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GREY CANARY FEEDING TECHNIQUE - Grey Canaries Serinus leucopygius are partial to the 'seeds' of the abundant and widespread composite flower Tridax procumbens. They have a method for obtaining them in situ on a fruiting head well beyond the reach of the standing bird, which in its behavioural complexity is comparable with pulling up strings from which peanuts hang, as is well known in the case of weavers, tits and crows.

In February 1975 I stayed in a house at Samaru, Zaria, which afforded views at only two metres of canaries feeding on the ground. A bird would reach with its beak as high as seemed possible up a Tridax stem (peduncle), bend the stem down to the ground, tread on it proximal to the place where gripped by the beak, release the grip and rapidly walk crabwise along the prone stem to the fruiting head. It spent a few seconds plucking and eating seeds before moving off (when the stem sprang upright again) and selecting another stem to pull down. Up to three birds at a time were seen feeding in this manner, more or less independently of each other, on several dates. Since Tridax procumbens is exotic, introduced into West Africa about 1930, either the canary has acquired the technique since that time, the habit spreading culturally, or it has adapted to this flower a pre-existing method of foraging on other flower species - a behaviour which could be cultural or innate. A native composite with a similar fruiting habit, Vernonia sp., was ignored by the canaries.

I am grateful to Professor B.J. Harris for his botanical help. C.H. Fry

ADDITIONS TO LOCAL AVIFAUNAS

ZARIA. I stayed at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, from January to March 1975 inclusive, and during this period with Mr and Mrs M. Dyer and with Mr D. Johnson I encountered the following new species for the district as defined by Fry (1965), i.e. within 35 miles (55 km) radius of Zaria City (11° 05' N, 07° 43' E).

Peregrine Falco japonensis (F. peregrinus) One, 5 km north-west of Zaria Sabon Gari, 25th January, and probably the same bird there on 24th February. See remark under Lanner F. biarmicus on p.71 of Fry (op. cit.).

Red-billed Wood-Dove Turtur afer Three seen separately and clearly in the kurmi (forested watercourse) in Anara Forest Reserve (10° 43' N, 07° 32' E) on 2nd March. Black-billed Wood-Doves T. abyssinica were plentiful elsewhere within the reserve.

Guinea Turaco Tauraco persa One, feeding on small canopy fruits in company with two Violet Turacos Musophaga violacea, Anara Forest Reserve kurmi, on 2nd March.

(Cardinal Woodpecker Dendropicos fuscescens A bird very probably of this species (certainly not any of the other Zaria woodpeckers) viewed briefly in Anara Forest Reserve kurmi on 2nd March (D.Johnson,C.H.F.).)

Singing Bush-Lark Mirafra cantillans Two, or three, on the Samaru-Bassawa watercourse 6 km north-west of Zaria Sabon Gari on 20th and 21st January (C.H.F., Mr and Mrs M.Dyer), one at Bomo Lake, Samaru, on 23rd March, and a probable at Ahmadu Bello University on 14th March. These astonishing occurrences of a Sahel-zone lark, hitherto recorded in Nigeria only at Malamfatori (Hopson 1964), are discussed in relation to other arid-zone bird species at Zaria by Fry (1975, Savanna, in press).

White-crowned Robin-Chat Cossypha albicapilla One, Anara Forest Reserve kurmi, 2nd March. One or more (possibly Snowy-headed Robin-Chats C. niveicapilla) in a dense growth of the shrub Syzygium guineense on the River Galma 37 km east of Zaria on 9th February (11° 13'N, 08° 01'E) (Mary Dyer, C.H.F.).

Rufous Swamp-Warbler Calamocichla (Acrocephalus) rufescens I suspected (1965, p.94) that this was the species heard at Maska Dam and Fish Farm (11° 25' N, 07° 19'E) near Funtua ten years ago. On 26th January the same song was heard in a reed-mace Typha bed in exactly the same part of the ponds, and on 2nd February a determined effort to capture it, using 90 metres of net strung in the 3-metre tall reed-mace over a metre's depth of water, was rewarded with the capture of one of at least two birds. It was identified, photographed, ringed and released.

Grey-headed Olive-back Nesocharis capistrata One in the Kahuga kurmi on the south bank of the River Galma 37 km east of Zaria on 9th March (Mary Dyer).

For the record, additions to the Zaria avifauna recorded in this journal since my 1965 article are in Vol. 3: 43-44, 74 & 100; Vol. 4: 37-38 & 15; Vol. 5: 66-67; and Vol. 7: 39. The total now stands between 368 and 382 species. C.H.Fry

References

- Fry, C.H. (1965) The birds of Zaria. Bull. Nigerian Orn. Soc. 2: 9-17, 35-44, 68-79 & 91-101.
Hopson, A.J. (1964) Preliminary notes on the birds of Malamfatori. Bull. Nigerian Orn. Soc. 1 (4): 7-15

