



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



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Rainforest Birds in South-west Ghana. By G. Dutson & J. Branscombe, 1990. 70pp. Study Report 46, International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge. £5 from ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge, CB3 0PJ, U.K.

Little attention has been directed in recent years towards Ghana's forest birds and mammals except, as this report stresses, by local poachers and hunters! Following on from other expeditions to West Africa's rainforests, ICBP suggested the exploration of the Nini-Suhien National Park, Ankasa Game Production Reserve and nearby forest reserves; this report concentrates on bird and mammal surveys carried out by two expeditions in 1988 and 1989.

One aim was to search for endangered Upper Guinea forest bird species, and White-breasted Guineafowl *Agelastes meleagrides* and Yellow-throated Olive Greenbul *Criniger olivaceus*, both considered extremely rare in Ghana, were found. Species lists are given with little comment (not even species totals) and may be incomplete, a total of just over 70 days being spent at six different sites. In contrast, too much was made of inadequate data from calling bird surveys (intended to assess the effects of logging on the avifauna). In general, the report suffers from inappropriate analysis and documentation of results. However, my impression is that the expedition members themselves did their best to carry out fieldwork in difficult locations and to compile this report and seem aware of many of the limitations of their information. I feel that inexperienced expedition teams like this should be given more editorial and scientific assistance with the analysis and presentation of results.

A valuable part of the report is the description of levels of logging and hunting at various sites. The lack of investment by timber companies in forest management and replanting and the level of hunting reported in this area of Ghana are alarming and I hope that this report will draw attention to this situation and encourage further studies of Ghana's forests.

Hilary Tye

Bustards, Hemipodes and Sandgrouse, Birds of Dry Places. By P.A. Johnsgard, 1991. 276 pp. + colour plates. Oxford University Press, Oxford. ISBN 019-857698-6. £60 hardback.

Why include three groups of birds, which are not closely-related, in a single monograph? The historical, ecological and personal reasons are set out in an intriguing preface to this book. The three groups are convergent in their ecological adaptations to arid habitats yet show some interesting differences, for example in mating system, and all but one (the Lark-Quail *Ortyxelos meiffrenii*) had been painted by Major Henry Jones, whose beautiful and intricately precise watercolours adorn the book (and account for its high price?). The text, in contrast to the plates, is somewhat dry, being written in

unimaginative prose, and it is obvious that the author does not write from his personal experience of the birds; the book is rather a detailed review of the published work of others.

Sixty-one pages make up introductory chapters on systematics and evolution, behaviour, breeding and conservation. Necessarily in three separate parts, the section on systematics discusses comprehensively if briefly the history of classifications of the groups. There is no new taxonomic treatment; recent reviews or Peters (1934, 1937 *Checklist of Birds of the World*) have been followed and Johnsgard gives no strong opinions where areas of controversy exist (such as what are the nearest relatives of sandgrouse). Apart from the hemipodes, whose distribution (SE Asia, Australia, Africa) appears to this reviewer to be perhaps relict, and which are not so closely tied to Africa or to arid habitats, the distribution of the groups considered centres on Africa's arid lands. The West African Sahel is rich in species, with up to two hemipodes, five bustards and three sandgrouse at a locality. The chapter on behaviour is ethological and descriptive in style and is again mostly split into separate sections on the three families, as is the chapter on breeding. The latter includes some analysis of the limited data available on breeding success, but is again mostly descriptive. The chapter on conservation concentrates on the recent declines, mainly due to hunting, of many bustard species.

Some three-quarters of the book are devoted to detailed species-by-species accounts of the three families. Each is begun by a key (for captured birds or skins). The account for each species contains sections on vernacular names, distribution, biometrics, description, identification, ecology, social behaviour, breeding, evolution and status. The level of detail is comparable with that in Volume 2 of *The Birds of Africa* (Urban *et al.* 1986). However, Johnsgard's book is better referenced and has the advantage that it considers all the species, African or not, and gives the global distribution of those that do occur in Africa. In general, Johnsgard's book gives less detail than *Birds of Africa* on African range and status, plumage descriptions of subspecies, voice and breeding season, but more on habitat, displays and food where recorded outside Africa. Johnsgard also gives more detail of African observations of the better-known species of bustard and some sandgrouse, which are relatively poorly-treated in *Birds of Africa*. But for most species there are small titbits of information to be found in only one or other of these books. Thus, those interested in one or more of the three families, or in Henry Jones's paintings, will want to buy Johnsgard's book. Others, primarily interested in Africa, will find *Birds of Africa* adequate.

Alan Tye