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THE BIRDS OF MAMBILLA PLATEAU

by P. Hall

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Mambilla Plateau is an extensive area of highland between 1,500 m and 2,000 m in southern Sardauna Province of Gongola State, Nigeria. It consists mainly of rolling grassland and is extensively grazed, with remnants of forest ("kurmi") along watercourses and on steep slopes. Around the big villages, Eucalyptus grandis is being planted increasingly, to replace the natural forest and to meet the growing demand for poles and fuel.

The grassland is dominated by Hyparrhenia, with Loudetia common on poorer soils. Under intensive cattle grazing and trampling, the Hyparrhenia is replaced by the tufted Sporobolus with exposed soil between the tufts, increasing run-off and eventually leading to the erosion now evident all over the Plateau. Amongst the characteristic kurmi species are Syzigium guineense, Polyscias fulva, Neoboutonia sp. and Croton macrostacys.

I visited the Plateau from 13 to 22 October, 9 to 11 November, and 26 to 29 December 1974. Several species of birds not recorded by Boulter (1965), Ebbutt (1965) or Gray (1971) were seen and a total of 119 species have now been recorded on the Plateau. In the full list below, scientific nomenclature follows White (1960-65) and English names follow Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1970-73).

Ardeola ibis A small party seen near Maisamari in November. Gray saw a party of 12 in April.

Ardea melanocephala Only recorded by Gray in April.

Ciconia ciconia Two seen by Gray in April near Maisamari.

Ciconia abdimii Recorded by Ebbutt in February and by Gray in April.

Anas sparsa One in a small marsh near Yelwa in October and one near Yelwa in December. They constitute the first records of Black Ducks in Nigeria.

Gyps ruppellii Two near Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve in October, one recorded by Gray in April at Maisamari and two or three by Boulter in December, also at Maisamari.

Gyps bengalensis One near Yelwa in December. Recorded by Boulter as common in December, by Ebbutt from both the Plateau and the Escarpment in February, and by Gray from Maisamari and Warwar.

- Neophron monachus Widely but sparsely spread over the whole Plateau.
Gypohierax angolensis Two near Maisamari on 12 October and one on 21 October.
- Circus macrourus One near Nguroje in November.
Terathopus ecaudatus One at the top of the Escarpment in December. One seen by Gray in April near Nguroje.
- Buteo auguralis Three displaying over Gembu Forest Reserve and one near Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve in October. Three seen near Maisamari by Gray in April.
- Lophoastus occipitalis One between Maisamari and Nguroje in November.
- Aquila rapax Two seen on the Plateau and one on the Escarpment by Ebbutt in February.
- Milvus migrans Widespread in small numbers over the whole Plateau.
Elanus caeruleus Two at Yelwa in October.
- Falco biarmicus One seen between Gembu and Dorofi in October. Recorded by Gray as common in April.
Falco peregrinus One near Yelwa in December.
Falco ardosiaceus A pair breeding near Gembu in December. A few recorded by Gray in April.
Falco tinnunculus Widespread in small numbers over the Plateau in December.
- Sagittarius serpentarius Several recorded by Ebbutt in February and one seen near Nguroje by Gray in April.
- Francolinus bicalcaratus Widespread and frequent over the whole Plateau.
Numida meleagris Three seen displaying near Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve in October. Gray saw six near Warwar in April.
- Neotis denhami Ebbutt saw two in February and Gray one in April near Nguroje.
- Tringa glareola One seen at Nguroje in November.
Tringa hypoleucos Small numbers just off the Plateau in October on the River Donga near Gembu.
Gallinago gallinago One seen at Nguroje in November.
- Streptopelia lugens One recorded by Ebbutt in February.
Streptopelia decipiens Widespread and frequent over the whole Plateau.
Streptopelia senegalensis Small numbers only at Yelwa in October.
Turtur afer Only recorded by Boulter (1965), in December.
Treron australis One at Yelwa in October.
- Tauraco leucolophus Two in a small kurmi near Yelwa in December and two heard at Warwar in April by Gray.
- Cuculus solitarius Recorded by Gray in April on the Escarpment.
Cuculus canorus One at Nguroje in October.
Centropus toulou Only seen near Gembu in dense scrub in December.
Centropus senegalensis Widespread over the whole Plateau.

- Asio capensis A pair seen at Nguroje and one at Gembu in October.
- Apus melba 200+ recorded by Ebbutt (1965) in February in a valley north of Gembu.
- Apus caffer Small numbers seen on the Escarpment in October. Ebbutt also saw three on the Escarpment in February.
- Colius striatus Widespread in small numbers in scrub over the whole Plateau. Gray also recorded it in April on the Escarpment.
- Ceyx picta One seen in a small kurmi near Yelwa in December.
- Halcyon leucocephala One at Nguroje in November. Boulter recorded it as common in December.
- Merops nubicus One recorded by Boulter on the Escarpment.
- Merops albicollis Frequent on the Escarpment in November.
- Merops variegatus Seen in October at Nguroje and frequent there in tall grassy areas in November. Boulter (1965) recorded it as common in December.
- Phoeniculus aterrimus One recorded on the Escarpment in April by Gray.
- Pogoniulus bilineatus or P. subsulphureus Recorded by Gray on the Escarpment in April.
- Jynx ruficollis One netted by P. Ward in a small kurmi near Yelwa, the first record for Nigeria.
- Galerida cristata Two near Yelwa in December.
- Riparia paludicola Frequent near Yelwa in October. Boulter recorded it as frequent in December.
- Hirundo rustica A small party at Nguroje in November. Recorded by Boulter in December.
- Hirundo aethiopica Widespread over the whole Plateau. Gray recorded it as common in April.
- Hirundo senegalensis A few at Nguroje in October. Gray recorded five in April.
- Hirundo daurica One seen on the Escarpment in November.
- Delichon urbica Four seen by Gray near Nguroje in April.
- Psalidoprocne nitens Recorded by Gray in April on the Escarpment.
- Psalidoprocne pristopectera Small numbers seen on the Escarpment and near Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve in October. Gray saw them on the Escarpment in April.
- Motacilla flava Widespread and frequent, especially between Maisamari and Nguroje. Gray recorded them as still present in April.
- Anthus novaeseelandiae One at Gembu in October. Ebbutt netted one on the Plateau in February.
- Anthus trivialis One seen in a small kurmi near Yelwa in December.
- Macronyx croceus Widespread and frequent over the whole Plateau.
- Tchagra senegala Two at Nguroje in October.
- Laniarius ferrugineus Widespread in wooded areas over the whole Plateau.

- Laniarius atroflavus Not recorded on any of my three visits, but it was frequent in kumis on Chappal Waddi, the highest mountain in Nigeria, in November.
- Lanius collaris A few at Nguroje and Gembu: three recorded near Maisamari by Boulter in December.
- Lanius senator Four seen by Gray in April.
- Buphagus africanus Widespread and frequent over the whole Plateau.
- Corvus albus Widespread in small numbers over the whole Plateau.
- Pycnonotus barbatus Widespread in small numbers on wooded and thicket areas over the whole Plateau.
- Chlorocichla flavicollis Small numbers present in kumis over the whole Plateau.
- Saxicola rubetra Boulter found it abundant around Maisamari in December, and Gray recorded it as still present in April.
- Saxicola torquata Widespread and frequent over the whole Plateau; possibly commoner at higher elevations around Nguroje.
- Oenanthe bottae Widespread and frequent over the whole Plateau in December.
- Myiomecocichla nigra Widespread and frequent over the whole Plateau especially between Yelwa and Nguroje.
- Cossypha niveicapilla Present in small numbers in dense thickets around Nguroje and Gembu.
- Luscinia megarhynchos One caught near Nguroje in November.
- Turdus pelios Frequent in Nguroje and Gembu Forest Reserves.
- Schoenicola platyura One caught in dense scrub at Gembu in October.
- Chloropeta natalensis Present in small numbers around Nguroje.
- Sphenoaecus mentalis Present in small numbers in tall grassy areas around Nguroje and Gembu.
- Sylvia borin Present in small numbers around Nguroje and Gembu on all visits.
- Sylvia atricapilla One caught near Gembu in December.
- Phylloscopus trochilus One caught near Nguroje in October and frequent around Nguroje by November.
- Cisticola erythropus Frequent over the whole Plateau in areas of scrub.
- Cisticola cantans Recorded by Gray on the Escarpment in April.
- Prinia subflava Widespread in small numbers over the whole Plateau.
- Prinia leucopogon Present in small numbers in woodland around Gembu.
- Apalis nigriceps Recorded only by P. Ward (pers. comm.) in a kumi near Yelwa.
- Hypergerus atriceps Small numbers seen near Yelwa in December.
- Cameroptera brachyura Only once recorded near Yelwa, in December.
- Ficedula hypoleuca One netted near Nguroje in November.
- Batis orientalis One caught in scrub on the edge of Nguroje Forest Reserve in November.
- Platysteira cyanea One seen near Yelwa in December.

- Trochocercus longicauda One near Yelwa and one near Gembu in December. Boulter recorded it near Maisamari in December.
- Nectarinia verticalis Present in small numbers around Gembu and near Yelwa.
- Nectarinia preussi Widespread and frequent all over the Plateau. Boulter gave it as the commonest sunbird around Maisamari.
- Nectarinia bouvieri Widespread and frequent all over the Plateau.
- Nectarinia cuprea A few around Nguroje and Gembu.
- Nectarinia coccinigaster One recorded by Ebbutt on the Escarpment in February.
- Zosterops senegalensis Recorded only from near Yelwa, in December.
- Emberiza tahapisi Frequent on the Escarpment in November. Also recorded by Boulter (1965) around Maisamari in December.
- Serinus mozambicus Seen only in cultivated areas around Gembu in small numbers.
- Ploceus cucullatus A large breeding colony present in Maisamari.
- Ploceus nigerrimus Ebbutt recorded a small breeding colony on the Escarpment in February.
- Ploceus baglafecht A few around Nguroje, Gembu and Yelwa, and netted near Nguroje. These are the first known records of this weaver in Nigeria.
- Quelea erythroptus Small flocks seen at Nguroje in October and November.
- Euplectes ardens Widespread, but sparse, over the whole Plateau.
- Euplectes capensis Widespread and common over the whole Plateau in marshy areas.
- Euplectes macrourus Widespread in small numbers over the whole Plateau.
- Passer griseus Widespread and frequent around all habitations.
- Vidua macroura Present in small numbers in cultivated areas over the whole Plateau.
- Vidua chalybeata Present in small numbers in cultivated areas around Gembu and Yelwa.
- Clytospiza dybowskii Small numbers present in a kurmi near Yelwa.
- Estrilda melpoda Widespread in small parties over the whole Plateau.
- Estrilda nonnula Widespread in small parties over the whole Plateau.
- Estrilda astrild Seen only at Nguroje in small parties. Boulter recorded it as much in evidence around Maisamari in December.
- Lonchura bicolor One netted in scrub on the edge of Nguroje Forest Reserve in October.
- Lonchura cucullata Present in small numbers at Gembu and Yelwa but not recorded around Nguroje.

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