



**West African Ornithological Society  
Société d'Ornithologie de l'Ouest  
Africain**



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method of opening up its seismic transects through forest and savanna with a bulldozer, when this can be done with small teams on foot.

Hecketsweiler spent only 2½ months in the field (June to August 1990), in the middle of the dry season, and Doumenge a similar period in the dry season of 1991. With limited time and assistance, their contribution to the study of the biological resources is inevitably restricted. The chapters on floristic and faunistic inventories occupy only a few score pages, about a quarter of the main text. Both authors are botanists by training and most of the text on biological resources, as well as most of the appendices, are taken up with details of floristic transects and plant lists. Birds are covered by less than a page in the main text and a tentative, partial list in an appendix of just over 120 species, about a quarter of the potential (cf. Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1991, *Tauraco Res. Rep.* 4: 189-239). It is regrettable that some birds were actually collected for identification, despite which several species listed are extremely unlikely and are certainly the result of misidentification (cf. Dowsett-Lemaire *et al.* 1993, *Malimbus* 15); this could have been avoided by submitting the relevant section (or specimens) to referees.

Overall, Doumenge's contribution is of a higher standard than Hecketsweiler & Mokoko-Ikonga's, and he pays more attention to the available literature. Like all parts of southern Congo, Konkouati has been subjected to intensive hunting pressure and the mammal fauna appears greatly depleted. More detailed surveys need to be carried out to redefine the status of all hunted species; unless the "reserve" receives some effective protection (at least in a core area), the future of its wildlife is very dim indeed.

F. Dowsett-Lemaire

**Ornithology for Africa.** By G.L. Maclean, 1990. xxiii + 270 pp, 16 col. plates, numerous line drawings. University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg. ISBN 0-86980-737-4 (hardback), 0-86980-771-4 (paperback). Paperback 55 Rand.

Although aimed at Africa, the Preface gives away a South African bias: "Our African sun stays north of the shadows at all times of year" - not for us in West and Equatorial Africa it doesn't. For us, the South African term "oversummering" for Palaearctic migrant visitors is as misleading as "overwintering" might be to a South African, and the claim that Africa's universities are southern hemisphere ones makes no sense. This bias might appear trivial were it not for the fact that most of the continent (and its universities) lies north of the equator.

Maclean's stated aim is to cater for two groups of readers: interested laymen and university undergraduates. I am not sure how well he succeeds. Maclean admits that some sections will be unnecessary for students, but these are easily bypassed. More seriously, many complex concepts and technical terms, which would probably baffle the layman, are introduced without explanation (e.g. disulphide bonds, gill pouches) and only some are included in the glossary. It would not have harmed to define all terms at

first mention. Many unnecessary terms are used too: do we really need "epimeletic" behaviour, when "parental" will do?

The chapter on flight leaves some questions inadequately answered (*e.g.* the reason for the difference in wing shape between soarers and gliders) and some explanations will leave the novice struggling, *e.g.* the potentially illuminating illustration of wing aerodynamics relative to lifestyle using cisticolas is so abbreviated as to baffle a beginner. The chapter on food and feeding is mainly about feeding methods, with bills illustrated by colour plates; it is pitched about right for an introductory text. That on zoogeography is interesting to someone who knows the birds discussed but will not mean much to an African student who has no idea what a colinga looks like or does. Ecology is dealt with in a chapter on "Adaptations to environments"; this is fairly successful and interesting but is marred by hinting at details which are not explained. For example, in the account on salt glands, countercurrent flow and active ion transport are mentioned but not explained at all. This would leave both student and layman wondering what was meant. The migration and navigation chapter is good, illustrated by a surprising variety of migration patterns, all well-explained. Two wide-ranging chapters on breeding biology form the biggest topic section of the book.

The text is in some places attractively composed (*e.g.* the chapter on classification and origin digresses on feather structure and colour), but in other places dry. Some sections are up-to-date (there is one on DNA hybridization) and others rather dated (*e.g.* the behaviour chapter: no behavioural ecology here, and not much elsewhere in the book). Not enough is made of the prime role that bird studies have played in many areas of biological advance. I spotted few errors, most of which did not concern Africa, such as "trogons cannot adapt to savanna woodland", whereas some central American species inhabit what in West Africa would be termed Guinea Savanna.

As an ornithological text, it is not bad, but there are more interesting ways to learn about birds than in an ornithology course, *via* behaviour and ecology courses, biogeography courses *etc.*, all of which can use birds as examples. Such courses could use this book as a source. Unfortunately, most African universities and students cannot afford a great range of books and must stick to one or two for a course basis. In such a case, I would not recommend using this as one; but then, I would probably not recommend any "straight ornithology" book at all.

Alan Tye

**Les Zones Humides au Niger et leur Importance pour les Oiseaux d'Eau.** By W.C. Mullié, M. Salifou, J. Brouwer & A. Kounou, 1993. 48 pp. Département de Formation en Protection des Végétaux, Niamey. Available free from IUCN, Programme pour le Sahel, BP 10933, Niamey, Niger.

This A4 spiral-bound booklet, which is entirely in French (not even an English summary), reports ground censuses of waterbirds carried out over two-week periods