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MIXED NESTING COLONIES OF *Quelea quelea* AND *Quelea erythrops* IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN

by P.O.Park

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INTRODUCTION

The Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea*, one of the most destructive grain-eating bird pests in Africa because of its huge numbers, exists in all semi-arid zones of the Sub-Sahara, east, central and southern Africa. The Lake Chad basin, including North Eastern State, Nigeria, has long suffered attacks on rice, sorghum and millet. Nesting occurs in Acacia scrub near the lake and elsewhere.

The Red-headed Quelea *Quelea erythrops* also causes losses to rice, in the more humid areas, for example in the East Central State (latitudes 6-7° N approx.), and it is known to nest there, in colonies in elephant grass, in September. Adegoke (unpubl.) and Barré, Nortoli, Ndiaye & Park (1974) have reported a small colony where the two species were found nesting side by side, much further to the north at Madelhout, Cameroun, 12° 00' N, 14° 40' E. A similar colony in Chad is the subject of this note.

Communal nesting by the two species has also been reported from Tanzania (Burke 1960).

SITUATION

Approximately 100 nests, each attached to two stems of wild sorghum *Sorghum lanceolatum* in a partially-flooded area of about 100m² were immediately adjacent to a small (2 ha) colony of *Q. quelea* established in *Acacia sayel* and *Ziziphus* scrub. The site was at Dougui Magueta 12° 20' N, 15° 08' E, about 55 km northeast of that recorded by Barré *et al*.

IDENTIFICATION

The nests, somewhat resembling those of *Q. quelea*, were first recognised from the description of Barré *et al*. - ovoid, the longer axis approximately 11 cm, evenly and densely woven, unlined, with a side opening just under the roof. Confirmation of identification of the nests was by sighting a few males in breeding plumage and a number of females which occasionally visited the nests.

STATE OF DEVELOPMENT

The blue eggs were incubating when first discovered, and hatching occurred, in fairly close synchronisation with the Q. quelea alongside, around 25 September 1974.

DISCUSSION

Bortoli et al. (cited by Barré et al.,1974) reported large-scale breeding of G. erythrops at latitude 15° N in north-west Mali, by birds which had apparently migrated northwards from more humid areas. Dr P. Ward (pers. comm.) has mentioned a similar colony in the Potiskum area of Nigeria some years ago. However, no such single-species large colonies of Q. erythrops have yet been reported from the Lake Chad basin.

This mixed colony in Chad, and that in Cameroun described by Barré et al. raise interesting questions on how the small numbers of Q. erythrops might have become associated with the larger numbers of Q. quelea.

The latter species is known to migrate 300-400 km southwards from the Lake Chad basin at the beginning of the rains in June-July (Ward 1965, Jackson 1974), and to return northwards later to breed around September. Vielliard (1972) has reported Q. erythrops in breeding condition at Moundou (about 08° 30' N) in mid July. Thus it seems possible that the two gregarious species could become associated at this period and evidence for this was obtained in 1975 when small mixed flocks were observed 15 km north-west of Moundou on 22 July. Given suitable conditions of semi-inundated grassland alongside thorn bush, other mixed nesting colonies are likely to be found in the Chad basin. It is also possible that Q. erythrops, as well as Q. quelea, may occasionally be involved in attacks on flood rice at the end of the rains in this area, although no such reports have been received so far.

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