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February / février 2010

Short Notes — Notes Courtes

Two new raptors for Nigeria and other raptor observations at Lake Chad

Two new raptor species for Nigeria were discovered in dry, open savanna woodland 4–5 km from Lake Chad, Borno State, Nigeria in November 2001, during the Lake Chad Bird Migration Project (Ottosson *et al*. 2001).

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

We saw a juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle along the road from Baga to Metele near the shore of Lake Chad (13º14´34″N, 13º31´32″E) on 14 Nov 2001. It was soaring *c.* 150 m above us with an adult Tawny Eagle *A. rapax belisarius*. Both birds continued soaring close to us for several minutes until they reached a high altitude and parted, the Eastern Imperial Eagle gliding southeast. The observation was made in good weather conditions, with a 32x telescope and 10x binoculars.

The Eastern Imperial Eagle appeared clearly the larger, with broader, longer wings and bigger, more protruding head. Its most prominent character was the dark streaking on the otherwise pale yellowish-brown underparts, which covered the underwing coverts and body feathers except for the lower belly and vent. The flight feathers were uniformly blackish apart from three to four pale grey inner primaries forming a "window" which was visible from below and above. The upperparts were more difficult to observe but the rump was white and the greater and median wing coverts had narrow white tips. The general colour was similar to the underside. Compared to the Tawny Eagle, the white primary feather shafts formed a larger pale patch on the primary base. The age was determined by the fresh appearance of all feathers as well as an S-shaped trailing edge to the wing and neat white tips to the blackish rectrices and remiges, as described by Forsman (1999).

Two additional observations, both of first calendar-year birds, were made on 16 and 24 Nov 2001. At least the latter observation probably concerned the same wintering bird as the individual described above, based on plumage similarity and observation at the same site.

Eastern Imperial Eagle winters mainly in Egypt and Sudan but is regular as far south as Kenya and Tanzania (Brown *et al*. 1982, Zimmerman *et al*. 1999). There is one record of an immature in N Cameroon (Borrow & Demey 2002), but it does not seem to have been observed elsewhere in W Africa.

Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*

As we knew Barbary Falcon might occur in the area, we systematically checked each large falcon we saw. On 23 Nov 2001 we saw an adult of this species along the above-mentioned road (13º13´31″N, 13º33´17″E). We watched it for 4 min. with the sun

behind us, with a 32x telescope and 10x binoculars. It was mostly about 100–200 m away but approached to *c.* 60 m while patrolling for prey. After circling low over the area it flew northeast.

It was distinguished from Lanner *F. biarmicus*, which is very common in the area, by the different jizz and proportions in flight. Compared to Lanner, it showed clearly shorter and broader tail and more compact wings that were broader in the arm but more pointed at the tip. Wing beats were faster than Lanner's and the bird appeared somewhat smaller. The general colour of the upperparts was paler grey than on Lanner, with upper tail, rump and lower back distinctively pale bluish grey (cf. Forsman 1999). The primaries were darker than rest of the upperparts and the black tail bars were broader towards the tip of tail. Different from both Lanner and Peregrine *F. peregrinus*, the underparts were pale tawny and virtually lacked barring or streaking. Some diffuse bars on the flanks, and spots on the breast, were present but could only be seen when very close. All wing feathers were finely barred on a pale sandy background, the barring being uniform in density and tone. There was thus no contrast between the coverts and flight feathers, very different from Lanner (Forsman 1999). At certain angles, diffuse dark commas at the base of the primaries could be seen. The moustachial stripe was black and narrow, as in Lanner but more pointed than in Peregrine. The sandy yellowish cheek-patch appeared clear-cut and round. The head was largely black apart from neck and sides of nape, which were reddish-brown.

On 24 and 26 Nov 2001, adult Barbary Falcons were seen somewhat to the north of the first site. Both birds were perched in acacia trees, we approached them to 20–25 m in a car and both were photographed (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Barbary Falcon and Short-eared Owl near L. Chad, 2001. Photos: Rolf Gustafsson.

Barbary Falcon has been suggested (U. Ottosson, C. Hjort pers. comm.) to occur around Malamfatori, Lake Chad but no observations were confirmed until now (Borrow & Demey 2002). We agree with Brouwer & Mullié (2000), who suggest that Barbary Falcons are probably more common wintering in the Sahel than previously thought, although some records they mention lacked substantiation. Birds from eastern N African breeding populations occur, although rarely, as far south as Kenya during winter (Brown *et al*. 1982).

Other raptors

Our observation of a Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* represents the fourth Nigerian record (Elgood *et al*. 1994). We flushed the bird from an acacia tree in the middle of the day on 22 Nov 2001. It then sat on a grassy hill and then in another acacia *c*. 20 m from us (Fig. 1). Among other features, the yellow iris, black triangle around the eyes, white trailing edge to the wings and yellow-toned general colour rule out all other similar species.

Our visit to Lake Chad produced several other interesting discoveries such as remarkable numbers of migrant Palaearctic raptors, especially Steppe Eagle *A. nipalensis* and Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*, both virtually unknown in Nigeria until the end of the 1990's (Philip Hall pers. comm.). Daily counts included up to 72 Steppe Eagles and 12 Booted Eagles.

Our trip was made possible by kind logistical and financial support from A.P. Leventis. Philip Hall arranged all practical matters in Nigeria and played an essential role in planning the survey. Christian Hjort and Ulf Ottosson helped with references. Dick Forsman, Christian Hjort, Mikael Nordström, Ulf Ottosson and Kalle Rainio made invaluable comments on early versions of the manuscript. Headmaster Adam Piyer in Alagarno village showed great hospitality in housing us. Finally, hearty thanks to our driver, Usman Ntakiel, for cooperation during the month in the field.

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On the plumages of Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis* and a putative observation of Black-throated Coucal *C. leucogaster* in Niger

Debout *et al*. (2000) reported what would be the first observation of Black-throated Coucal *Centropus leucogaster* in Niger, near Niamey in July 1998. While the description given clearly matches *C. leucogaster*, the site and habitat mentioned (gardens and old cultivation) would be very unusual for this forest species, which has not otherwise been reported far from any forested area. The only records at similar latitudes are from Mali (Lamarche 1980–1) possibly erroneously (R.J. Dowsett pers. comm.), Dandum in Guinea-Bissau (Rodwell 1996) and southern Senegal (Morel & Morel 1990), where other typical forest species have been found. This led Demey *et al*. (2001) to question the record and discuss the possibility of an undescribed form of Senegal Coucal *C. senegalensis*.

Two plumage morphs of Senegal Coucal *C. senegalensis* are presently known: the typical bird, with creamy white underparts and black restricted to the top of head, and a melanistic form "*epomidis*" with black head and breast and rufous belly. Demey *et al.* (2001) suggest that *epomidis* does not occur more than 200 km from the coast. However, in Ivory Coast, this morph is known from several localities far inland (Schouteden & De Roo 1967, Yaokokore-Beibro 1997 and pers. obs.) at least as far north as Korhogo, 500 km from coast (Brunel & Thiollay 1969).

In the Abidjan area where both morphs are common, I observed an atypical Senegal Coucal in September 1999. It had the head and upper breast black, and the rest of the underparts creamy white, thus showing the same pattern of coloration as in Black-throated Coucal. However, it was accompanying a typical *C. senegalensis* and was similar to it in size and structure; Black-throated Coucal is much larger and has a very strong bill. Furthermore, the habitat where it was seen — scrub interspersed with cultivated land in the city's suburbs — seems quite unlikely for *C. leucogaster*.

It thus seems that an undescribed, black-throated morph of *C. senegalensis* occurs in West Africa, and the Niamey bird is perhaps more likely for to have been this morph rather than *C. leucogaster*.

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