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## Short Notes — Notes Courtes

### Vocalisations of the Mouse-brown Sunbird *Anthreptes gabonicus*

The only description of calls or songs of the Mouse-brown Sunbird *Anthreptes gabonicus* is by Barlow *et al.* (1997): a thin, very high pitched “sqee” and a conversational “wit.wit.sqee.witter.witter”. In August and September 1986, I regularly saw a pair feeding on insects in trees alongside the St Paul River at Haindi (6°54'N, 10°23'W) near Bong Town, Liberia. On 5 Sept one uttered a soft “tsurp-tseeep-tseeep” whilst in flight. On 8 Sept, what I assumed to be the male sang from a dead bough at the top of a tall tree by the river’s bank. The song consisted of “tser-tser-tsew-tsi-tsi-tsi-tsi-tsi-tseuuur”. The latter part of the song was similar to the twittering made by many species of sunbird and the first part (“tser-tser-tsew”) was sometimes uttered on its own with no follow-up. The calls resemble the description given by Barlow *et al.* (1997).

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### Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus* and White-breasted Negro-Finch *Nigrita fusconota*, new to the Benin list

*Stephanoaetus coronatus* **Crowned Eagle**. I recorded two immatures of this species in Benin on 29 Mar 1997, at 9°12'N, 2°15'E in the Ouémé Valley on the southern end of the Forêt Classée of Ouémé Supérieur. I was attracted by their calls while they soared on thermals above the river, from 30 m upwards, at about 11h30. This behaviour allowed excellent views of both upper- and underparts. The most striking feature on the underparts was the brilliant white belly, particularly evident in the bright sunlight. The breast and wing linings were lightly tinged rufous, the remainder of the underwing being clearly spotted. The upperparts were light grey, the tail long and clearly banded. I thought the primaries had black tips. The enormous size, fine soaring flight, call (a very distinctive “kwee-kwee”, cf. Gibbon 1991), plumage and habitat contributed to its ready identification. The Martial Eagle *Polemaetus*

*bellicosus* has been recorded in the drier country of the Pendjari and Arli National Parks (Green & Sayer 1979), and there is potential for confusion among the immatures of these two species. However, the grey back, rufous breast and wing lining, and longer tail, combined with the habitat, appear to eliminate Martial Eagle in this case (cf. Brown *et al.* 1982, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996).

Crowned Eagle is said to be "frequent to uncommon" throughout its range, and not yet threatened, although its numbers are probably reduced by habitat destruction (Brown *et al.* 1982). It has not previously been recorded in Benin, nor in Niger and Burkina Faso, and Ouémé is probably at the northern edge of its range; suitable habitat is absent from the well-studied Arli and Pendjari National Parks on the Benin–Burkina Faso border (Green & Sayer 1979). In Togo it is said to be a not uncommon resident, north to 8°57'N in the Mo Valley, where it has been reported breeding twice (Cheke & Walsh 1996); in Nigeria it is a rare resident, extending "well north of forest in Guinea zone" (Elgood *et al.* 1994). The Ouémé Valley and the three Forêts Classées of central Benin are particularly suitable habitat for this species, which prefers "remnant forest in river valleys" (Brown *et al.* 1982). The Ouémé Supérieur is well stocked in the small mammals that make up its diet (Green & Sayer 1977). It is therefore an interesting addition to the 52 diurnal raptor species that make up the present Benin list (Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 1993, Claffey 1997).

***Nigrita fusconota* White-breasted Negro-Finch.** On 7 May 1996, also in Ouémé Supérieur, I observed a bird of this species in the upper level of the trees. The dark brown upperparts, sharply contrasting white underparts, and black head, were clearly seen and preclude confusion with other species in the area. The site consists of secondary forest and savanna woodland, at 9°12'N, 2°15'E.

White-breasted Negro-Finch has been recorded as an uncommon resident in both Ghana north to 7°4'N and Nigeria north to 6°12'N (Grimes 1987, Elgood *et al.* 1994). It has not been reported from Togo or Benin (Cheke & Walsh 1996, Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 1993). In Ghana, it occurs in mature and secondary forest, clearings and riverine forest (Grimes 1987).

The forest reserves of central Benin are still in relatively good condition and rather poorly studied, and it is likely that several other discoveries are waiting to be made there.

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### **Sharp decline in the population of Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* in Benin**

The Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* is regarded as common throughout much of its range, and it is certainly so in the countries surrounding Benin. It is a common resident in Nigeria (Elgood et al 1994) and Ghana (Grimes 1987) and an abundant resident in Togo (Cheke & Walsh 1996). The species is also present as a resident in Niger and a breeding resident in Burkina Faso (Dowsett & Forbes Watson 1993). In eleven years of observation in Benin I have classified it as an abundant resident, with some movements from south to north during the rainy season (Claffey 1995).

The earliest observations of males in breeding plumage in Benin are from March (Bouet 1914), with some present up to the end of November or even into December (pers. obs). My earliest records for males in breeding plumage are for 22 April 1995, in the south. The species has been consistently observed in south Benin up to a month earlier than in the north. In Togo, males in breeding plumage have been noted from May to October; there is a similar pattern in both Nigeria and Ghana.

Pin-tailed Whydah is an abundant breeding resident in the Borgou Province of north Benin. Males are noted with groups of 8–10 females, often in flocks of several males with females. However, an apparent sharp decline in the population occurred during the rainy season of 1997. I had no observations in April or May and only a few