

Short Notes — Notes Courtes

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, a new species for The Gambia

On 22 January 2010, we visited rice fields near Madina-Sapu in the Lower River Division of The Gambia (13°49'N, 15°25'W). Several species of waders, herons and raptors were sighted both in and around the fields. Among them a duck was discovered which appeared to be a male Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*. This was the only duck in the area. It stood in the water of a rice paddy at a distance of *c.* 100 m, and was observed with binoculars and telescopes. It stopped foraging at the moment of discovery and started to walk and swim around slowly for a few minutes. Then it flew into the adjacent rice paddy where it resumed foraging. Total observation time was *c.* 15–20 min., during which several photographs were taken (Fig. 1). Afterwards the duck remained in the area.

The bird was a medium-sized dabbling duck with short neck, rounded head and small bill. The pointed tail made it look slender. The bill was short, dull blue with a black tip. The legs were black (but partly covered with mud). The eye was dark. The head was chestnut brown, including forehead and crown, and darker around the eye. The mantle was dark grey with some chestnut-brown feathers. The neck and upper breast were chestnut brown, distinctly divided from the whitish lower breast, and the under-parts were mottled chestnut brown and grey. The white belly was darkened by mud and the under tail-coverts were white with increasing black mottling towards the tip of the tail. The tertials and wing tips were blackish, and the speculum dark without a white trailing edge. The under wing-coverts were uniform pale grey. The outer tail-feathers had dark centres and white edges. These characteristics are distinctive of Eurasian Wigeon. The uniform grey underparts of the wing, seen when the bird flew for a short distance, ruled out Northern Pintail *A. acuta* and American Wigeon *A. americana*. The chestnut-brown head indicates that this bird was a male. The absence of a yellowish forehead is typical for first-winter males and males in eclipse plumage. In first-winter birds, the belly often shows a mottled grey pattern, while the wing lacks the distinctive white panel of adults and often has uniform grey coverts (Svensson *et al.* 2009, Duivendijk 2010). We thus conclude that this was a first-winter male Eurasian Wigeon.

The Eurasian Wigeon breeds in northern Eurasia and winters from southern Eurasia to North Africa. In its wintering areas the species prefers coastal regions with shallow fresh- or salt-water marshes, flooded grassland and lagoons (Cramp & Simmons 1977, Hoyo *et al.* 1992). To our knowledge, no records of Eurasian Wigeon have so far been documented for The Gambia (Vestergaard-Jensen & Kirkeby 1980, Gore 1990, Barlow *et al.* 2007, Borrow & Demey 2004). Even though West Africa, including The Gambia, offers numerous suitable wetlands in the form of river deltas,

floodplain marshes and rice fields, the Eurasian Wigeon remains a scarce winter visitor south of the Sahara, where its regular occurrence is known only for the Inner Niger Delta and the Atlantic coast from Mauritania to northern Senegal (Giraudoux *et al.* 1988, Borrow & Demey 2004).



Figure 1. First-winter male Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* at a rice paddy near Madina-Sapu, The Gambia, 22 Jan 2010 (photo: Louis de Vos).

The possibility that this bird originated from an ornamental waterfowl collection cannot be ruled out completely. However, the bird was not ringed and showed no signs of captivity such as unnatural behaviour, abnormal feather wear or damaged bill or feet, and we are not aware of any ornamental waterfowl collections in the Senegambia region. Furthermore, considering the occurrence of the species in northern Senegal, a wild origin seems more likely.

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First record and probable breeding of African Pitta *Pitta angolensis* in Omo Forest Reserve, southwest Nigeria

The Omo Forest in southwestern Nigeria is an Important Bird Area and Biosphere Reserve, known to hold at least 74 bird species restricted to the Guinea-Congo Forests Biome (Ezealor 2001). In spite of effort by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation and World Bank to secure the forest, its 4.6 km² Strict Nature Reserve and the 142 km² Biosphere Extension Areas around it are still experiencing severe degradation due to excessive exploitation of timber, agricultural encroachment and poaching (Ezealor 2001, Olmos & Turshak 2009, pers. obs.).

On the damp, calm, cloudy mornings of 27 and 30 May 2012, at 7h00 and 10h00 respectively, we caught two African Pittas *Pitta angolensis* (Figs 1 and 2) in the lower pockets of mist nets in the primary forest of Omo Forest Reserve, at altitude *c.* 75 m near Erin Camp (6°55'6"N, 4°19'10"E), at two locations separated by ≤ 60 m. Biometrics of the two birds were: wing length 114, 117 mm; tarsus 37, 34 mm; bill 22, 23 mm; head 49, 48 mm; tail 44, 40 mm; weight 69, 60g. One had an active brood patch (Fig. 2).