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Breeding of the Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* in southwest Nigeria

The Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* is a common dove of sub-Saharan villages, parks and gardens (Urban *et al.* 1986). Nigerian records of its breeding biology (Smith 1962, 1966, Smith & Killick-Kendrick 1969, Elgood 1982) furnish information on nest type, nest height, nesting duration, clutch size and number of broods. Reports of Laughing Dove breeding in the southern rainforest zone are fewer than in the northern savanna.

Observations on the nest and breeding activities of the Laughing Dove in Ijebu-Ode (6°49'N, 3°56'E), southwest Nigeria, are reported from two clutches of eggs laid in January and April 1991.

The nest-site was a window ledge in my apartment in Ijebu-Ode. Observations of the pair of Laughing Doves at the nest consisted of scan samples (Altmann 1974), which were taken at 24-hour intervals during the period preceding egg-laying, 8-hour (January clutch) and 30-minute (April clutch) intervals whilst eggs were incubated and 30-minute intervals during incubation of the January nestling. The male was distinguished from the female by its slightly bigger size and darker brown head and throat (Urban *et al.* 1986).

The first nest material was noted on 1 Dec 1990 and the nest had been completed when checked on 15 Dec although it was not checked between these dates. No new material was added after 15 Dec. The nest-site was 4.1 m above ground. The nest measured 14 x 13 cm. It had at the base a criss-cross of stiff twigs of dicotyledonous plants and stiff midribs of dry raffia palm leaflets which projected beyond the edge of the ellipse. Dry, slender, rope-like stems of the climber *Centrosema* sp., which was abundant on nearby fallows and weedy farms, were piled in several layers on top.

The female laid two cream-white oval eggs in each clutch, on 12 and 14 January and 3 and 4 April. The April eggs measured 25 x 20 mm and 24 x 19 mm, and weighed 4.82 g and 3.92 g respectively. Incubation of the January clutch lasted 14 days (12-25 Jan) while incubation of the April clutch was discontinued after 12 days (3-14 April) without the eggs hatching. The January clutch was being incubated during 20% of the 7.00, 80% of the 15.00 and 100% of the 23.00 scans. The female incubated the April eggs from about 12.00-15.00 until between 6.00-9.00 the following morning. The male switched position with the female at these times and incubated during the intervening period.

Only one of the eggs in the first clutch hatched, on 25 Jan at 15.00. The mother assisted the chick in breaking out of the egg-shell. The dimensions of the one day old nestling were: bill length 10 mm, bill width at base 6 mm, head length (excluding bill) 13 mm, maximum head width 19 mm, total body length 78 mm. The chick had sparse, light yellow down feathers on the flanks and nape, brown down, tinged with yellow at the tip, on the mantle, back, crown and developing wings, and chocolate brown skin. The bill was ivory-coloured and had a black ring about 1 mm from the tip.

The nestling was incubated for only three days after it hatched, and for the two days on which records were taken, the female brooded it from 18.30 until 6.30 when she was

relieved by the male. The day-shift was shared, with the female brooding for about 20 min to 2 h between 9.00 and 12.00 and the male between 12.00 and 15.00 for about the same duration. The nestling was left unattended from about 15.00 to 18.30 and during short intervals between the departure of an incumbent parent and arrival of the replacement. The nestling was usually fed when the replacement parent arrived.

Development of the nestling was rapid after the three days of incubation. By Day 5 (Day 0 = hatch date) quills had begun to appear and the tail-coverts were visible. By Day 7 the body was fully covered with grey, chocolate-tipped down feathers and the bill had darkened chocolate brown to black along its entire length. Total body length had increased from 78 mm (Day 2) to 150 mm and the tail constituted 25% of total length. On the evening of 6 Feb, the male and female simultaneously visited the nestling and on 7 Feb (Day 13) the nestling fledged at 7.45. Its total body length was then 190 mm; the dorsum had the chocolate brown colour of the adult female's upper tail-coverts and tail, while the under tail-coverts were white. The throat was a paler brown.

The nest was flimsy but not transparent as described by Smith (1966) and Urban *et al.* (1986). However, neither the nest site nor nesting material used was novel (see Bannerman 1931, Smith 1966, Urban *et al.* 1986). Breeding occurs in all months in Nigeria and peaks in the dry season (Elgood 1982) and in Senegambia eggs are also laid in every month (Urban *et al.* 1986). The records described here for southwest Nigeria were from the dry season.

Total nesting period from laying the first egg to fledging was 26 days, within the range reported by Urban *et al.* 1986; Smith (1966) and Smith & Killick-Kendrick (1969) observed 30 days in northern Nigeria. The chick was, however, brooded for only three days compared with 6-9 days reported in Urban *et al.* (1986) and it did not return to the nest after it had fledged.

The male-female relief schedule during incubation of the January nestling was different from that for April eggs whereas Urban *et al.* (1986) reported that the schedules were essentially the same for eggs and nestlings.

I thank K.B. Olurin and the two referees, R. Wilkinson and G.D. Field, for constructive comments on the manuscript.

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Received 20 March 1992

Revised 10 October 1992

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Unusual records from Cameroon

During February-March 1992 I observed in Cameroon the following species which have rarely been recorded there.

Blittern *Botaurus stellaris*. One watched feeding at the edge of tall reeds at the Ranch de Ngaoundaba (7°04'N, 14°00'E) on 25 Feb 1992, appears to be the second record for Cameroon, the first being at Bamenda Lake in December 1975 (Louette 1981).

Curlew *Numenius arquata*. Six seen at Zigague, near Waza National Park (11°25'N, 13°34'E) on 20 Feb 1992. Louette (1981) states that although the species is regular on the coast and has been recorded from Lake Chad there are no records from the Cameroon side of the lake.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. Two seen at Zigague on 20 Feb 1992. Louette (1981) considered the records of this species reported by Dragesco (1961) from Waza Park to be in error, due to confusion with other *Calidris* species. I suspect that Dragesco was correct in his identification (cf. Robertson 1992).

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*. Two seen at Zigague on 20 Feb 1992. Louette (1981) states that although the species has been recorded from Lake Chad there are no records from the Cameroon side. First observed in Cameroon by Swarth (1987) who considered that the birds he saw at Akonolinga (3°40'N, 12°15'E) had flown upriver from the coast. Elgood *et al.* (1966) suggested that a trans-Saharan crossing accounted for the gulls that reach Lake Chad, a theory that I would support for this record considering the improbability of Gulf of Guinea birds moving inland to tiny pools in Waza.

Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea*. First recorded in Cameroon in 1990 at Ranch de Ngaoundaba (Robertson 1992). In 1992 I found the species again, in greater numbers. In Waza National Park on 19-21 Feb I saw it daily, including a flock of 60. On 25-27 Feb I saw up to 25 birds at Ranch de Ngaoundaba. All birds were in non-breeding plumage.

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