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## **Some recent records of birds from Gashaka Gumti National Park and Ngel Nyaki, Nigeria, and the Gotel Mountains, Cameroon**

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### **Summary**

Notable ornithological observations made in January 2005 at Gashaka Gumti National Park and Ngel Nyaki, SE Nigeria, and in March 2007 at Gashaka Gumti NP and in adjacent Cameroon are presented, and other recent records reviewed. These records include a number of species not previously documented for these localities and additional records for uncommon to rare species in the region.

### **Résumé**

**Quelques notes récentes sur des oiseaux du Parc National Gashaka Gumti et de Ngel Nyaki, Nigeria, et des Monts Gotel, Cameroun.** Des observations ornithologiques remarquables faites en janvier 2005 dans le PN Gashaka Gumti et à Ngel Nyaki, SE du Nigeria, et en mars 2007 au PN Gashaka Gumti ainsi qu'au Cameroun voisin sont présentées, et d'autres notes récentes passées en revue. Ces notes couvrent un certain nombre d'espèces qui n'avaient pas auparavant été documentées pour ces régions ainsi que de nouvelles observations pour des espèces peu communes à rares.

### **Introduction**

Gashaka Gumti National Park is Nigeria's largest wildlife reserve and occupies nearly 7000 km<sup>2</sup> on the eastern edge of the country and to the north of the Mambilla Plateau. I visited Gashaka Gumti NP during 12–15 January 2005 and 8–19 March 2007. In 2005 I was based in the S sector of the park at the Kwano research centre of the Gashaka Primate Project. Kwano (7°20'N, 11°35'E, 583 m a.s.l.) is at the base of Chappal Tale (7°22'N, 11°36'E) c. 10 km east of Gashaka village. During my 2005 visit I also made a short visit to the nearby montane forest outside the park borders at

Ngel Nyaki (7°4'N, 11°4'E). Both Gashaka Gumti and Ngel Nyaki are assessed as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and as such are priority sites for conservation (Fishpool & Evans 2001).

In 2007 I was again based at Kwano and together with a colleague, researchers and staff from the research centre undertook a nine-day circular expedition to climb via the River Gamgam to the summit of Chappal Waddi (7°1'N, 11°41'E) and trek along the E border of the park bounded by the Cameroon border, returning to Kwano via Chappal Delam (7°6'N, 11°52'E) and Chappal Hendu (7°21'N, 11°44'E). The trek was made to assess the activity by cattle herders and their intrusion into the remaining forest on the western edge of the park, and bird observations were constrained by time and mainly concentrated at several campsites. Overnight camp sites were dictated by availability of drinking water and on one night necessitated camping in the Gotel Mountains of Cameroon. Gashaka Gumti NP and Ngel Nyaki, with some important localities and key topographic features, are illustrated in Fig. 1. Green (1990) provides a map of the park indicating some of these locations.

The more notable observations, including those of birds listed as rare or uncommon by Green (1990), are discussed below. Previous studies on birds of this and nearby areas were conducted by Hall (1976, 1977), Ash *et al.* (1989) and Green (1990). A provisional list of birds in Gashaka Gumti NP and its surroundings was compiled by Dunn (1999). This list is not readily obtainable or fully documented and I have included notes on several species listed there but missing from Green (1990). Common and scientific names follow Borrow and Demey (2004). I also include some unpublished records kindly provided by R. Dowsett and F. Dowsett-Lemaire (*in litt.*), referred to below as RJD & FDL.

## Results

### Anatidae

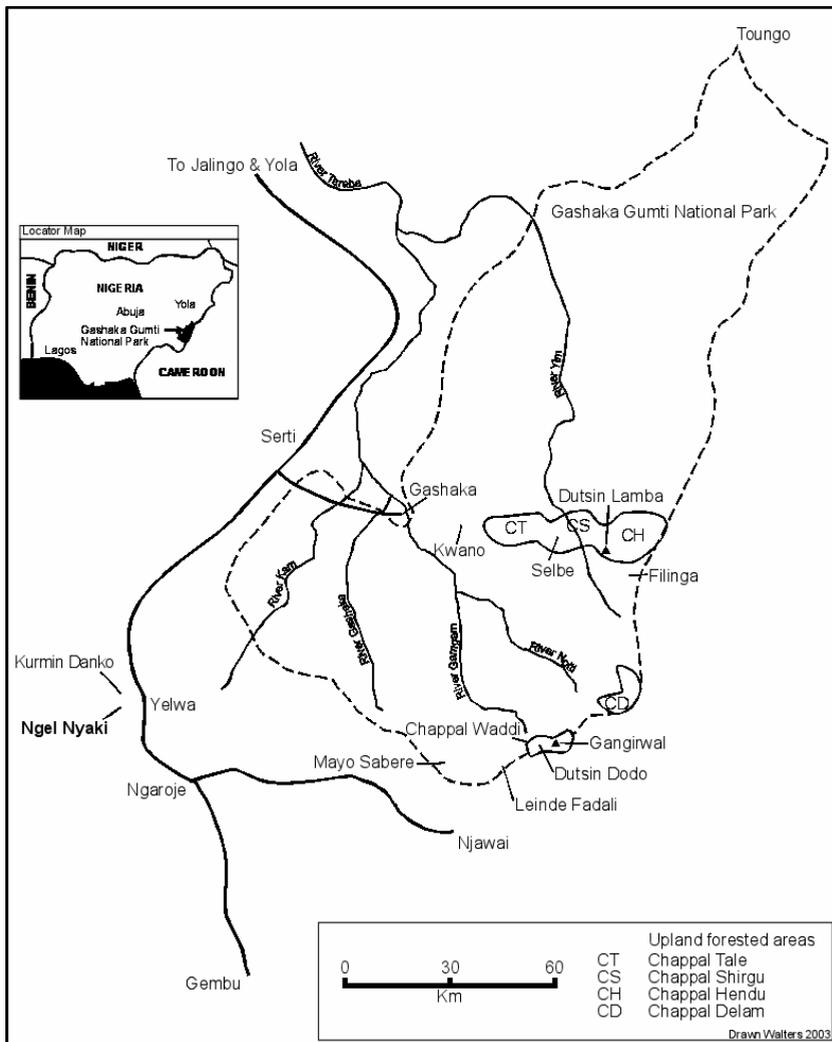
*Anas sparsa* African Black Duck. Two ducks thought to be of this species were seen in flight along the upper reaches of the River Gamgam on 11 Mar 2007. The following day one was seen well on the water further upriver in the area of the R Gamgam headwater forest. The species was noted as uncommon in Gashaka Gumti NP by Green (1990) and was otherwise only known in Nigeria from the Mambilla Plateau (Elgood *et al.* 1994). RJD & FDL saw one on a stream near Beli (7°52'N, 10°58'E), 9 Mar 1988, some at Yelwa (7°4'N, 11°5'E) on 29 Mar 1988 and a pair just over the border near Jauro Masali, Cameroon (7°0'N, 11°40'E).

### Accipitridae

*Gypohierax angolensis* Palm-nut Vulture. One seen between Kwano and the R Gamgam, 9 Mar 2007; one close to Kwano, 18 Mar 2007. Uncommon in the S sector of the park (Green 1990).

*Gyps africanus* African White-backed Vulture. Three near Kwano, 14 Jan 2005; one between Chappal Delam enclave and Mayo Jeram (7°15'N, 11°51'E), 15 Mar 2007.

RJD & FDL saw small numbers in and on the edge of Gashaka Gumti NP, from Ngel Nyake to Leinde Fadali (6°58'N, 11°36'E), Mar 1988. Not listed by Green (1970) but included by Dunn (1999).



**Fig 1. Gashaka Gumti National Park and neighbouring localities.**

*Gyps rueppelli* Rueppell's Griffon. A total of nine seen in Mar 2007, one near the summit of Chappal Waddi, two in adjacent Cameroon, five on the Cameroon side of the NP and one between Selbe (7°22'N, 11°40'E, c. 1600 m a.s.l.) and Chappal Hendu. RJD & FDL noted it as common in Mar 1988, with dozens at Chappal Waddi and a group at Ngel Nyaki. Listed as uncommon by Green (1990) with seven noted on the N spur of Gangirwal (7°2'N, 11°42'E), Mar 1988.

*Circus macrourus* Pallid Harrier. One first-winter bird at Ngel Nyake, 16 Jan 2005. Listed as uncommon by Green (1990).

*Circaetus beaudouini* Beaudouin's Snake Eagle. One near Mayo Jeram, 15 Mar 2007. Listed as rare by Green (1990), at Mambilla and Gangirwal.

*C. cinereus* Brown Snake Eagle. One along the upper reaches of the R. Gamgam close to the headwater forest, 10 Mar 2007. Listed as rare by Green (1990).

### **Phasianidae**

*Ptilopachus petrosus* Stone Partridge. Two on Chappal Waddi, 13 Mar 2007; a party of ten between Chappal Delam enclave and Mayo Jeram, 15 Mar; three between Selbe and Kwano, Mar 2007. The only previously known site in SE Nigeria was Serti (7°30'N, 11°22'E) (Hall 1977). Listed by Dunn (1999) but not by Green (1990).

### **Burhinidae**

*Burhinus senegalensis* Senegal Thick-knee. Singles, 15 Jan 2005, 8 and 19 Mar 2007 on the river between Serti and Gashaka village. RJD & FDL recorded it at Serti, 10 Mar 1988. Not listed by Green (1990) but included by Dunn (1999).

### **Glareolidae**

*Cursorius temminckii* Temminck's Courser. Seen at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. Recorded in Gashaka Gumti NP by Green (1990) only in Mar, when frequent.

### **Charadriidae**

*Vanellus senegallus* African Wattled Lapwing. Two on top of Chappal Hendu, 16 Mar 2007. RJD & FDL saw some at Mayo Ndaga (6°55'N, 11°25'E), 27 Mar 1988. Only recorded Nov and Dec by Green (1990).

### **Columbidae**

*Treron calvus* African Green Pigeon. Five observations with a total of 11 birds seen in four areas of the park and in an adjacent area in Cameroon, 13–19 Mar 2007. Listed as rare (as *Treron australis*) by Green (1990).

### **Musophagidae**

*Tauraco leucolophus* White-crested Touraco. Two at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. Recorded at Yelwa by Hall (1976) and for Gashaka Gumti by Green (1990). Included by Ezealor (2001) for the Ngel Nyaki IBA.

### **Cuculidae**

*Chrysococcyx cupreus* African Emerald Cuckoo. Heard near Kwano, 9 and 19 Mar 2007. Not listed by Green (1990) but included by Dunn (1999).

### **Strigidae**

*Strix woodfordii* African Wood Owl. One heard in the Gamgam headwater forest, 11 Mar 2007. Listed as rare by Green (1990).

**Apodidae**

*Tachymarpis aequatorialis* Mottled Swift. Two at Tonga (7°21'N, 11°36'E, c. 1000 m a.s.l.), 13 Mar 2005; one at Gangirwal, 12–13 Mar 2007. Included as common by Green (1990), although Ash *et al.* (1989) indicated uncertainty over the identity of swifts in this area. However, RJD & FDL found it numerous in the highlands of the area.

**Meropidae**

*Merops gularis* Black Bee-eater. A pair watched closely at our camp site (7°12'N, 11°50'E, c. 1300 m a.s.l.) near the river, near Jeram enclave, 15–16 Mar 2007. In addition to their iridescent blue rumps and blue-streaked underparts these birds had a thin blue line above the bill, which distinguishes the eastern subspecies *M. g. australis*. Only *M. g. gularis* is listed for Nigeria by Elgood *et al.* (1994) and Borrow & Demey (1994), but these authors overlooked Fry (1984) who indicated that the distribution of *australis* extends west into S Nigeria to about Cross River. However some caution may be required as birds in SE Nigeria may show characters of both these subspecies (Fry *et al.* 1994).

**Bucerotidae**

*Tockus fasciatus* African Pied Hornbill. One between Kwano and Tonga, 13 Jan 2005; at Kwano, eight on 14 Jan 2005, one on 8 Mar 2007, two on 19 Mar 2007; six between Kwano and Gashaka, 19 Mar 2007. All were *T. f. fasciatus*, as indicated by the outer tail feathers being white along their whole length and the bill tip dark red. Listed as rare by Green (1990) with only one bird on the upper Yim in Feb.

**Capitonidae**

*Lybius bidentatus* Double-toothed Barbet. Two at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. Up to two at Mayo Jeram, 15–16 Mar 2007. RJD & FDL saw it in several places from Ngel Nyaki across to Chappal Waddi. Noted as uncommon to rare by Green (1990).

**Picidae**

*Campethera nivosa* Buff-spotted Woodpecker. One between Kwano and the R. Gamgam, 9 Mar 2007. Listed as rare by Green (1990).

*Dendropicus poecilolaemus* Speckle-breasted Woodpecker. Two at Gashaka, 15 Jan 2005. Listed as rare by Green (1990). Not included by Ezealor (2001) for Gashaka Gumti or Ngel Nyaki IBAs.

*D. fuscescens* Cardinal Woodpecker. One female at Mayo Jeram, 15 Mar 2007. RJD & FDL saw this species at Chappal Waddi and Gangirwal (7°2'N, 11°42'E) and at Jauri Masali in nearby Cameroon. Listed as uncommon to rare by Green (1990).

**Alaudidae**

*Mirafra africana* Rufous-naped Lark. Two at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. Listed by Green (1990) only for Mar. Locally common on the Mambilla plateau with a few on Gangirwal and Chappal Wadi, Mar (Ash *et al.* 1989).

**Hirundinidae**

*Hirundo daurica* Red-rumped Swallow. Three at Mayo Jeram, 15 Mar 2007. Listed by Green (1990) as rare.

[*Psalidoprocne fuliginosa* Mountain Saw-wing. Swallows matching this species and lacking the whitish under-wing coverts of Petit's Black Saw-wing *P. pristopectera petiti*

or long tail streamers of Fanti Saw-wing *P. obscura* were seen on four occasions in 2007: a flock of *c.* 10 over the Gamgam headwater forest, 10 Mar; several in the Gotel Mountains close to the Cameroon border, 14 Mar (together with longer-tailed all-dark swallows considered to be Fanti Saw-wings); near Mayo Jeram, 16 Mar; at Chappal Hendu, 17 Mar. Ash *et al.* (1989) noted Mountain Saw-wing at Obodu and the species is included for Gashaka Gumti by Dunn (1999) and Ezealor (2001). Green (1990) notes only Petit's Black Saw-wing and Fanti Saw-wing as abundant to common at high elevations on Gangirwal and Sabere. RJD & FDL saw only Petit's Black Saw-wings at Gashaka Gumti in Mar 1988 and question the presence of Fanti Saw-wings at high altitude. The records of Mountain Saw-wing require confirmation, as confusion with immature Petit's remains possible.]

### **Motacillidae**

*Motacilla clara* Mountain Wagtail. Ten seen along the Gamgam and the river at Kwano, Mar 2007. RJD & FDL noted it in the Chappal Waddi/Jauro Masali area. Included by Dunn (1990) but not Green (1990) who only lists African Pied Wagtail *M. aguimp* (as *M. alba*).

### **Pycnonotidae**

*Andropadus gracilis* Little Grey Greenbul. Two at Kwano, 14 Jan 2005. RJD & FDL recorded it at Leinde Fatali. Not listed by Green (1990) but included by Dunn (1999).

*Baeopogon indicator* Honeyguide Greenbul. One at our camp site (ca 7°2' N, 11°45' E, *c.* 1400 m a.s.l.) in gallery forest in the Gotel Mountains in Cameroon. Not listed for Gashaka Gumti NP by Green (1990) but listed by Dunn (1990) and included in Ezealor (2001).

### **Turdidae**

*Cossypha albicapilla* White-crowned Robin Chat. Two at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. Included by Ezealor (2001) for Gashaka Gumti but not for Ngel Nyaki.

### **Sylviidae**

*Hypergerus atriceps* Oriole Warbler. One at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. Hall (1976) found small numbers near Yelwa. Not listed by Green (1990) but included by Ezealor (2001) for both Gashaka Gumti and Ngel Nyaki.

[*Macrosphenus concolor* Grey Longbill. Two birds fitting the description of this species were seen in deep forest at Kwano, 18 Mar 2007. Not listed by Green (1990) or Dunn (1999) but included for Gashaka Gumti by Ezealor (2001).

*Schistolais leucopogon* White-chinned Prinia. One at Mayo Jeram, 16 Mar 2007. Recorded in Gashaka Gumti NP, 28 Feb 1987 (Demey *et al.* 2003). Not listed by Green (1990) but included by Dunn (1999).

*Apalis pulchra* Black-collared Apalis. One in the Gotel Mountains, in Cameroon, 13 Mar 2007. Noted as common on the Nigerian side of the border on Gangirwal and Chappal Waddi by Ash *et al.* (1989). Listed for Gashaka Gumti by Green (1990) and Dunn (1999).

*Cisticola chubbi* Chubb's Cisticola. Seen on Gangirwal and Chappal Waddi, 12–13 Mar 2007. Listed (as *C. hunteri*) by Green (1990).

**Muscicapidae**

*Muscicapa cassini* Cassin's Flycatcher. Two on the upper reaches of the Gamgam River, 10 Mar 2007. Not listed by Green (1990) but included by Dunn (1999) and Ezealor (2001) for Gashaka Gumti.

*M. sethsmithi* Yellow-footed Flycatcher. One at our gallery forest camp site (7°2'N, 11°45'E) in the Gotel Mountains, Cameroon, 13 Mar 2007. Not listed by Green (1990) or Ezealor (2001) for Gashaka Gumti but listed by Dunn (1990). Recorded at Ngel Nyake, 29 Mar 1998 (Ash *et al.* 1989, RJD & FDL).

*Myioparus plumbeus* Lead-coloured Flycatcher. Two at Mayo Jeram, 15 Mar 2007. Considered rare in Gashaka Gumti by Green (1990) and noted just inside it by Ash *et al.* (1989).

*Ficedula hypoleuca* European Pied Flycatcher. Two at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005; one between Jeram and Chappal Hendu, 16 Mar 2007. Listed by Green (1990) as common in Mar, rare Nov–Dec and unrecorded in other months.

**Timaliidae**

*Illadopsis puveli* Puvel's Illadopsis. An adult feeding a fledgling, between Chappal Hendu and Kwano, 17 Mar 2007 is the first breeding record for Nigeria and the second anywhere (Elgood *et al.* 1994, Salewski 1997). One netted at Ngel Nyaki, 2 Apr 1995 (Robertson 1995). Not listed for Gashaka Gumti by Green (1990) but included by Dunn (1999) and Ezealor (2001).

**Nectariniidae**

*Hedidypna collaris* Collared Sunbird. One at R. Gamgam headwater forest, 12 Mar 2007. Not listed by Green (1990) but included by Dunn (1999).

**Laniidae**

*Tchagra australis* Brown-crowned Tchagra. One between Kwano and Tonga, 13 Jan 2005. Green (1990) records it as rare.

**Sturnidae**

*Onychognathus neumanni* Neumann's Starling. Seen on Gangirwal, Chappal Waddi and further north in the mountains bordering Cameroon, Mar 2007. Recently split from *O. morio*, which was listed by Green (1990) and Dunn (1999).

**Ploceidae**

*Ploceus baglafaecht* Baglafaecht Weaver. One at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. Recorded by Hall (1976) at Nguroje, Gembu and Yelwa.

*P. insignis* Brown-capped Weaver. An adult male in the Gotel Mountains, Cameroon, 13 Mar 2007. Listed as common on Chappal Waddi by Green (1990).

*Euplectes hartlaubi* Marsh Widowbird. Some 20 males in eclipse plumage at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005, a new locality for this species. First recorded in Nigeria in 1988 on the Mambilla Plateau (Ash *et al.* 1989, Elgood *et al.* 1994).

**Estrildidae**

*Nesocharis shelleyi* Shelley's Oliveback. One at its nest at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. One at Ngel Nyaki, 1 Apr 1995 (Robertson 1995) and listed for Ngel Nyaki and Gashaka Gumti IBAs by Ezealor (2001). No previous breeding records in Nigeria and

only otherwise recorded from the edge of montane forest at Obodu Plateau (Elgood *et al.* 1994).

*Estrilda nonnula* Black-crowned Waxbill Two at Ngel Nyaki, 16 Jan 2005. Four in a patch of riverine forest in the Gotel Mountains, Cameroon, 13 Mar 2007.

#### **Viduidae**

[*Vidua camerunensis* Cameroon Indigobird. An adult male with dull blue plumage, a pale wing panel and pale whitish legs and bill, 13 Jan 2005, best fits this species. Not recorded by Green (1990) or Dunn (1999), but Payne (1994) thought it likely to be found in Nigeria. All four known foster species (Black-bellied Firefinch *Lagonisticta rara*, Blue-billed Firefinch *L. rubricata*, Brown Twispot *Clytospiza monteiri* and Dybowski's Twispot *C. dybowskii*) occur in the park (Green 1990). Requires confirmation, as it would be a new species for Nigeria (Elgood *et al.* 1994) and identification on sight alone may not be reliable (RJD & FDL).]

*V. interjecta* Exclamatory Paradise Whydah. Adult males observed on four occasions at Gashaka, Kwano and Tonga, Jan 2005. One adult male at Mayo Jeram, 15 Mar 2007. Not recorded by Green (1990) or Dunn (1999) but included for the Gashaka Gumti IBA by Ezealor (2001).

#### **Fringillidae**

*Linurgus olivaceus* Oriole Finch. Four with a party of Black-crowned Waxbills, feeding on small figs in a patch of riverine forest in the Gotel Mountains, Cameroon, 13 Mar 2007. Recorded by Ash *et al.* (1989) on Chappal Waddi and Gangirwal in Gashaka Gumti, and at Ngel Nyaki.

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