



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



**Join the WAOS and support
the future availability of free
pdfs on this website.**

<http://malimbus.free.fr/member.htm>

If this link does not work, please copy it to your browser and try again.

If you want to print this pdf, we suggest you begin on the next page (2) to conserve paper.

**Devenez membre de la
SOOA et soutenez la
disponibilité future des pdfs
gratuits sur ce site.**

<http://malimbus.free.fr/adhesion.htm>

Si ce lien ne fonctionne pas, veuillez le copier pour votre navigateur et réessayer.

Si vous souhaitez imprimer ce pdf, nous vous suggérons de commencer par la page suivante
(2) pour économiser du papier.

THE AVIFAUNA OF WAZA NATIONAL PARK, CAMEROUN, IN DECEMBER

by Antony Pettet

Received 26 February 1976

Lists of birds seen in Waza National Park and a certain amount of comment on their ecology and movements have been provided by Fry (1970), Broadbent (1971), Mundy (1972) and Holmes (1972, 1974). I visited the Park from 24 to 28 December 1971 and saw several species not recorded by these observers*. While comparing the various lists it became clear to me that potentially useful information on seasonal and year-to-year changes in some of the less spectacular Palaearctic wintering visitors and African migrants is in danger of being lost by undue attention to avifaunal listing. Although the area is large and the stay of most visitors short, the Park has well-defined limits, is ecologically simple, and it should be relatively easy to provide some assessment of the more conspicuous changes by comparison with well-annotated lists. I have, therefore, listed all species seen by me. Where my counts or estimates do not differ materially from the status or counts given by Fry (op. cit.) who has provided the most comprehensive account, or by Mundy (op. cit.) who appears to have visited the Park more or less when I did, I have listed the names only. Otherwise I have given my own observations in detail, sometimes commenting on the differences where these are of interest, and occasionally giving ecological details.

ECOLOGICAL COMMENTS

Fry has briefly sketched the main ecological features of the Park but, between the time of his visit in late November and mine in late December, a number of minor changes take place with some possible consequences to birds.

In December the Acacia seyal on cotton soils is normally leafless, though when I visited the Park a few small patches of the trees were already beginning to produce leaf- and flower-buds. This makes it easier to see birds but meant that much of the seyal woodland was practically shadeless. By contrast, the Anogeissus-Mitragyna-Balanites woodland of the overlying sands was still in leaf and there was also considerable shade in the Balanites-Tamarindus-Mitragyna thickets around the water-holes. Like the seyal woodland, the Corniphora bush on the deep sands was also leafless and practically shadeless.

* Nettapus auritus, Polyboroides radiatus, Calidris minuta, Sterna leucoptera, Phylloscopus collybita.

There were no grass fires during my visit and, to judge from Fry's comments and the state of the ground at my visit, it would seem that much of the annual grass-burning is done in November and more-or-less completed by mid-December. One area I went over, however, had the appearance of very recent firing. Regular grass-firing is presumably the policy of the Park authorities, but it seems to be gradually destroying the seyal woodland in some parts of the Park. The absence of burning grass may explain the comparative infrequency of certain species at my visit compared with Fry's, although this may not have been the only reason.

The annual Sesbania which forms a conspicuous edge to the "rice-swamp" outside the Park had died down by the time of my visit. Fry found this very productive in warblers and other small birds so its virtual disappearance by December probably explains the low numbers I recorded. Fry's visit also seems to have co-incided with the tailend of the main southward passage. For example, in late November he found birds of prey present in abundance and variety, in contrast with the situation in late December when they were all very much less frequent. In particular, Circetus spp., Buteo spp. and Aquila rapax were all far less frequent and Falco biarmicus was not recorded. Bustards, frequent in Fry's visit, were not recorded in December, and the same was true of the 'resident' Hirundo aethiopica and Nilaus afer; I assume there is some movement of these birds out of the area although the latter may have been overlooked because of its unobtrusive nature.

The other accounts, unfortunately less detailed than Fry's, suggest that the northward passage starts in late February and continues beyond late March, the time of Broadbent's visit. The extent of passage in the Park towards the end of the dry season is, however, confused by the concentrating effects of the limited surface water compared with the beginning of the dry season. It is to be hoped that future visitors will provide more comprehensive accounts of the birds found at that time of year.

SPECIES RECORDED IN DECEMBER 1971

During my stay I made three morning visits to the western side of the Park, concentrating on different sections of the woodland as well as on the waterholes. Like others before me I visited the large "rice-swamp" on the north-west side of the Park in the vicinity of the Camp, spending the afternoon in its neighbourhood and on the large inselberg close by. Birds recorded at these two places outside the Park have been listed as such. I also spent one morning on the southbound road, driving about 20 km beyond the reserve to visit the roadside waterholes and vegetation, including some of the marginal vegetation of the "rice-swamp". Birds seen during this journey, to the periphery of the reserve and adjacent to it, have been included in the list and are referred to as being seen on the 'southbound road'.

Struthio camelus

Ardea cinerea 1-2 birds at some waterholes in the reserve and c.18 on the north end of the rice-swamp; single bird on southbound road.

A. melanocephala not recorded on the rice-swamp and seemingly restricted to waterholes in the reserve where there were usually 3-4 per waterhole. Fry's report of hundreds on the rice-swamp would suggest passage through the area in November (cf. Elgood, Fry & Dowsett 1973).

Egretta alba c.30 on the rice-swamp

E. garzetta

Ardeola ibis an estimated 400-500 on rice-swamp; not as conspicuous in the reserve where it was noticeably associated with elephants, e.g. a herd of 20 elephants was accompanied by c.60 birds.

A. ralloides

Scopus umbretta decidedly infrequent; a total of three for all waterholes visited; four at one waterhole on the southbound road outside the reserve.

Ciconia episcopus twos and threes at the bigger waterholes and one with c.20; not recorded from the rice-swamp. C. ciconia was not recorded - the birds seen by Fry were probably attracted by the grass fires and were not wintering.

Anastomus lamelligerus two on rice-swamp; not recorded on reserve although Mundy saw four at one waterhole.

Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis a total of three at reserve waterholes and one on rice-swamp.

Leptoptilus crumeniferus two near Camp; none on the reserve or rice-swamp. Frequent and attracted to fires in late November, so presumably there is some movement out of the area.

Threskiornis aethiopicus

Plegadis falcinellus one on rice-swamp; not apparently recorded before.

Bostrychia hagedash

Anas querquedula at least 2,000 on rice-swamp, but since they were only seen when disturbed I think there were many times this number present.

Dendrocygna viduata c.160 at one waterhole in the Reserve.

Nettapus auritus two adults with a full-grown immature bird on edge of rice-swamp; not previously reported.

Sarkidiornis melanotusPlectropterus gambensisGyps ruppelliiPseudogyps africanus

Trigonoceps occipitalis one near waterhole.

Necrosyrtes monachus Fry reported it as scarce but c.12 were visiting the Camp rubbish dump.

Circus pygargus one.

C. aeruginosus an adult male and an immature hunting over the rice-swamp, repeatedly flushing up Garganey, Ruff and occasionally geese, but the cranes appeared to ignore them.

- Polyboroides radiatus one at a well-vegetated waterhole; not reported previously.
- Terathopius ecaudatus
Circetus gallicus
Accipiter badius a single bird.
- Melierax metabates
M. gabar two typical and one melanistic phase birds.
- Butastur rufipennis a total of about ten scattered in the western side of the reserve, and six on the southbound road; from experience of this species elsewhere I suspect that this is rather late for these numbers so far north.
- Milvus migrans infrequent; c.20 in shade at one waterhole during the middle of the day probably represented most or all of the population of the reserve; c.12 on the southbound road and two on the rubbish dump at the Camp were the only other records. Fry found it 'abundant' in November, which suggests that the bird was still moving through the area then and may well have been attracted by grass fires.
- Haliaeetus vocifer
Elanus caeruleus
Falco tinnunculus 10+ scattered over the more open areas of the reserve; one on the southbound road and one at the top of the inselberg. Probably no real difference between November and December.
- Lophoaetus occipitalis not more than two in the reserve. Fry found it 'frequent'.
- Francolinus clappertoni frequent in denser vegetation around waterholes but usually seen only in late afternoon when birds left cover.
- Numida meleagris
Balearica pavonina an estimated 7,000 in small parties on the northern side of the rice-swamp, and presumably more in the centre; seen at the waterholes on the reserve only in ones and twos; Holmes reported c.10,000 at the swamp in late February.
- Actophilornis africanus seen only on the rice-swamp - 3+ adults and an adult with two half-grown young 6-8 weeks old. Although this species is mainly a wet-season breeder, it has a long breeding season if conditions are favourable. I have found a nest with eggs in January near Ibadan.
- Vanellus tectus a single bird on a bare area in the reserve.
- V. senegallus single bird at a waterhole.
- V. spinosus c.30 on dried mud above the rice-swamp.
- Charadrius dubius six on sandy upland near the marsh.
- Tringa nebularia one on southbound road.
- T. stagnatilis 2+ on the rice-swamp. Also recorded by Broadbent.
- T. glareola one on the reserve; 6+, marginal pools of rice-swamp.
- T. ochropus
T. erythropus 6+ with Ruff on the rice-swamp; not seen on the reserve and possible less frequent than in November.
- Gallinago gallinago five flushed from marginal pools of the rice-swamp and presumably common in its centre.
- Philomachus pugnax c.2,000 seen on the rice-swamp but many more were clearly present; several parties at pools on southbound road.

Himantopus himantopus a total of five at waterholes.

Glareola pratincola c.300 feeding over the marsh in late afternoon, suddenly appearing about 1630 hrs and remaining in the air until 1745 hrs; recorded by Broadbent.

Sterna leucoptera one over pool on southbound road within southern limits of reserve; not recorded previously.

Streptopelia turtur Only one flock seen in the reserve - c.100 in Balanites-Acacia polycantha vegetation near one waterhole in south-west corner of reserve; outside the reserve a few birds in marginal Balanites-Acacia seyal vegetation bordering the marsh along southbound road but nowhere common. Mundy did not see the bird, neither did Button in late January (ex Holmes). However when Holmes visited the reserve in late February it was very numerous, possibly more so than in Fry's visit in late November 1969 when in excess of 60,000 birds were estimated within the reserve. Broadbent also recorded large numbers in late March 1969. This rather suggests a passage through the Park in October-November and February-March with low numbers in between. Mid-winter movements are a conspicuous feature of birds wintering in the Sudan and are probably to be expected in West Africa. My own counts at Zaria near the southern limit of the wintering zone are consistent with this and showed, amongst other things, that penetration into the south was particularly marked in the winter of 1971-72, following a poor wet season. What was true of Nigeria that winter is likely to have been true of the Cameroun Republic. In years when the previous rains have been better the Turtle-Dove may remain in the reserve throughout the dry season in larger numbers. The relative infrequency of the bird in December and January may be related to shade and food. Balanites, Mitragyna and Anogeissus, though not leafless, were shedding leaves, and shade about the waterholes a declining asset. By February and March the pre-rains leaf-flushing would be well under way. Grain may be in short supply following widespread grass-burning and the dry-season grain Sorghum to the north of the reserve, though heading, was nowhere near ripe.

S. decipiens frequent around the better-shaded waterholes and in the denser vegetation of the rice-swamp.

S. vinacea mostly in Anogeissus woodland but also at waterholes.

S. roseogrisea

S. senegalensis recorded as 'frequent' by Fry but only two birds seen by me - one in denser vegetation near waterhole in reserve and one in scrub at base of inselberg.

Oena capensis

Turtur abyssinicus locally frequent in Balanites and low scrub around waterholes and more noticeable in late afternoon; otherwise scarce.

Coracias abyssinicus

Upupa epops

- Phoeniculus purpureus a flock of eight near the rice-swamp is my only record. Recorded as 'frequent' in late November, suggesting perhaps some movement away from the reserve after breeding (cf. Salvan 1967-9).
P. aterrimus, recorded in small numbers by Fry, was not seen during my visit and may also be a part-migrant (Elgood, Fry & Dowsett 1973).
- Ceryle rudis one, rice-swamp.
- Alcedo cristata
- Halcyon leucocephalus two in Balanites in swamp edge and two on south-bound road; recorded as common in November so presumably the wet-season visitors are late to leave this area and a few remain throughout the dry season (cf. Elgood, Fry & Dowsett 1973).
- Merops orientalis
- M. nubicus scarce in the reserve (only four recorded) but moderately common about the rice-swamp (c.60) and at roadside pools on the southbound road (c.30 per km).
- Tockus nasutus possibly less frequent than in November ('frequent'); one group of four in the reserve; c.30 on the southbound road moving westwards in small groups - but the date seems too late for migration of this species.
- T. erythrorhynchus common in widely dispersed small groups in reserve and on southbound road; more frequent in A. seyal woodland.
- Bucorvus abyssinicus
- Ereunetes leucotis common in the reserve, particularly noticeable where roads run over cotton soil.
- Motacilla alba two only, on rice-swamp; presumably near the southern limit of its wintering range.
- M. flava in small numbers at waterholes on the reserve and about the rice-swamp; certainly not 'common' as in November, so the bulk of birds present then move southwards. One flava and two feldegg males noted.
- Oenanthe oenanthe
- O. bottae a few birds on the newly burnt area mentioned earlier.
- Sylvia communis one in vegetation at base of inselberg and another in a sandpit on the southbound road.
- S. curruca six at base of inselberg, mostly in Acacia albida.
- S. cantillans one in subsong in vegetation at base of inselberg.
- Acrocephalus schoenobaenus 3+ in vegetation at edge of rice-swamp.
- Phylloscopus collybita one in vegetation at base of inselberg; not previously recorded.
- Camaroptera brachyura
- Riparia riparia thinly spread over the whole area and also present well south of the reserve; collectively numbers considerable, an estimated 8-10,000 for the whole reserve.
- Dicrurus adsimilis
- Lanius excubitorius
- L. collurio two on the reserve, both L. c. isabellinus.
- Corvus albus maximum of two at the Camp.
- Lamprolornis chalybaeus a flock of c.30 in Balanites at rice-swamp edge.

- L. caudatus 'frequent' rather than 'common' in the reserve.
Buphagus africanus the only record was of four on a giraffe.
Anthreptes platura single pair visiting Loranthus at Camp, probably nesting.
Passer griseus 6+ at one waterhole in the reserve and small flocks with Quelea in vegetation on southbound road, so far more common than Fry's records suggest.
Petronia dentata breeding; single males noticed around inselberg; but some in mixed finch flocks and 10+ seen with Passer at one waterhole.
Ploceus spp. nonbreeding birds present in 'finch'-flocks.
Quelea quelea not conspicuous in reserve and only one small flock of c.20 seen at one waterhole, but many thousands in marginal vegetation of rice-swamp on southbound road, usually in small flocks of 100-200. Numbers difficult to estimate but 1-2 million may have been present. One old nesting colony in a patch of Acacia polyacantha in the reserve held an estimated 0.8-1.0 million nests.
(Bubalornis albirostris old nesting sites occur in the reserve but no birds were seen.)
Serinus leucopygius several pairs with territories about the Camp.
Amadina fasciata only one pair recorded on the southbound road but the species is presumably breeding and inconspicuous, unless population depleted by birds moving southwards to breed.
Estrilda bengala
Lagonosticta senegala
Lonchura malabarica
Vidua (Hypochera) sp.
V. orientalis a male in the reserve.

REFERENCES

- Broadbent, J.A. (1971) Additions to the avifaunas of Waza (Cameroun) and Lake Natu (Sokoto). Bull. Nigerian Orn. Soc. 8 (31/32): 58-59
- Elgood, J.H., Fry, C.H. & Dowsett, R.J. (1973) African migrants in Nigeria. Ibis 115: 1-45 & 375-411.
- Fry, C.H. (1970) Birds in Waza National Park, Cameroun. Bull. Nigerian Orn. Soc. 7 (25/26): 1-5.
- Holmes, D.A. (1972, 1974) Bird notes from the plains south of Lake Chad winter 1971-1972. Bull. Nigerian Orn. Soc. 9 (35): 47-75, (36): 76-84 and 10 (37): 28-37.
- Mundy, P.J. (1972) Waza, Cameroun - access and avifauna. Bull. Nigerian Orn. Soc. 9 (34): 16-18.
- Salvan, J. (1967-1969) Contribution a l'etude des oiseaux du Tchad. Oiseau 37: 255-284, 38: 53-85, 127-150, 249-273, 39: 38-69.
- A. Pettet, 23 Cole Park Road, Twickenham, Middlesex TW1 1HP, U.K.