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An observation of copulation in the Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis albirostris* in Senegal

Breeding behaviour and nest-building of the polygamous Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis albirostris* have been studied in detail (Friedmann 1949, Crook 1958, Collias & Collias 1964), yet copulatory behaviour has only been noted once before. Crook (1958) reported a single Buffalo Weaver copulation during a month long study in southern Mauritania and in northern Senegal near Richard-Toll. He described the copulation as starting with the female and male giving a bouncing display, in which both birds assumed a horizontal position on a branch and moved the body up and down in a series of bounces. Following this, the female assumed a head-low position on a branch below the male, with the tail held to the side. The male then quickly mounted and gave repeated blows to the head of the female with his bill while copulating. The female immediately attacked the male when he completed copulation.

The copulation event I report here was observed while studying nest-building in Buffalo Weavers in Kaolack, Senegal, (Beaver in prep.) for 6 days in November 1987. The colony, consisting of six nests, was located in a small *Acacia* tree. The birds were in the early stages of nesting probably prior to egg-laying, since males were intensely building their nests, and females were bringing grasses and green leaves to the nesting chambers (see Crook 1958).

At the start of copulation, the female was located on a branch below the male. The male approached the female while holding a small stick in his bill. When he was about 15 cm above and behind her, she began a continuous, twittering call. The male continued approaching until he reached the female. He passed the stick to her and as she took the stick, he mounted and copulated with her. He then dismounted and perched above her. She dropped the stick and flew to the top of the nest structure, with the male following. The female then circled the nest and entered one of the chambers. The male remained outside and rearranged sticks vigorously on the nest surface. No other

vocalizations were given. Thus, this copulatory event displayed none of the overt aggression and violence witnessed by Crook. Certainly more observations are needed to clarify copulatory behaviour in Buffalo Weavers; perhaps Crook's observation was of forced copulation whereas in the instance described here the female solicited the copulation.

Another interesting question raised by Crook (1958) concerns the low frequency of observations of copulation in Buffalo Weavers. Perhaps a single copulation is all that is necessary to fertilize a clutch, as in the Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (Birkhead *et al.* 1987). Birkhead *et al.* (1987) suggest that very infrequent copulations occur in species where paternity is assured, principally by mate guarding. Male Buffalo Weavers chase males away from their nests and, perhaps more importantly, so do females (Crook 1958; Beaver in prep.). Perhaps the low frequency of copulation is a result of this behaviour which may assure paternity.

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British Storm-Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* off Côte d'Ivoire

Mead & Clark (1991) give details of a British Storm-Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* ringed in the Shetland Isles and recovered at Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire on 16 Nov 1990. This appears to be the second record for Côte d'Ivoire; Sharland (1955) reported one at Abidjan in October 1953 but this record was omitted by Thiollay (1985).

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