



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



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AN AVIFAUNAL SURVEY OF TAI NATIONAL PARK, IVORY COAST by M.E. Gartshore (1989), 67 pp. Study Report 39. ICBP, Cambridge. £5 from ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, U.K.

This report includes the results of the first phase of a survey of one of the largest surviving blocks of primary forest in West Africa, and reflects a renewed interest in the Upper Guinea avifauna. Tai has been relatively poorly studied, previous data being summarised by Thiollay (1985, Malimbus 7: 1-59).

The report includes descriptions of 11 sites visited on the western side of Tai, both in primary forest and in the buffer zone, where logging and hunting occur. Besides noteworthy birds, mammals and other animals present at each site are listed. A total of 207 species of birds was recorded from good high forest. Four bird species were added to the Tai list and there is a large section on the identification of difficult species which may prove useful to those not fully familiar with this avifauna. Special attention is given to the seven Red Data Book species, including Picathartes gymnocephalus which was recorded for the first time in Tai. Appendices summarise results from timed counts, species found in bird parties, netting data, breeding records, mammals and herpetofauna encountered. This report follows the trend of recent ICBP study reports in including reproductions of black and white photographs.

Phase two of the survey took place in spring 1990 and it is hoped that it will have thrown some light on the as yet undescribed species of small oxpecker associated with the African buffalo Syncerus caffer (Thiollay, loc. cit.). In general, a well-presented report, with many interesting details, such as the detection of the elusive White-breasted Guinea-fowl Agelastes meleagrides by moulted feathers (later checked against museum specimens).

Hilary Tye

THE COASTAL WETLANDS OF LIBERIA: THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR WINTERING WATERBIRDS. By W. Gatter, 1988. Study Report No. 26. 45 pp. ICBP, Cambridge.

ETUDE ORNITHOLOGIQUE PRELIMINAIRE DE LA ZONE COTIERE DU NORD-QUEST DE LA GUINEE. By W. Altenburg & J. Van der Kamp, 1989. Study Report No. 30. 65pp. ICBP, Cambridge.

£5 each from ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PT, U.K.

These two ICBP Study Reports cover the water-birds of coastal areas of two W. African countries from which little information has been available in recent years. Guinea's coast is highly indented, and includes extensive mudflats, whereas Liberia's coastline is mainly sandy. Sierra Leone, in between, contains the break in character of the coast, with its northern half containing many large estuaries and its southern half being one long sand beach.

In a general survey of potential wader wintering sites on Africa's Atlantic coast, I identified Guinea as one of the most promising candidates, likely to harbour large populations of waders, and Liberia as probably the worst (Tye, 1987, Wader Study Group Bull. 49: 20-27). It is nice to see from Gatter's report, that Liberia harbours some 40000-60000 Palaearctic waders in winter, along with substantial numbers of Palaearctic terns and Palaearctic and Afrotropical herons. However, despite the title, Gatter's counts include substantial freshwater areas, which were not included in Tye (1987), and in fact Liberia does appear poor in numbers of coastal waders, compared with the muddier countries further north. When comparing Liberia with neighbouring countries, it should be borne in mind that figures quoted by Tye & Tye (1987, Wader Study Group Bull. 49 Suppl/IWRB Spec. Publ. 7: 71-75) refer only to the coast of Sierra Leone, not to the whole country, as Gatter has assumed. The bulk of Liberia's wintering waders belong to species which prefer freshwater habitats (especially Snipe Gallinago gallinago c.10000 birds, and Common Sandpiper Actitis hypoleucos c.25000). Neighbouring countries probably harbour at least as many freshwater waders, but Gatter's valuable work represents the first attempt to produce an accurate estimate of numbers wintering inland for any W. African country.

Altenburg & Van der Kamp concentrated their observations in two areas of NW Guinea: Alcatraz Island and the Iles Tristão. They present data on a little-known breeding colony of 3000 pairs of Brown Boobies Sula leucogaster on Alcatraz, and found small breeding populations of Spoonbill Platalea alba, Sacred Ibis Threskiornis aethiopicus and Caspian Tern Sterna caspia at Tristão. Both of these areas are recommended for reserve status. From brief surveys elsewhere in the country, they show that Guinea's extensive mudflats in its multitude of small estuaries probably hold numbers of waders of international importance by Ramsar criteria (20000 birds) on all the sites which I identified in 1987, including at least 6000 Avocets Recurvirostra avosetta near Conakry. Total numbers of Palaearctic waders wintering on Guinea's coast may be c.350000. Guinea would then rank third in importance for Palaearctic waders in W. Africa after Mauritania (2.5 million birds) and Guinea-Bissau (one million).