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Birds in northern Mauritania, including range extensions and breeding evidence

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Summary

We present bird observations from the region of Tiris Zemmour, northernmost Mauritania, in April 2017. These include nine species not previously recorded in the region, 17 other range extensions, and new breeding evidence for nine species.

Résumé

Oiseaux au nord de la Mauritanie, extensions des aires de répartition et signes de reproduction. Nous présentons des observations d'oiseaux dans le Tiris Zemmour, région de l'extrême-nord de la Mauritanie, en avril 2017. Celles-ci incluent neuf espèces non encore observées dans la région, des extensions de l'aire de répartition pour 17 autres et des signes de reproduction nouveaux pour neuf espèces.

Introduction

The most recent bird surveys in Mauritania mostly date from the late 20th century and covered only the central and southern regions of the country (Browne 1981, 1982,

Gee 1984, Farnsworth 1994, Bengtsson 1997). Knowledge of birds in northern areas derives almost exclusively from observations made by Henri Heim de Balsac in 1947 and José António Valverde in 1955 (Heim de Balsac & Heim de Balsac 1949–51, Valverde 1957, Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962).

Tiris Zemmour is the northernmost region of Mauritania and is characterised by arid conditions (aridity index <0.05: Ward 2016) where surface water is seasonal and irregular among years. Sandy desert and rocky desert (gravelly and stony areas, hardpan and rock outcrops) predominate, both with vegetated areas, such as sandy wadis with grassy bottoms and *Acacia* trees (especially in the north) and extensive sandy plains with seasonal grass cover; bare areas comprise mostly gravel plains, virtually devoid of vegetation (Figs 1 and 2; GlobCover 2008, Isenmann *et al.* 2010). Wettest months are generally from August to April and we found extensive green grass cover in some areas.

Political problems and general remoteness have hindered research in the area since the 1950s (Isenmann *et al.* 2010, Brito *et al.* 2014), but records with precise location in the region were available for 111 bird species prior to our trip (Browne 2016), and a number of additional species have been reported to occur in the area without precise location records (see Isenmann *et al.* 2010 for examples).

We visited Tiris Zemmour for nine days (7–15 Apr) in the spring of 2017. Climatic conditions at the time were normal for the time of year: temperatures during

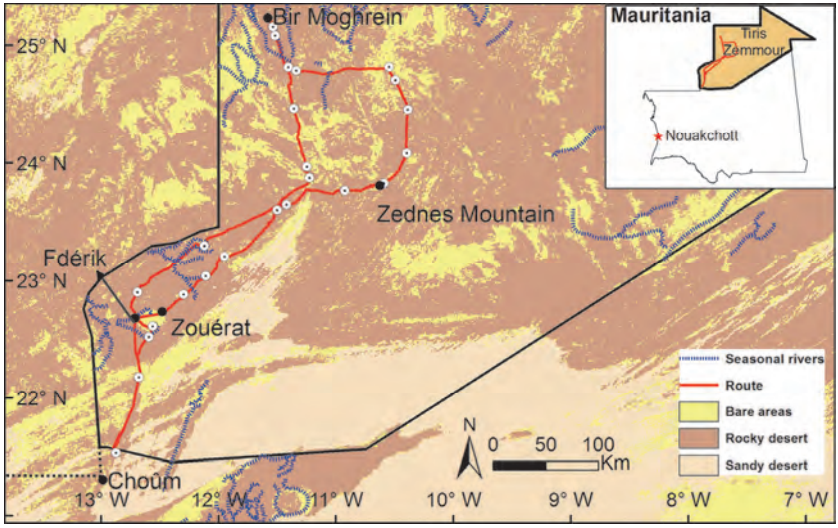

Figure 1. Survey route (red line) in the Tiris Zemmour region, Mauritania, with stopping points for extensive observation (white dots).

Figure 2. Examples of land cover types: rocky desert (top), sandy desert (lower left) and bare area.

the day exceeded 35ºC and during the night fell to *c.* 20ºC, and precipitation never occurred. Bird observations were made while driving (covering an approximate 1200 km transect) and at stations where we stopped to sample areas more intensively (Fig. 1). All observations were georeferenced using a Global Positioning System (WGS84 datum). A total of 507 bird species observations (where one "observation" = one species at one site) were made by 11 observers travelling in two groups. The complete list of observations can be provided by the authors upon request. We report here records obtained north of 21.5ºN, which represent range extensions, new breeding evidence, or evidence for the current status of species last recorded more than 60 years ago, together with others that, according to Isenmann *et al.* (2010) or

Browne (2016) are rare or whose distribution is poorly known. Abundance assessments use the terminology of Morel & Tye (1995).

Results

We recorded 71 species in total. The 27 species listed below include nine not previously recorded for Tiris Zemmour, 17 other range extensions, and nine species for which new breeding evidence is provided.

Columbidae

Streptopelia decaocto Eurasian Collared Dove. Seen only in the cities of Fdérik (at least ten adults in courtship flight) and Bir Moghrein (six individuals). New to the region. Previously recorded in the south of the country, where associated with human settlements, and expanding its range with the first record in Nouakchott from 1999 (Isenmann *et al.* 2010).

Spilopelia senegalensis Laughing Dove. Eight observations. New for the region. Previously thought absent north of 21.2333°N (Isenmann *et al.* 2010). Most of our records were in villages and towns, but also in cultivated oases, where the species probably breeds. However, we also observed individuals in desert areas, perhaps moving between breeding areas.

Caprimulgidae

Caprimulgus europaeus European Nightjar. One individual was flushed from the shade of an *Acacia* tree at 23.2016°N, 11.9488°W on 14 Apr. First record in Tiris Zemmour.

Apodidae

Apus apus Common Swift. Six individuals at 24.7683°N, 11.0038°W and three at 25.1149°N, 11.5285°W, 11 Apr. First records in Tiris Zemmour.

Glareolidae

Cursorius cursor Cream-coloured Courser. Common throughout the region. Three adults with two chicks at 22.9341°N, 12.6794°W, 8 Apr; one pair with one chick at 23.7877°N, 11.3069°W, 9 Apr; one pair with one chick at 24.8427°N, 11.7257°W, 11 Apr; one juvenile at 25.0851°N, 11.5147°W, 11 Apr; two adults with two chicks at 25.0979N, 11.5178°W, 11 Apr. These observations indicate a laying period from late February to early March.

Tytonidae

Tyto alba Barn Owl. One found dead on 11 Apr, in the same rocky outcrop where we found *Bubo ascalaphus* nesting (see below). This is the only recent observation of the species in the region although it is considered a resident breeder in Saharan Mauritania (Isenmann *et al.* 2010, Browne 2016). Also inhabits rocky outcrops in Western Sahara (Bergier *et al.* 2017).

Strigidae

Bubo ascalaphus Pharaoh Eagle-Owl. Frequent from 21.5197ºN to 25.1678ºN, where we heard it on five occasions near rock outcrops. We heard one female and one male

duetting in a rock outcrop 9 km SSE of Bir Moghrein (25.1574°N, 11.5315°W) on the night of 10 Apr. We found a nest inside a hole the next morning, containing one adult with two chicks *c*. 5–6 weeks old (Fig. 3), indicating hatching in the first days of March and laying in the first days of February. The surrounding region was mostly flat, with many small rocky outcrops. The laying period extends from December to the end of March in Western Sahara (Bergier *et al*. 2017).

Accipitridae

Aquila chrysaetos Golden Eagle. One adult hunting in Char (30 km NE of Choum) along a 7-km rocky cliff. Valverde (1957) observed one adult in Bir Moghrein. Also recently recorded in the Adrar Atar area and probably breeds in Saharan Mauritania (Isenmann *et al*. 2010). Scattered pairs remain in mountainous areas of Western Sahara (Bergier *et al*. 2017).

Falconidae

Falco tinnunculus Eurasian Kestrel. One at 24.4613°N, 11.3585°W, 10 Apr; one at 24.9147°N, 11.4633°W, 11 Apr. First precise records in Tiris Zemmour, although

Figure 3. Desert Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*, one adult (above) and two chicks (below) in nest hole 9 km SSE of Bir Moghrein (photo: FS).

Valverde (1957) recorded one observation in French Zemmour, without details. A common winter visitor to southern Mauritania and a localised breeder in the Sahara (Isenmann et al. 2010). Our observations could represent migrants or breeders.

F. biarmicus Lanner Falcon. Frequent. Our 17 observations north of 23ºN (the northernmost one 9 km SSE of Bir Moghrein) extend the known distribution of the species. Two individuals on 13 Apr circling the highest point of a rocky outcrop of Zednes mountain (Fig. 1), one of them carrying a jerboa (*Jaculus sp.*: Fig. 4), may signal a nest with chicks to be fed. On the same day, about 29 km to the west, we found a nest with three chicks *c.* 1 month old, 3 m above the ground on a small (7 m high) rocky outcrop. The environmental temperature was 39º C but the nest orientation avoided direct sunlight at midday. The nest was full of flies, and two White-spotted Wall Geckos *Tarentola annularis* were feeding on them. Valverde (1957) found eggs in Zemmour, Western Sahara, on 10 Mar, and reported one observation in Tiris Zemmour but provided no details. Bergier (2017) reported juveniles in Derraman, Western Sahara, 13–18 Mar.

Laniidae

Lanius meridionalis Iberian Grey Shrike. Common. Our 36 records, all of birds with features of the Saharan subspecies *elegans*, contrast with the scarcity of the species in Tiris Zemmour reported by Valverde (1957). Bergier *et al.* (2017) reports the species to be widespread in Western Sahara.

Corvidae

Corvus ruficollis Brown-necked Raven. Very abundant throughout the region. One individual carrying sticks (typical nesting behaviour) at 21.5180°N, 12.8556°W on 7 Apr, whereas the laying period is considered to occur between January and March in Tiris Zemmour (Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962).

Figure 4. Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* carrying a jerboa above Zednes mountain (photo: FS).

Alaudidae

Ramphocoris clotbey Thick-billed Lark. Observed four times, 45–50 km SSW of Bir Moghrein, 11 Apr, including a group of 21 individuals, two of them juveniles. Poorly known in the country, but found breeding in the same area in 1947 (Heim de Balsac & Heim de Balsac 1949–51) so probably a regular breeder there.

Ammomanes cinctura Bar-tailed Lark. Abundant and widespread in flat habitats. We observed one pair giving alarm calls and performing distraction display 120 km NE of Fdérik, 9 Apr. This is the only firm evidence of breeding in the region.

A. deserti Desert Lark (Common). Only recorded near rocky hills or cliffs, from Char to Bir Moghrein. Always seen in pairs, suggesting local breeding.

Eremopterix nigriceps Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark. Three observations 26 km south of Bir Moghrein (24.9916°N, 11.5965°W), 11 Apr. New for Tiris Zemmour, previously thought to have its northern limit at 21ºN (Isenmann *et al.* 2010).

Eremalauda dunni Dunn's Lark. Abundant in suitable habitat (sandy plain on hard substratum with scattered grass). Several birds singing in the early morning of 10 Apr, 87 km south of Bir Moghrein; one adult accompanied by one large chick at 23.0278°N. 12.5663°W, 8 Apr; an adult female with three chicks in the nest at 24.4924°N, 11.3676°W, 10 Apr (Fig. 5). These records extend the laying period into March (previously thought to be January: Isenmann *et al.* 2010).

Figure 5. Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunni*, female brooding three chicks in nest (photo: PG).

Cisticolidae

Spiloptila clamans Cricket Longtail. Common, as far north as 21 km SE of Fdérik (22.5163°N, 12.5927°W): the northernmost record of the species in Mauritania.

Hirundinidae

Delichon urbicum House Martin. Six observations from 21.5197ºN to 25.1149ºN. New for Tiris Zemmour, although Isenmann *et al*. (2010) reported prenuptial passage in Saharan Mauritania.

Cecropis daurica Red-rumped Swallow. Four observations. New for Tiris Zemmour, although known to migrate through Mauritania, Feb–May (Isenmann et al. 2010).

Ptyonoprogne fuligula Large Rock Martin. Common. Northernmost observation 9 km SSE of Bir Moghrein, where five adults were flying around rocky outcrops. Not previously reported so far north. We found an empty nest at 21.5195°N, 12.8607°W, 7 Apr, at a steep rocky slope and cliffs next to an oasis with many *Acacia* and palm trees; several Rock Martins were observed nearby.

Muscicapidae

Monticola saxatilis Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush. One female at Char (21.5195°N, 12.8607°W), 7 Apr; the same or another there, 12 Apr. First records for Tiris Zemmour.

Oenanthe leucopyga White-crowned Wheatear (Abundant). Among our 31 records, we observed an adult with one juvenile *c.* 30 km NE of Char (21.5208°N, 12.8605°W) on 7 Apr and two adults with one juvenile near Bir Moghrein (25.1560°N, 11.5318°W) on 10 Apr. These juveniles must have hatched between late February and early March, fitting the breeding period of the species in Western Sahara (Bergier *et al.* 2017).

Passeridae

Passer domesticus House Sparrow. Abundant in the settlements of Fdérik, Zouérat and Bir Moghrein. Two males fighting and one male nest-building on a tank near the mines of Zouérat, 8 Apr. One seen in rocky desert habitat at 24.4613°N, 11.3585°W, 90 km from the closest human settlement, 10 Apr (Fig. 6). First observations in Tiris Zemmour.

Figure 6. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, 90 km from the closest human settlement (photo: FS).

Fringillidae

Bucanetes githagineus Trumpeter Finch. Frequent as far north as 8 km SSE of Bir Moghrein, the northernmost modern records for the country (*cf.* Isenmann *et al.* 2010, Browne 2016).

Emberizidae

Emberiza sahari House Bunting. Common throughout the region. Several individuals seen and heard singing in Bir Moghrein. Northernmost record for the country (*cf.* Heim de Balsac & Mayaud 1962, Isenmann *et al.* 2010).

Discussion

The data provided here are now incorporated into Browne (2018). Further research and survey in northern Mauritania, particularly in the north-eastern regions of Tiris Zemmour, is still needed to amplify our knowledge of breeding species and trans-Saharan migration.

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Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* now a breeding resident in The Gambia, with an expanded breeding range in Senegal

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Summary

We report on the history of Little Grebe *T. ruficollis* in The Gambia and Senegal and give details of new breeding records and localities observed since 2001. Use of man-made water bodies as nesting sites contributes to an extended breeding season and expansion of range in this region.

Résumé

Le Grèbe castagneux *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, aujourd'hui une espèce reproductrice résidente en Gambie, avec une aire de reproduction au Sénégal etendue. Nous rapportons ici l'historique du Grèbe castagneux *T. ruficollis* en Gambie et au Sénégal, en fournissant des données nouvelles sur la reproduction et de nouveaux sites de nidification depuis 2001. L'utilisation de plans d'eau artificiels en tant que sites de nidification contribue à l'extension de la saison de reproduction ainsi que de l'aire de répartition dans cette région.

We review historical records of the Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* in Senegal and The Gambia, and report new breeding records and localities. All new and historical breeding localities are enumerated in Table 1 and shown on Fig. 1, and these locality numbers are given in the form (L1, L2 *etc.*) after their locality names in the text.

Historical records in The Gambia and Senegal

Bannerman (1930) made no reference to the Little Grebe in The Gambia and wrote "In Senegal it is likely to be most numerous in the uninvestigated Salum river district, but specimens have only been collected in the north".

Table 1. Localities of Little Grebe breeding records in Senegal and The Gambia. Locality numbers accord with those on Fig. 1.

No.	Locality	°N	°W
1	Richard Toll area, Saint-Louis (Senegal)	*c.* 16.5	*c.* 15.7
2	Djoudj NP, Saint-Louis (Senegal)	16.41671	16.27185
3	STEP Saint-Louis (Senegal)	15.95495	16.47873
4	Mboro, Thiès (Senegal)	15.14105	16.90846
5	Technopole, Dakar (Senegal)	14.75814	17.41184
6	Bargny, Dakar (Senegal)	14.68681	17.21087
7	Yène-Tode, Dakar (Senegal)	14.65197	17.17927
8	Nianing, Thiès (Senegal)	14.31754	16.91877
9	Kaffrine region (Senegal)	*c.* 14.1	*c.* 15.4
10	Belly-Djimbara, Tambacounda (Senegal)	14.10056	12.36889
11	Sambardé, Vélingara, Kolda (Senegal)	13.21115	14.38097
12	Djibelor, Ziguinchor (Senegal)	12.55275	16.32230
13	Borofaye, Ziguinchor (Senegal)	12.51024	16.27865
14	Diembering, Ziguinchor (Senegal)	12.46633	16.78432
15	N'Jau, Central River Region (Gambia)	13.74521	15.21388
16	Kotu Sewage Farm, Western River Region (Gambia)	13.45835	16.70122
17	Coral Beach Hotel, Brusubi, Western River Region (Gambia)	13.39139	16.76033
18	Tujering, Western River Region (Gambia)	13.29580	16.79170
19	Gunjur, Western River Region (Gambia)	13.28610	16.77837
20	Kartong, Western River Region (Gambia)	13.11124	16.76232

In The Gambia, the species was reported by Cawkell & Moreau (1965) as seldom seen and only on floodwater and small pools during the rains. Records in the area of Bund Road, Banjul (13.16479°N, 16.34519°W) were reported from mid-Jun to late Jul 1996 with a maximum of six birds, and one bird in Upper River Region in Aug, and then on the Bund Road from Jan to Apr 1967 and in Jan 1969, but with no breeding records (Bray *et al.* 1969). Gore (1990) documented the first known breeding attempt (which was unsuccessful), at the Kotu Sewage Farm (L16), a permanent water body in Western River Division, in 1989. as well as a range extension up to Gambia River National Park (13.38839°N, 14.57401°W), Central River Region. By 1997 there had been sight records in all seasons but with breeding attempts still restricted to the Kotu Sewage Farm, all failing due to suspected predation by Nile Monitor *Varanus niloticus* and storm wash-outs (Barlow *et al.* 1997). Considered locally increasing (Barlow & Dodman 2011), there are now sight records in all river regions north and south of the Gambia River (CRB pers. obs.).

Up to 1990 there had been seven breeding records of Little Grebe from the Richard-Toll area in the north (L1) and one from Dakar (precise locality not known), all during Nov–Feb (Cawkell & Moreau 1965, Morel & Morel 1990). During 1984–94, it was

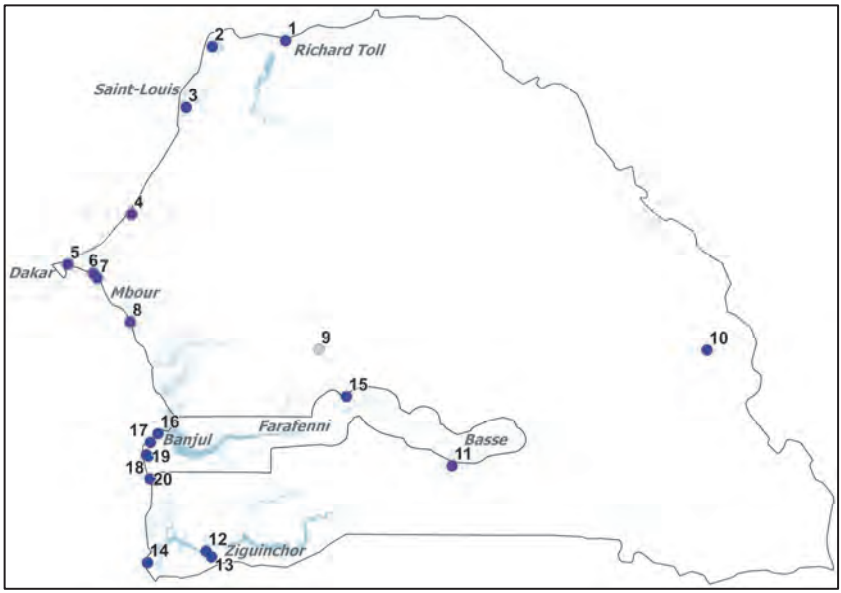

Figure 1. Location of all known breeding records of Little Grebe in Senegal and The Gambia.

regularly recorded breeding in the Djoudj National Park (L2) (Rodwell *et al.* 1996), and breeding was reported at the Saint-Louis sewage works (L3) in the north in April and in the Kaffrine region (L9) in the centre of the country in November (Sauvage & Rodwell 1998).

New breeding records in The Gambia

On 20 Nov 2001 at N'Jau (L15) in Central River Region, north of the river, one adult Little Grebe with small black-and-white striped downy chicks and with well grown juveniles was watched on a wide but receding water body created by the rains, and densely bordered by tall well-established *Mitragyna inermis* trees. Eight Egyptian Plovers *Pluvianus aegyptius* and a large group of Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* were also present on the shoreline of the same sandy roadside pond.

On 25 Aug 2009, a nest with seven eggs and attendant adults was found near the edge of a recently created artificial pond at the Coral Beach Hotel, Brusubi, Western River Region (L17). The pond was regularly watched up to 19 Oct 2009, when four nearly fully-fledged juveniles were present with no adults. Adults were not present on

any further visits, suggesting that the parents vacated the site before the juveniles themselves departed later in October. The adults were mostly silent when disturbed and the only registered vocalisations were brief warbling sounds recorded on 15 Aug 2009. The artificial pond is sunken into a landscaped lawn with a mix of scattered trees and a fence hides it from view from a busy highway some 15 m away. The pond attracted Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus*, Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*, Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Black-headed Heron *A. melanocephala* and many Cattle Egrets. Various small migratory insectivorous passerines also used the site on passage e.g. Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* and Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*.

A well grown juvenile was at Kotu Sewage Farm (L16) on 4 Dec 2011, and a nest built mostly from garbage was at the same site on 11 Nov 2014; both were photographed (O.J.L. Fox pers. comm.). Breeding attempts associated with the rains are regularly witnessed at this site but no further details are available (L. Sidebeh & G. Dobbs pers. comm.). In Sep–Oct 2013, two adults were watched from nest construction to incubation, on a flooded disused roadside quarry at Tujering, Western River Region (L18) but observations were not sustained further. On 7 Oct 2013, a pair of Little Grebes in bright breeding plumage was photographed carrying clumps of decaying aquatic vegetation (Fig. 2) and building a nest on a seasonally flooded stretch of water in an extended hollow on sand dunes (G. Ramos pers. comm.) near Gunjur, Western River Region (L19). A nest with four unstained white (fresh-looking) eggs (Fig. 3) was found on 28 Oct 2016, on an expansive seasonally flooded sand and stone quarry with no floating vegetation, near Kartong (L20) (T. Kulongoski & CRB pers. obs.). The nest was built at the base of a partly submerged leafless *Acacia* sapling close to the bank, and nest materials were still being brought to it at the time of the observation. A changeover of incubation duties was watched and photographed the same day (Fig. 3).

Figure 2. Little Grebe carrying nest materials at Gunjur, The Gambia, 7 Oct 2013 (photo: G. Ramos).

Figure 3. Nest with four unstained eggs (photo: CRB) and a changeover of incubation duties (photo: T. Kulongoski), Kartong, The Gambia, 28 Oct 2016.

New breeding records in Senegal

During 2014–17, new breeding records were obtained throughout the country, including in several areas where Little Grebes had not previously been reported nesting; these are listed below from north to south, and observations are by BP unless otherwise stated.

At least five birds, including one apparently incubating and one nest-building, were seen at a seasonal "*niaye*" wetland (a reed-fringed shallow lake in coastal dunes) at Mboro, Thiès region (L4), 16 and 18 Nov 2016. Breeding was confirmed at the

Dakar Technopôle (L5), an urban wetland complex with brackish lagoons, a freshwater lake and several small ponds, where at least 30 birds including a striped chick were seen on 4 Jan 2016; at least 20 birds, including an adult and two more chicks, were there on 21 Jan 2016, and there were at least 40 birds including at least one older striped chick (possibly one of the previous birds) on 6 Mar 2016. Little Grebe is present year-round at Technopôle in variable numbers throughout the year, often reaching several hundreds of birds: the highest counts were *c.* 800 on 3 June 2011 (P. Robinson pers. comm.) and at least 527 on 21 Jan 2018 (BP & M. Lecoq). At Bargny (Dakar region (L6), two adults were seen nest-building at disused gravel pits on 24 Jan 2016, and on 13 Nov 2017 at least two chicks several weeks old were there, still striped and obviously hatched locally. At the nearby seasonal coastal lagoon of Yène-Tode (L7), there was an adult with two chicks aged 1–2 weeks on 13 Nov 2017, and there were at least four birds including one on a nest on 18 Nov 2017. At a small lake near the coast at Nianing, Thiès (L8), a pair with two chicks was seen on 26 Nov 2017.

The first breeding record for the Boundou Community Nature Reserve, Tambacounda was obtained at a dam on an affluent of the Falemé river at Belly-Djimbara (L10), 7 Oct 2017, when six adults and four striped chicks were seen (Fig. 4), and at least 20 Little Grebes including five independent juveniles and ten younger chicks were found there on 25 Nov 2017 (G. Caucanas *in litt.*). In Casamance, breeding was confirmed at Diembering, Ziguinchor (L14), on a small seasonal pond on the edge of rice fields in coastal dunes, when a pair was seen on a nest on 13 and 14 Oct 2016. Further inland, the species was found breeding at two locations near Ziguinchor (Djibelor L12; Borofaye L13) in Dec 2014, and at Sambardé (L11) near Vélingara, Kolda region, where a nest with three chicks aged 1–2 days was found on 20 Sep 2017 (BB pers. obs.). Aggressive behaviour of an adult Little Grebe towards a crocodile (2.5–3 m long) lying motionless in the water was observed at Djibelor. The grebe postured upright some 3–4 m away from the crocodile, diving and re-surfacing to threaten it repeatedly over about half an hour (BB pers. obs.).

Of the above records, those from the Grande Côte (Mboro L4), the Petite Côte (Yène-Tode L7; Nianing L8), Tambacounda region (L10), and Casamance (L11–14) are all new breeding locations.

Figure 4. Four striped Little Grebe chicks at Belly-Djimbara, Senegal, 7 Oct 2017 (photo: G. Caucanas).

Discussion

Our observations suggest that Little Grebe is a widespread and increasing breeding bird in The Gambia and Senegal (Fig. 1), using natural seasonal ponds, lakes and lagoons, and (in recent years) man-made water bodies such as abandoned gravel pits, sand extraction sites and small reservoirs. Little Grebes have been observed at a number of suitable habitats where breeding is not yet proven *e.g*. Tujering marshlands (13.188547°N, 16.47217°W) in coastal Gambia, Aug 2018 (R. Cryer, G. Dobbs, F. Mendy & CRB pers. obs.). In Senegal, pairs have also been observed during the breeding season at Ndiael Fauna Reserve (16.29063°N, 16.08237°W), Saint-Louis (F. Bacuez pers. comm.), Popenguine Nature Reserve (14.54784°N, 17.10618°W), Thiès (BP pers. obs.) and inland at Keur Waly Ndiaye (14.03854°N, 16.21429°W), Kaolack region (S. Cavaillès pers. comm.). The construction of large ornamental garden ponds and the unintended creation of habitat by quarrying have contributed to an extension of the breeding range and greater regularity of breeding of Little Grebe in coastal Gambia and Senegal, on sites that attract a diversity of wildlife. The breeding season extends from the rainy season well into the dry season, with chicks noted from the end of September to December in southern localities, from November to February in coastal areas north of 14°N and to April in the Senegal delta (*c*. 16–16.5°N). Some natural seral succession has occurred at some sites, but in the face of rapidly diminishing habitat quality especially in coastal Gambia, supplementary planting at open quarries of appropriate vegetation would prove judicious.

The diurnal Nile Monitor is common at all the sites discussed above and is expected to be a significant predator of nests and chicks, while West African Crocodile *Crocodylus suchus* and Slender-snouted Crocodile *C. cataphracatus* are likely to be important predators at some locations. Further study of nest predation and of defensive behaviour by breeding Little Grebes would be of interest.

The Little Grebe is resident throughout Africa south of the Sahara, with race *T. r. capensis* found from Mauritania (the reference to the nominate there by Isenmann *et al*. 2010 is in error: P. Isenmann *in litt.*) to Ethiopia southwards (Brown *et al.* 1992). The breeding habits of *T. r capensis* have not been intensively studied anywhere in Africa and its diet has not been analysed in detail (Brown *et al.* 1992). Studies of vocalisations and DNA are also needed to clarify the differentiation of *capensis* from the nominate subspecies, which breeds in Europe and Morocco (Thévenot et al. 2003).

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A major count of the Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* in Senegal in November 2017, with notes on its history and current status in Senegal and The Gambia

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Summary

We report an observation of a group of 30 Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* at the Boundou Community Nature Reserve, eastern Senegal, on 26 Nov 2017. This is the largest group of Egyptian Vultures ever documented in Senegal and The Gambia and one of the largest known from the Sahel. The Egyptian Vulture is suffering a severe decline across much of its global range. We review observations and GPS tracking data of the species in Senegal and The Gambia since the first scientific record, in 1913, and propose that it should be considered an uncommon non-breeding visitor to these two countries, occurring regularly only in the far east of Senegal.

Résumé

Effectif exceptionnel de Percnoptères d'Egypte *Neophron percnopterus* observé au Sénégal en novembre 2017, avec historique et actualisation de son statut au Sénégal et en Gambie. Nous rapportons l'observation d'un groupe de 30 Percnoptères d'Egypte le 26 nov 2017 dans la Réserve Naturelle Communautaire du Boundou à l'est du Sénégal. C'est le groupe le plus important de Percnoptères d'Egypte jamais documenté au Sénégal et en Gambie et l'un des plus importants pour le Sahel. Le Percnoptère d'Egypte est en déclin rapide dans la plus grande partie de son aire de répartition. Nous dressons un état des lieux des observations et données obtenues par suivi GPS de l'espèce au Sénégal et en Gambie depuis la première mention de l'espèce en 1913, et nous proposons qu'elle soit considérée comme migratrice peu fréquente et ne nichant pas dans ces deux pays, régulière seulement dans l'extrême est du Sénégal.

Introduction

The Boundou Community Nature Reserve (BCNR) is a protected area of 1200 km^2, mainly covered by sahelo-soudanian shrubby savanna and managed by local communities. It is located in the extreme east of Senegal, *c.* 100 km east of the town of Tambacounda. The Falemé River, which forms the eastern border of the BCNR, takes its source in the Fouta Djallon highlands of Guinea and joins the Senegal River near Bakel, providing an important north-south ecological corridor. The current species inventory of the BCNR (as of May 2018) includes 267 species of birds and 31 of large mammals (GC unpubl. data). Thirty-six species of raptors have been recorded, including Beaudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beaudouini* and Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* and six species of vultures, of which the Critically Endangered Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* is the most often observed. White-backed Vulture *G. africanus*, Rüppell's Vulture *G. rueppelli*, Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos* and Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, are noted less frequently, with only occasional records of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*.

The Egyptian Vulture has a large global range extending from the Cape Verde Islands to eastern India (Orta *et al.* 2018) and has been listed as Endangered by the IUCN since 2007 (Birdlife International 2017). It has suffered a severe decline across much of its range, particularly in Europe and West Africa (Thiollay 2006, BirdLife International 2017) and this trend is expected to continue in the near future, at least in Africa (Ogada *et al.* 2015). The following observation made in the BCNR represents the largest group ever documented in Senegal and The Gambia.

Observation of large group

On 26 Nov 2017 at 14h30, GC and four eco-guards found a group of 30 Egyptian Vultures on a sandbar, drinking from the Falemé river at a site called Sané in the extreme southeast of the BCNR (13°49′41″N, 12°10′59″W). A photograph of the group was obtained from the opposite side of the river, several hundred meters away (Fig. 1a). The group included ten birds in adult plumage and 20 immatures. Most of the birds soon dispersed (Fig. 1b-d). Other raptors present included three Lappet-faced Vultures, a Griffon Vulture, a Wahlberg's Eagle *Hieraaetus wahlbergi*, two adult African Hawk Eagles *Aquila spilogaster*, an immature Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*, two Harrier Hawks *Polyboroides typus* (an adult and an immature) and a Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*. Egyptian Vultures were observed elsewhere the same day and on the previous day: three at a large pond at Belly-Djimbara (14°6′2″N, 12°22′8″W) on 25 Nov, and two *c.* 6 km north of the Sané site, south of Goundafa (13°52′40″N, 12°11′48″W) at 11h30 on 26 Nov.

Following these observations, GC and A. Kanté made monthly visits to the site until Feb 2018. On 21 Dec 2017 between 14h45 and 15h15, at least ten Egyptian Vultures

Figure 1. Group of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* observed at Sané, Boundou Community Nature Reserve, 26 Nov 2017 (photos: GC).

(two adults and eight immatures) were flying over the site. On 15 Jan 2018, an adult and an immature were flying northwards at high altitude. On 18 Feb 2018 around 12h00, three immatures were flying in an east-southeasterly direction.

Egyptian Vulture in Senegal and The Gambia, past and present

Senegal

Between the 1960s and 1980s, Egyptian Vulture was considered a Palaearctic winter visitor and scarce resident in Senegal, with the Falemé River between 14° and 14°30′N being the only known location where it appeared to be common (Morel & Morel 1990). Eight other records between 1964 and 1990 came from Richard Toll (one record), Djoudj National Park (two), the Saloum delta (one), Niokolo-Koba National Park and north of Kédougou (three), and Basse-Casamance (two) (Morel & Morel 1990). The only record of a possible locally nesting bird was a female “ready to lay its eggs” shot near the Ségou post on the border with Guinea, on 19 Mar 1972

(Morel & Roux 1973). The same day, three Egyptian Vultures were observed in the surroundings by the same authors. There was, however, no proof of nesting within Senegal, as the female could have been breeding in nearby Guinea, where there are numerous cliffs suitable for the species (Morel & Morel 1990).

Rodwell *et al.* (1996) gave two January records for the Djoudj NP in 1991 and 1992, while Sauvage & Rodwell (1998) reported one observation in Kolda (Jan 1988) and seven in the Niokolo-Koba NP between 1984 and 1994 (Jan–Mar) and mentioned four previous observations in the same park.

More recently, Egyptian Vulture was considered a "scarce and local visitor" to Senegal (Borrow & Demey 2014), with distribution covering three main areas, roughly: the departments of Tambacounda and Kedougou, a possibly resident population extending into Mali, northern Guinea and the extreme south of Mauritania; wintering birds along the Mauritanian border between Saint-Louis and Richard Toll; wintering birds in the western part of The Gambia to Kerewan and adjacent Basse-Casamance. Single records outside these areas were noted at Dakar and Kolda.

In recent years, we identified 31 records from Senegal that we consider to be reliable, as follows. Eight of these are from the Saint-Louis Region in northern Senegal: Djoudj NP, 18 Jan 2016 (B. van Hoogstraten <https://observation.org/waarneming/view/114147189>, consulted 15 Jan 2018); two observations at Langue de Barbarie NP, Dec 2016 (R. Benjumea <https://observation.org/waarneming/view/132990483>, consulted 15 Jan 2018, J. Wright pers. comm.); Gueoul, Kébémer, 16 Jan 2017 (D. Díaz-Diethelm & E. Fontcuberta Trepat <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S34240740>, consulted 15 Jan 2018); Trois-Marigots Patrimonial Area, 25 Dec 2017 (F. Bacuez pers. comm.); one bird satellite tagged in the French Western Pyrenees in 2015 entered Senegal northeast of Golere on 26 Oct 2016, then moved in a straight line to north of Louga when the signal disappeared on 29 Oct 2016 (Kobierzicky 2017, Vulture Conservation Fund 2017); a satellite-tracked bird (named "Azahar") from Spain wintered in southern Mauritania from mid-September to the end of February in two consecutive years (2007–8 and 2008–9) and each winter briefly crossed into Senegal east of Podor, on 3 Feb 2008 and 26 Jan 2009, before returning to Mauritania (García-Ripollés 2010; Fig. 2). This series of records suggest that Egyptian Vulture is a sporadic visitor in the north of the country, at least in the area between Kébémer and Richard Toll and possibly further up the middle Senegal valley.

A further 21 records are from eastern Senegal, mainly from the BCNR, including three observations between Aug 2015 and Feb 2016 (J. Delannoy pers. comm.) and 11 between Nov 2016 and Feb 2018 (GC; Fig. 3). Three other direct observations of 1–2 individuals were made in the BCNR on 25–26 Jan 2018 around the villages of Belly-Djimbara and Toumboura (G. Monchaux <https://observation.org/waarneming/view/148386149>, <https://observation.org/waarneming/view/148386009> and <https://observation.org/waarneming/view/148385839>, consulted 14 Oct 2018). One GPS-tracked bird tagged in Extremadura, Spain, in Sep 2014 must have crossed the BCNR on its way to Tambacounda before returning to Mali in Jan 2015 (<https://www.4

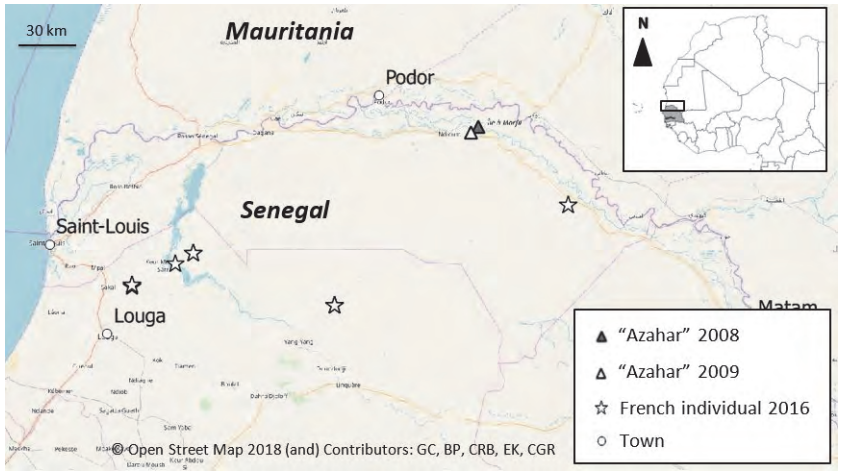

Figure 2. Locations of two tagged Egyptian Vultures that entered north Senegal.

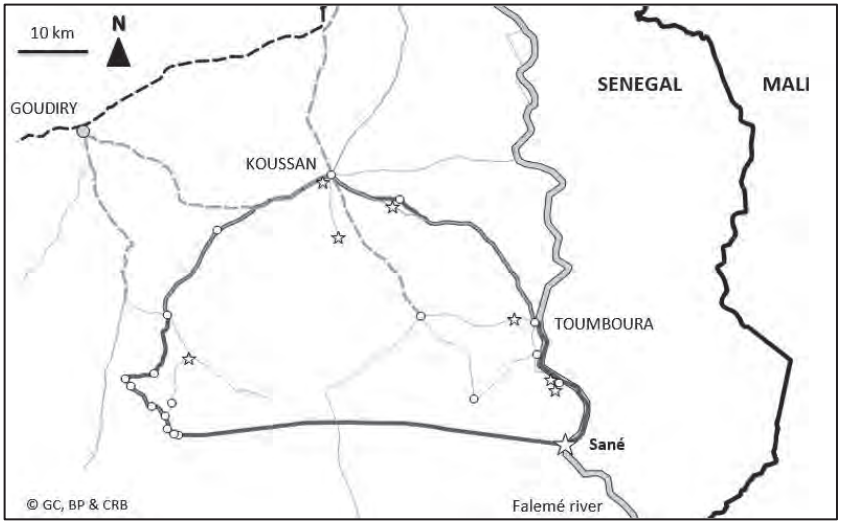

Figure 3. Observation sites (stars) of Egyptian Vulture in the Boundou Community Nature Reserve, Oct 2016 to May 2018.

vultures.org/2015/01/02/happy-new-year-tiz%C3%B3n/>, consulted 25 Feb 2018). Three other GPS-tracked birds from the Douro region on the Spanish–Portuguese

border visited the area (Fig. 4): two adults that bred in the Arribes del Duero Natural Park, Spain ("Batuecas A" and "Huebra") and one breeding female ("Poiares") captured in the Douro International Natural Park in Portugal (Vulture Conservation Foundation pers. comm.). These three birds spent 25–76 days in Senegal or close to the border in Mali, arriving from 23 Oct 2017 (Poiares) and departing as late as 17 Jan 2018 (Batuecas A). Their movements were mainly concentrated in the sahelo-sudanian savanna of the border region east of BCNR, particularly between Diambaloye, Daloulé and Madina Foulbé. Batuecas A travelled >100 km south of this area within Senegal before returning north. All three birds entered BCNR at different points between 4 Nov 2017 and 11 Jan 2018, with Batuecas A and Huebra being present in the south-east of BCNR near Sané, where some of the other observations were recorded.

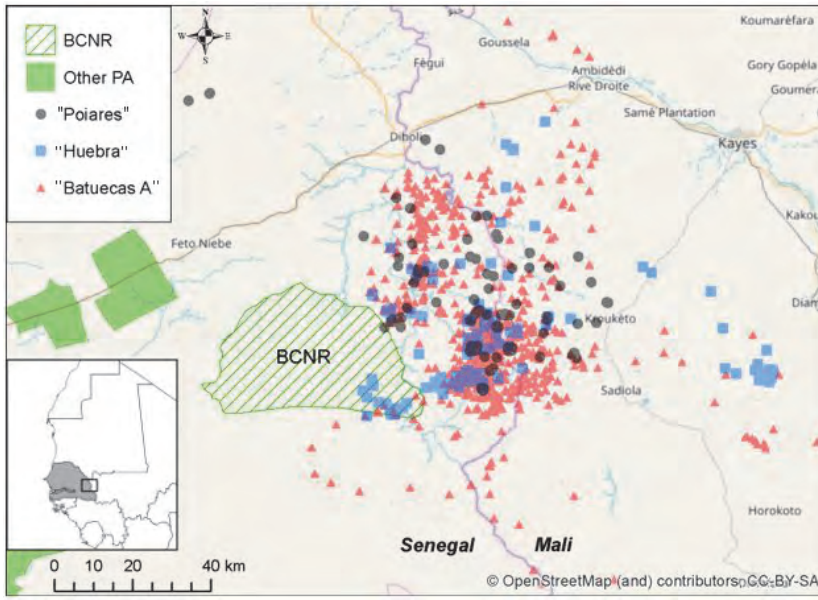

Figure 4. GPS locations of three tagged adult Egyptian Vultures that entered eastern Senegal between Oct 2017 and 17 Jan 2018.

The remaining two records suggest that the species is a rare and erratic winter visitor elsewhere in the country: Saloum delta (one or two birds near Toubacouta, 30 Dec 2017, J.-L. Carlo & M. Zein pers. comm.) and Basse-Casamance (2 km west of Ziguinchor along the Casamance river, 6 Feb 2006, B. Bargain pers. comm.).

The Gambia

The first documented record of Egyptian Vulture in The Gambia was one seen at Jassong on 3 Dec 1913, which at the time was considered to be the only definite record on the African mainland between the Senegal River and the Congo (Bannerman 1930), although "albinistic Hooded Vultures" reported from Casamance and the Fouta Djallon (Bannerman 1930) might have been Egyptian Vultures. The species was considered a vagrant by Gore (1990), with only six records since the 1913 one: Fajara, 8 Mar 1962; Yundum, 24 Jun 1962 (the only rainy season record for The Gambia); Bund Road, Banjul, 24 Apr 1966 (an immature); Lower River Region, late Feb to early Mar 1973; Abuko, 14 Dec 1975 and 6 Jan 1981. Additional records, hitherto unpublished, on which Barlow *et al.* (1997) based their assessment of the species as a rare visitor are: two immatures drinking from a pool at a small roadside quarry at Jali, Kiang West, Lower River Region 12 Jan 1991; a sub-adult over Brufut Woods on the coast, 12 Jan 1993, and a sub-adult mobbed and forced to the ground by Pied Crows *Corvus albus* at the nearby Madiana stream, 3 Feb 1993. A sub-adult was seen over the fish landing site on Sanyang Beach, 15 Apr 1997 (CRB). Only one substantiated record is known to us outside Western River Region and Lower River Region: a sub-adult north of the river over N'jau, Central River Region, 29 Nov 1997 (D. Gilbert, C. Sammels, M. Wilson & CRB). Since 1997 there has been a handful of unsubstantiated reports, all of singletons.

Discussion

Following the introduction of satellite tracking technology, the movements and migration strategies of Egyptian Vulture are becoming better documented. GPS-tagged birds from Spain and France have overwintered mainly in Mauritania and Mali (Meyburg *et al.* 2004, García-Ripollés *et al.* 2010, Kobierzycki 2017), whereas birds breeding in the Balkans and the Caucasus wintered between Nigeria and Yemen (Bougain & Oppel 2016, Buechley *et al.* 2018, Karyakin 2018, <www.lifeneophron.eu/en/news-view/470.html> consulted 28 May 2018).

Most records from Senegal and The Gambia were made during Nov–Jan (Fig. 5), including the two large groups noted in the BCNR (30 individuals in Nov and ten in Dec). As there are no definite indications of breeding anywhere in Senegal since the record of a female ready to lay in 1972, we consider that Egyptian Vultures reported in Senegal and Gambia are predominantly migrants from Western Europe, possibly with erratic visitors from Mali, where the species is said to breed between Kita and Kayes (Morel & Roux 1973) and Mount Hombori near Mopti (Clouet 2008) and further east closer to the Niger border (Thiollay 2006). Morel & Morel (1987) suggested possible nesting in the Fouta Djallon in Guinea, but no recent information is available from this region.

Across the western Sahel, very few groups as large as that seen in the BCNR have been reported. These include: groups of 50 birds in the Hodhs of Mauritania, Jan 2001

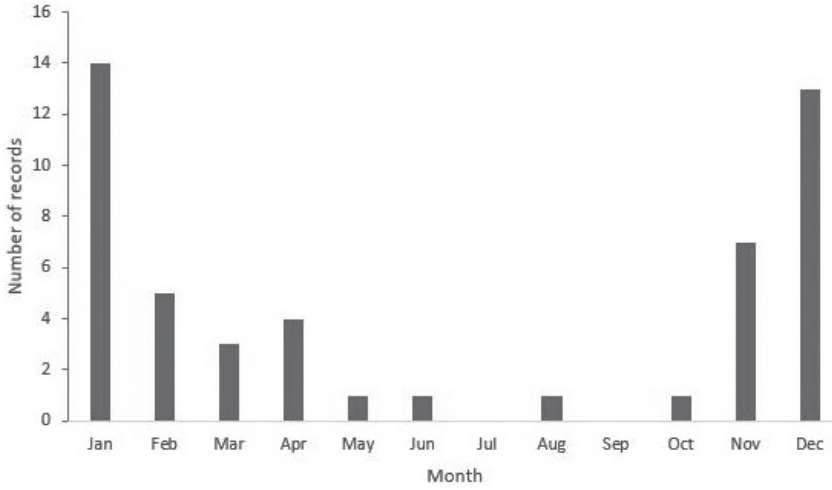

Figure 5. Records of Egyptian Vulture in Senegal and The Gambia from 1913 to May 2018, per month (records with month recorded: n = 50).

and Jan 2007 (Isenmann *et al.* 2010); 15 at the Agadez abattoir, Niger, Mar 2002 (V. Keller on <www.wabdab.org>, consulted 26 May 2018); 14 at Bilma oasis, Ténéré, Niger, 9 Dec 2004 (J.M. Thiollay pers. comm.); 22 in Feb 2014 and 30 in Feb 2017 at a laterite quarry *c.* 180 km NE of N'Djamena, Chad (T. Wacher on <www.wabdab. org>, consulted 28 May 2018). Larger congregations of wintering birds have been reported further away, from the Afar region (Ethiopia), Djibouti, Socotra (Yemen) and Oman (Arkumarev *et al.* 2014 M. McGrady pers. comm., J.M. Thiollay pers. comm.). The 2017 observation from BCNR thus represents one of the largest groups of Egyptian Vultures noted in the Sahel in recent years and the largest ever documented in Senegal and The Gambia. We believe the BCNR and its surroundings should be considered a key area for the conservation of Egyptian Vulture in the region. Additional survey work is needed to monitor seasonal occurrence, population size, and trends.

The conservation status of Egyptian Vulture, as for most other vulture species in Africa, is precarious (Botha *et al.* 2017). Electrocution by high voltage power lines and poaching for traditional medicine, food and witchcraft purposes are reported as threats to vultures from several parts of the Sahel region (Oppel *et al.* 2015, Kret *et al.* 2018). Changing food supply and poisoning may be the main threats for scavengers across the region (Thiollay 2006, Arkumarev *et al.* 2014, Mullié *et al.* 2017). Pastoralism is widespread in the Boundou area, with local and transhumant herds transiting between Mauritania and Guinea. Improvements in veterinary medicine, the removal of carcases, and strong declines of wild mammal populations in recent decades (A. Kanté pers. comm.) imply tougher conditions for scavengers such as vultures. Within the BCNR, deliberate

poisoning by herdsmen occurs, as illustrated by the 34 vultures (27 Hooded Vultures, four Rüppell's Vultures and three Griffon Vultures) with one Bateleur and one Brown Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinereus* found poisoned near a cow carcase 3 km ESE of Belly-Djimbara, in Dec 2015 (J. Delannoy & A. Kanté pers. comm.; Fig. 6). No Egyptian Vulture was found at the incident, but such acts of poisoning are a potential risk to the species. Poachers are active inside the BCNR and raptors may be intentional targets. Only one large power line has been erected in the Boundou area to date, from the Manantali hydroelectric dam in Mali to Kayes and on to Ballou and Matam in Senegal, but this could be considered a potential threat to vultures and other large birds.

Conservation efforts are needed more than ever in Sahelian zones where habitats and land use practices are rapidly changing, and conflict and insecurity exacerbate widespread environmental pressures (Brito *et al.* 2018). Botha *et al.* (2017) provide a framework for suitable action. In order to understand better the status, origins and movements of Egyptian Vultures in West Africa and establish adequate conservation measures, the links between the birds occurring in Senegal and populations in Europe, northwest and West Africa (Mali in particular) need to be clarified. Awareness and education efforts centred on vulture conservation should target both local communities and transhumant herdsmen and may need to work across borders (Kret *et al.* 2018). To this end, the BCNR team and eco-guards regularly organise village gatherings and environmental education programs in partnership with local schools. Finally, surveys of potential nesting areas in southeast Senegal would be useful.

Acknowledgments

We thank Abdou Diouf, the Conservator of the BCNR, for fostering surveys of the reserve and ensuring its good functioning. We also thank Abdoulaye Kanté and all the

Figure 6. Carcases of vultures found poisoned near Belly-Djimbara, Boundou Community Nature Reserve, 5 Dec 2015 (photos: J. Delannoy).

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Short Notes — Notes Courtes

First record of Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* for Senegal

During the latter months of 2017, the seasonal lagoon at Yène-Tode (Dakar region, 14°39′10″N, 17°10′50″W) attracted many water birds due to higher than usual water levels, which created ideal conditions for herons, ducks, waders, gulls and terns. As a result, up to about 1000 ducks (mainly White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*, Garganey *Spatula querquedula* and Northern Shoveler *S. clypeata*), 1200 waders and hundreds of gulls and terns were present from October to mid-December. The shallow freshwater lagoon was fringed with extensive inundated grassland which provided cover for species such as Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Greater Painted-Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*. Regular visits to the site during this period resulted in observations of several rare migrants and vagrants to Senegal, including a Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* on 13 November and three Common Shelducks *Tadorna tadorna* on 9–17 December.

During a visit to the site on 1 Jan 2018, by which time the lagoon had all but dried up, I located a small flock of Yellow Wagtails and one pipit *Anthus* sp. feeding on the ground in an area of short vegetation and sparse sedge (*Carex* spp.) growth. Expecting it to be a Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, several of which had been present during previous visits, I watched it through a telescope and realised that it was neither that species nor a Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*. It resembled both, but several features did not fit for either species. As I approached, the bird flew off and called a few times, its diagnostic flight call confirming my suspicion that it was a Meadow Pipit *A. pratensis*. It was relocated in denser grass on the edge of the floodplain, in an area where at least eight Red-throated Pipits were present. After it returned to the original patch, where it continued feeding actively, I obtained prolonged views and took several photographs (Fig. 1).

It was a small, streaked pipit with upperparts green-brown, generally lacking warm tones in plumage; in direct comparison, clearly smaller-bodied and more slender than Yellow Wagtail; head pattern not highly contrasting, with pale lores, a narrow white eye ring, an indistinct supercilium only diffusely separated from the finely streaked crown, a buff sub-moustachial stripe bordered by dense black malar streaks, and a large pale buff throat patch; breast and upper flanks with dense dark streaking, streaks clotting together on the chest to create an irregularly striped pattern on an off-white to pale buff ground colour, extending onto the lower flanks as finer and longer black streaks; mantle and scapulars with irregular broad dark streaks; rump and upper tail-coverts entirely plain olive-green to brown (Fig. 1c, d); wings largely brown, olive-greenish fringes to greater coverts and remiges, contrasting median

upper wing-coverts very dark brown or black with neatly demarcated white fringes; relatively fine, sharply pointed bill with diffuse yellowish base extending centrally to about two thirds of the length of the bill; legs and feet pale pink, the hind toe appearing long and moderately curved. The call was a high-pitched, thin and hurried *hiisp-isp-isp-isp* or *whist-hist-ist* increasing in speed and with a slightly raspy quality, uttered in several series during hesitant flight. The bird fed actively in short vegetation, pecking at invertebrates on the ground, often in a fairly horizontal posture (Fig. 1c, d), moving almost mouse-like though the vegetation. When alerted, it appeared longer legged and more upright in stance (Fig. 1a).

In addition to the diagnostic call, with which I am familiar on the species' breeding and wintering grounds in Europe, the identification as Meadow Pipit is based on the greenish tinge to upperparts and absence of warmer hues in the plumage, the absence of clear pale "rails" on the mantle, a clearly unstreaked rump (which excludes Red-throated Pipit), the "gentle" expression due to the pale lores and unmarked ear-coverts, the yellow-based fine bill, and the form of the hind toe (longer and less curved than that of Tree Pipit) (Alström & Mild 2003). Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni*, a potential vagrant to Senegal, was ruled out based on the call, the heavily streaked back and absence of a clear bicoloured "ear spot". The pinkish legs and feet eliminate Water Pipit *A. spinoletta* and Rock Pipit *A. petrosus*, two other potential vagrants to West Africa, which in juvenile and winter plumage superficially resemble Meadow Pipit.

The bird was obviously in fresh plumage and can be aged as a first-winter based on the shape and colour of the median coverts. These clearly show a pointed "tooth" extending from the dark centre into the white fringe of the coverts (Fig. 1b, d), a feature that is distinctive of first-winter birds (Svensson 1992).

The Meadow Pipit is common (but declining: BirdLife International 2017) across much of Eurasia. Northern and eastern populations are medium-distance migrants; the non-breeding range includes western Europe and most of the Mediterranean basin, extending eastward into southwest Asia, and along the Atlantic coast into southern Morocco and to the Canary Islands (Snow & Perrins 1998). In Mauritania it is considered to be scarce but possibly regular, with very small numbers reaching the northern limit of the Sahel zone, including the lower Senegal river where it may be an irregular visitor only (Isenmann *et al.* 2010). Rather surprisingly given the proximity of the southernmost Mauritanian records, it has so far not been documented in Senegal. No records are known from elsewhere in West Africa (Borrow & Demey 2014), except one or two birds reported in The Gambia on 19 Nov 1990 (P.-O. Bengtsson *per* C.R. Barlow *in litt.*); however, this record is not fully documented and has never been published.

As such, the observation from Yène-Tode is the first record for Senegal and the southernmost documented report for West Africa. Given its status as a scarce winter visitor nearby in Mauritania, it is likely that the species occurs at least irregularly in northern Senegal. The observation reported here coincided with several records of Palaearctic species that typically winter further north or are scarce winter visitors to the Dakar region and central Senegal, including Common Shelduck, Short-eared Owl

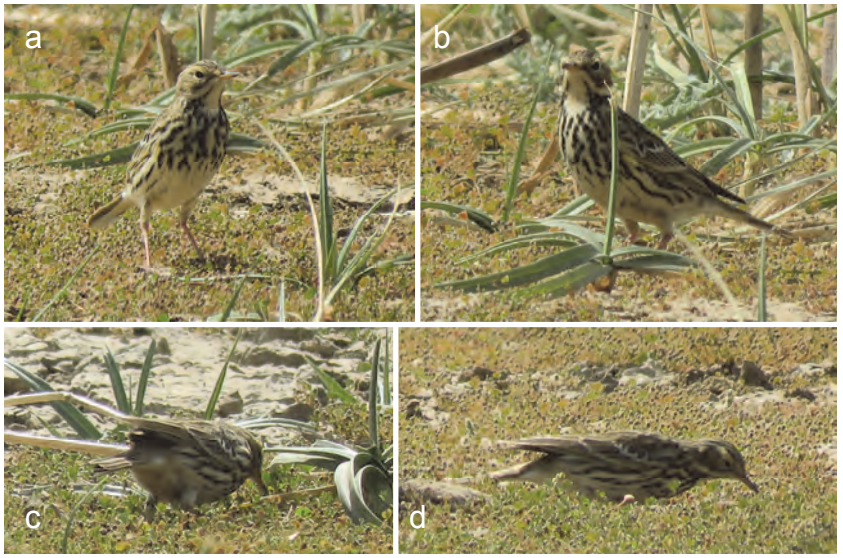

Figure 1. Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* at Yène-Tode, Senegal, 1 Jan 2018.

Asio flammeus, Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*, Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus* and Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus* (pers. obs.).

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African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis* feeding on the back of a Hippopotamus

We report an observation of a rarely described behaviour of the African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis*, feeding on the back of a Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius* at Campement de Wassadou on the River Gambia in eastern Senegal (Tambacounda region, 13°20′53″N, 13°22′35″W). During our stay at the camp between 19 and 24 Feb 2018, two hippos spent most of each day in the river in front of the lodge. We also sighted African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis* on several occasions, always as single individuals crossing the river in the open or swimming half-concealed among the riparian vegetation, or once walking across a sand bank while fleeing our approaching boat.

The most interesting sighting however occurred in the early afternoon of 22 Feb between 13h30 and 13h45. One hippo was resting in the shade of the low branches overhanging the left bank opposite the camp, with the top of its head and back above the water while a female or non-breeding male Finfoot was observed feeding off its back. While swimming along the sides and rear of the hippo, the bird searched for prey on the animal and regularly extended its neck to catch something. Most strikingly, in four or five instances the Finfoot climbed onto the back of the hippo in pursuit of small prey invisible to us (Fig. 1). While we were unable to identify the prey items captured by the Finfoot, we assume that these were small arthropods. At no time did the hippo appear to express discomfort, even when the bird twice climbed over its head to reach its back by walking between the ears. This encounter lasted at least 15 min., since it probably started before we noticed it.

Figure 1. African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis* foraging on the back of a Hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibius*, Wassadou, Senegal, 22 Feb 2018 (photo: C. Huber).

To our knowledge, this is the first photographic documentation of this kind of interaction between the African Finfoot and the Hippopotamus, although the same or similar behaviour has been witnessed several times before, including along the River Gambia in Senegal, near Gouloumbou (13°28′56″N, 13°44′57″W) on 17 Mar 2014, though that interaction lasted less than 1 min. (J.-J. Guitard pers. comm.), and at Kai Hai Island on the River Gambia in The Gambia on 26 Mar 2005 when a Finfoot, foraging around the rump of a partially submerged hippo cow with calf, at one point continued to forage while perched on the cow (C. Barlow *in* Demey 2005). Similar behaviour has been reported in southern Africa (Rockingham-Gill 2012), and Finfoot has also been seen seizing prey while swimming around bathing Forest Buffaloes *Syncerus caffer nanus* and Bongos *Tragelaphus eurycerus* in forest clearings of the Republic of Congo, occasionally climbing on their backs (Ruggiero & Eves 1998). Although the usual feeding behaviour of the African Finfoot consists of picking insects and other arthropods off the water surface, they also pick prey, including molluscs, from the vegetation (Urban *et al.* 1986). Interactions between the Finfoot and large mammals, such as that documented at Wassadou, may therefore commonly occur in locations where both are present. African Jacana *Actophilornis africana* has also been noted pulling leeches off the neck and once from the ears of a Hippopotamus in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (Pooley 1967).

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Distribution and confirmation of residency of Oriole Warbler *Hypergerus atriceps* in Liberia

Oriole Warbler *Hypergerus atriceps*, the only member of its genus and unique in its size, sunbird-like shape and plumage coloration compared to other members of its family, is a widely distributed breeding resident from Senegal to central Africa (Fig. 1), occurring in riparian thickets, gallery forests, savanna thickets, and mangroves (Borrow & Demey 2014). Oriole Warblers are known for their rapidly repeated melodious whistles, commonly used to identify them because of their shyness. Despite its wide distribution, the presence of Oriole Warbler in Liberia is reported to be uncertain (Borrow & Demey 2014, BirdLife International 2016), even though the country has all the suitable habitats for the species. Gatter (1997) considered it a rare and probably overlooked resident, and listed only two records, one in Monrovia (on the coast) in 1931 and another in Voinjama, northern Liberia, in 1984 (Gatter 1997). Here I report my observations of the species in Liberia over the period 2013–18, confirming its residency and widespread distribution in the country.

I first found the species in a swamp near my house, *c*. 15 km north of Monrovia (Fig. 1), in December 2013. When I initially heard the bird, I used playback to confirm its identification (Chappuis 2000). An individual responded to this within 5 min., approaching quietly and foraging in a tree *c*. 5 m in front of me. Since then, I have observed about ten individuals at different locations in the vicinity, usually singing morning and evening, and heard all year round in the past two years.

In 2016, I had additional observations in three other locations across Liberia. In February 2016 in Robertsport, coastal SW Liberia (Fig. 1), two colleagues and I observed

Figure 1. Current range of Oriole Warbler across West Africa according to BirdLife International (2016), with observation points in Liberia: 1 = Monrovia 1931, 2013–18; 2 = Robertsport 2016, 2018; 3 = Bomi 2016; 4 = Greenville 2016; 5 = Voinjama 1984.

two birds singing in a shrubby thicket on the bank of Lake Piso, *c.* 50 m from the ocean (Fig. 2). What may have been the same pair was observed again at the same spot on 11 Jan 2018, after playing the recording of Chappuis (2000). The birds were responsive and not shy when we broadcast the recording (Fig. 2). Another pair had also been heard earlier that day, calling on the bank of the lake, *c.* 5 km away from the above-mentioned sighting. The other two observations were of two birds each, in Bomi (NW Liberia) in April 2016 and at Greenville in the southeast in July 2016 (Fig. 1).

In all sites except for Robertsport, where the habitat is described above, the bird was seen mainly in swampy shrubby habitats. The birds sighted were often vocal, responsive to playback and came out into the open readily, compared to those I have observed in Nigeria, where they were often heard but not seen. In the Monrovia site mentioned above, for example, a pair perched in an oil palm tree in an open area and another individual flew over houses. The observation of Oriole Warblers over several years in four independent locations across Liberia suggests widespread residency in the country, at least in coastal regions. The previous paucity of records and doubts about its status may simply reflect lack of observers in the country, as suggested by Gatter (1987), rather than a recent range expansion.

Figure 2. Oriole Warbler and its habitat at the bank of Lake Piso, *c.* 50 m from the Atlantic Ocean at Robertsport, Liberia, 11 Jan 2018.

I am grateful to Professor Will Cresswell for his initial review of this manuscript, and Lincoln Fishpool for helpfully reviewing the submitted article.

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Corrigendum

First record of successful breeding of the Ibadan Malimbe *Malimbus ibadanensis* (Awoyemi *et al.* 2018, *Malimbus* 40: 3–9.

In this article, the totals row given in Table 1 is incorrect. This row is in fact unnecessary and should be ignored. The authors and Editor apologise for this oversight.

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News & Comment — Nouvelles & Commentaires

Bird recorder for The Gambia

The West African Birds Study Association (WABSA) is pleased to announce the appointment of Clive R. Barlow as the voluntary Country Recorder for bird observations in The Gambia. WABSA intends to produce for the Department of Parks & Wildlife Management (DPWM) an annual Gambia bird report and update of activities, which will then be accessible to all resident and visiting ornithologists. This work will complement a GIS biodiversity project currently being planned by DPWM. More news of activities including a proposed rarities review panel, single species enquiries, colour ring reports and nest records will be notified as the project develops. Meanwhile, feel welcome to email your *ad hoc* records, trip reports *etc*., past, present and future, to Clive at <birdsofthegambia@hotmail.com>.

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European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* new to Togo

Evens *et al*. (2017) described the results of attaching geolocators and GPS-loggers to European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus* at breeding sites in England, France and Belgium (see also map at <https://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/nightjars?dm_i=IG4,5SV1S,39GXV7,MND4U,1>). The results clearly demonstrated that European Nightjars travelled through Togo and some birds tagged in France made stopovers there during autumn migrations. This species was not recorded by Cheke & Walsh (1996) nor in an up-to-date checklist at <www.igoterra.com/countryspec_checklist_checklist.asp?countryid=209&lit=artlista&taxa_group_id=1> (consulted August 2018), so the new records based on tagging represent the first for Togo.

References

CHEKE, R.A. & WALSH, J.F. (1996) *The Birds of Togo*. Checklist 14. British Ornithologists' Union, Tring.

EVENS, R., CONWAY, G.J., HENDERSON, I.G., CRESSWELL, B., JIGUET, F., MOUSSY, C., SENECAL, D., WITTERS, N., BEENAERTS, N. & ARTOIS, T. (2017) Migratory

pathways, stopover sites and wintering destinations of Western European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus*. *Ibis* 159: 680–686.

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Society Notices — Informations de la Société

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Malimbus publie des articles de recherche, des recensions de publications et des nouvelles traitant de l'ornithologie ouest-africaine.

Les **Articles** et les **Notes Courtes** doivent être des apports originaux; ceux déjà publiés ailleurs, en partie ou en totalité, seront normalement refusés. Les Notes Courtes sont des articles de moins de 1500 mots (références comprises) ou de quatre pages imprimées. Autant que possible, les manuscrits auront été au préalable soumis à au moins un ornithologue ou biologiste pour un examen minutieux. Les manuscrits seront envoyés pour critique à au moins un lecteur spécialiste.

Les textes des **Nouvelles & Commentaires** ne devraient pas dépasser 1000 mots.

Les **textes** sont acceptés en anglais et en français; la Rédaction pourra aider les auteurs dont la langue maternelle n'est pas l'une de celles-ci. Nous préférons les envois de manuscrits par email (en pièce jointe). Consultez le Rédacteur pour plus de détails, par ex. les logiciels compatibles.

Tous les Articles (mais non les Notes Courtes) comporteront un **Résumé**, n'excédant pas 5 % de la longueur totale. Le Résumé mentionnera brièvement les principaux résultats et conclusions de l'Article et ne sera pas un simple compte rendu de ce qui a été fait. Les résumés seront publiés à la fois en anglais et en français (ou dans la langue officielle du pays dans lequel le travail a été réalisé) et seront traduits au mieux par la Rédaction.

La **présentation** des tableaux, chiffres, unités métriques, références, *etc*. doit correspondre à celles des numéros récents. A notez, en particulier: Les noms des auteurs doivent être listés en faisant précéder le nom de famille par le prénom ou des initiales (ex. John A. Smith); les dates seront écrites "2 fév 1990" mais les mois seuls pourront être écrits en entier; les heures seront écrites "6h45", "17h00"; les coordonnées "7°46′13″N" (pas de zéros en tête) ou en degrés décimaux jusqu'à cinq décimales (ex. 1.23456°N), mais non en minutes décimales; les nombres jusqu'à dix seront écrits en toutes lettres, excepté devant une unité de mesure (ex. 6 m); les nombres à partir de 11 seront écrits en chiffres sauf au début d'une phrase. Toutes les références citées dans l'article, et aucune autre, doivent figurer dans la bibliographie.

La séquence taxonomique et **les noms scientifiques** des oiseaux doivent suivre la Liste de Birdlife International <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/taxonomy>, à moins que des raisons de s'en écarter soient exposées. Les noms Français doivent suivre les *Noms Français des Oiseaux du Monde* <www.digimages.info/listeoiseauxmonde/genre_cinfo.htm>. Les noms Anglais de la Liste Birdlife, ou les autres noms employés de longue date et d'un usage courant en Afrique de l'Ouest, sont préférés. Des adjectifs tels que « commun » et « africain » ne peuvent être utilisés que s'ils font partie d'un nom commun employé de longue date.

Les **articles sur l'avifaune** doivent comprendre une carte ou un index géographique, incluant tous les endroits cités. Ils doivent comporter quelques brèves indications sur le climat, la topographie, la végétation et les circonstances ou événements inhabituels avant ou pendant l'étude (ex. pluies tardives, *etc*.). Les **listes d'espèces** ne doivent contenir que des enregistrements importants: les listes complètes ne sont justifiées que pour les régions encore non étudiées ou délaissées pendant longtemps. Autrement, ne citer que les espèces sur lesquelles l'étude fournit une information nouvelle sur la répartition, la période de séjour, la reproduction, *etc*. Pour chaque espèce, indiquer l'extension de l'aire de répartition, une estimation d'abondance (*Malimbus* 17: 38) et les données datées sur la reproduction; indiquer le statut migratoire et la période de séjour seulement tels qu'ils ressortent de l'étude. Eventuellement, replacer les données dans le contexte en les comparant brièvement avec une liste régionale de référence. Les longues listes d'espèces peuvent être présentées sous la forme de tableaux (ex. *Malimbus* 25: 4–30, 24: 15–22, 23: 1–22, 1: 22–28, or 1: 49–54) ou sous la forme rédigée des numéros récents. Un **guide plus complet à l'intention aux auteurs** d'articles sur l'avifaune, comprenant l'échelle d'abondance des espèces conseillée, a été publié dans *Malimbus* 17: 35–39 et une version augmentée de celle-ci mise sur le site internet (http://malimbus.free.fr/instmalf.htm). La Rédaction se fera un plaisir de donner des conseils pour les études spécifiques.

Pour le dessin des **Figures**, et en particulier la taille des caractères, tenir compte des dimensions de la page de *Malimbus*. On préfère les figures préparées sur logiciel graphique et sauvegardées en haute définition. Les fichiers de basse résolution et les impressions de mauvaise qualité seront refusés. Les auteurs sont encouragés à soumettre des **photographies** qui illustrent des points importants de leur article. Les photographies doivent être en couleurs et de haute définition. Les figures et les photographies doivent être envoyées comme fichiers de logiciel graphique (par ex. jpg ou tif), et non pas être incluses dans un fichier de Word. Consulter le Rédacteur pour tout renseignement.

Un fichier pdf des Articles et des Notes Courtes, et une copie du numéro de publication seront envoyés gratis à l'auteur ou à l'auteur principal.

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