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THE CONSERVATION OF THE BIRDS OF GOLA FOREST, SIERRA LEONE by G. Allport, M. Ausden, P.V. Hayman, P. Robertson & P. Wood (1989), 104 pp. Study Report 38. ICBP, Cambridge. £5 from ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, U.K.

This report, the fruit of a five month (October 1988 - February 1989) study by a team from the University of East Anglia, places Gola within the context of the Upper Guinea forests, outlines the objectives, details the methods used to identify and quantify bird species, tables the results, including specific surveys of rare species, discusses habitat requirements and makes recommendations for conservation. There are 17 Appendices, including an annotated checklist of all birds recorded in and around Gola. It continues the high standard one expects from ICBP publications and should command interest in all concerned with tropical forest conservation.

Gola in southeast Sierra Leone, now split into two disjunct areas, is the westernmost sizeable tract of lowland primary forest in Africa, and forms with the nearby Liberian forest one of the two CORE areas (Centres of Richness and Endemism) of the Upper Guinea forest. Some 25 forest-dependant bird species reach their western limit here, including six Red Data Book species. The forest is vulnerable to logging pressures (26%, including the whole of Gola West, is already logged) with subsequent liability to encroachment by local farmers. Urgent action is needed to preserve what remains and so this report is timely.

The team's brief was to gather information on the distribution, population and ecology of the forest birds with particular emphasis on the Red Data Book species. The most important is the White-breasted Guineafowl Agelastes meleagrides, whose total Gola population they estimate could be as high as 8500 birds, surely an optimistic assessment when they estimate the Gola population of the babbler Trichostoma rufescens, relatively common in all Sierra Leone forests, as only 9500.

In the course of these investigations they have added 13 new species to the Sierra Leone avifauna, including the Nimba Flycatcher Melaenornis annamarulae and the more widespread but rarely recorded honeyguide Melignomon eisentrauti. Disappointingly, they failed to refine the Gola Malimbe Malimbus ballmani, this failure vividly highlighting the extremely localised occurrence of some forest species (my own sightings were all along one half mile of logging track) and reinforcing my belief that you cannot safely extrapolate from a few localities to the whole forest.

One minor quibble: Appendix 6, comparing Tai National Park, Ivory Coast with Gola, lists as not occurring anywhere in Sierra Leone 12 species which in fact do occur, most well documented; several one would not expect to find in a forest environment anyway.

This apart, the writing is lucid, the findings clearly presented and the whole a valuable addition to reports on specific West African localities.