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Desert Sparrow Passer simplex: c10 at Tabankort, Mali, 21/7. This, oddly enough, is one of the localities given by Bannerman.

Golden Sparrow Passer luteus: Seen from Gao to Tabankort, Mali, especially at a village 60km north of Bourem, it was much more numerous than Bannerman indicates.

Scaly-fronted Weaver Sporopipes frontalis: 6 at Aquelhoq, Mali, 23/7, about 19° latitude, apparently further north than previous records.

Slender-billed Weaver Ploceus luteolus: 3 among date palms at Tessalit, Mali, 24/7. This species does not seem to have been previously recorded north of Timbuktu: Tessalit is about 350km further north.

Black-faced Dioch Quelea quelea: 6 seen at Labezana, Mali, 13/7.

Cut-throat Weaver Amadina fasciata: 2 feeding on the ground 60km north of Bourem.

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#### A VISIT TO WURNO, NORTHERN NIGERIA

22nd APRIL 1970.

Sir Frederick Podler.

Wurno is about 30 miles north of Sokoto, in the north-eastern corner of Nigeria. I understand that in former times there was in this place a very extensive fadama (marsh) containing a number of shallow natural lakes, which in most years provided small areas of open water even at the end of the dry season. Some ten years ago a dam was built which converted the whole of the fadama area into a catchment area. My visit took place at the end of the dry season, and although the bund of the dam is quite low, it was retaining so much water that, even with the aid of 10 x 50 binoculars, I was unable to distinguish the farther shore. This artificial lake is, therefore, very large. It might well provide exceptional attractions for resident anserines and for palaeartic migrants about to set off for the north across the Sahara, or in the fall of the year returning to their winter haunts. This must be my excuse for offering these hurried notes of a very brief visit. I was able to do no more than gain an impression, of how rewarding a longer visit might be. I hope that my reconnaissance may lead on to a longer visit by a more experienced observer.

The reason for my being at Sokoto was, to acquaint myself with

the school of irrigation which, at that time, was conducted in that place by the Kaduna Polytechnic, and to consider proposals for the further development of education for the personnel of the irrigation services. The visit to Wurno was arranged for me, partly for me to see the irrigation dam, and partly because I had expressed an interest in birds, and it was thought that some might be seen at Wurno. I made the visit in a Landrover in company with Mr. Abdul Gaira the engineer in charge of the Wurno irrigation and with Mr. Caffray, who at that time was the head of the department of civil engineering and irrigation of Kaduna Polytechnic. Since neither of them was concerned with birds, they devoted themselves to their professional interests. I had three-quarters of an hour, in a place where a birdwatcher could well spend days; and in the last minutes of my visit dark was already falling, which was bad for identifying species although it was probably the best time to see the waders massing on a sandbank where, as I guess, they were going to spend the night.

The population of anserines was breath-taking. How many thousands, I could not say, for the more distant flocks were just dark patches on distant water. Of those within range for identification, the most numerous were Spurwing Goose Plectropterus gambensis. The next in numbers were Knob-billed Goose Sarkidiornis melanotus and of these there were ample numbers near enough to the bund to provide a good view of the males and their extraordinary adornments and of the much more numerous females and young which lack the knob. Egyptian Geese Alopochen aegyptiacus were also in large numbers, many standing on sandbanks or at the foot of the bund. There was a flock of a smaller bird which was a fourth species. At the extreme limit of the range of my binoculars I judged these to be Pygmy Geese Nettapus auritus but I could not be sure of that.

Meanwhile bee-eaters had been dashing overhead. These were not a variety with elongated tail, and although I noted the colour as 'rufous', they were certainly not Carmine Bee-eaters Merops rubicus. They may have been Red-throated Bee-eaters Melittophagus bullocki, a species which was certainly numerous a little way to the south; but I do not feel entirely happy about that identification, and should be interested to learn the views of another observer.

Large numbers of palaeartic waders were present, and as night fell flocks were flying in to a sandbank of which the top was just about level with the surface of the water. It was not very far from the bund, but the birds being massed together and in constant movement made it impossible to be confident about identification details in the failing light. It has since been suggested to me that possibly some of them were Ruff Philomachus pugnax, but I did not observe any with legs yellow enough to enable me to support that suggestion. Large numbers certainly were Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos. Earlier, before the evening roosting began, this species in parties of about 100 each had been flying off, at a fair height, towards the north. The roosting bank was, I judged, about 100 yards long and varying from 10 to 20 yards wide. As the birds were in a solid mass, it may be that the total number on that one bank exceeded 10,000.

I had a good close view of an individual Curlew Sandpiper Erolia testacea and of a Spurwing Plover Hoplopterus spinosus. There were plenty of Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus. White-winged Black Tern Chlidonias leucopterus were patrolling the water at a distance of 20 yards from the bund. I counted 12 on a bank and there were certainly many more. West African Little Tern Sterna albifrons were very numerous. Good views were obtained of a single Goliath Heron Typhon goliath. Of the Great White Heron Casmerodius albus a single specimen afforded excellent comparisons with Little Egrets Egretta garzetta and Cattle Egrets Bubulcus ibis. I saw a pair of Hadada Hagedashia hagedash which according to Bannerman are rare in Nigeria, and more than a dozen Jacana Actophilornis africanus; and several Pied Kingfishers Ceryle rudis. A donkey was covered with oxpeckers Buphagus. Bannerman states that the West African species has a heavy yellow bill with red terminal patch, but the bills of these birds looked to me all bright red like the East African variety. There were two species of swallows which (observed in flight) I thought to be Ethiopian Hirundo ethiopica and Pied-winged Hirundo leucosoma. Below the bund on the landward side were weavers, seed-eaters, canaries and sparrows in flocks but time did not permit close examination, having regard to the more exciting population on the water.

It will be interesting to see whether further study indicates that the Wurno reservoir has become an important factor governing the movements of palaeartic waders. As for the anserine population, an examination of the further shore of the reservoir, that is the shore on the side opposite to the bund, might reveal areas of marsh suitable for breeding.

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#### NOTES.

#### YELLOW-LEGGED OWLET FROM WESTERN GHANA.

The only reference I have to the Yellow-legged Owlet Glaucidium tephronotum is from Bannerman (1953, Birds of West & Equatorial Africa). He states that to date the bird had only been recorded in the Ashanti region of Ghana and that nothing is known of its habits.

While inspecting a trap line for small mammals laid in high forest, I discovered this bird with its head in a trap. Fortunately it was unharmed apart from being dazed. It was an adult specimen with an appearance corresponding exactly to Dr. Bannerman's description. It was trapped between the hours of 0900 and 1500, during which time one would not expect an owl to be active. It was apparently attracted by banana bait, again unexpected