



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



**Join the WAOS and support
the future availability of free
pdfs on this website.**

<http://malimbus.free.fr/member.htm>

If this link does not work, please copy it to your browser and try again.
If you want to print this pdf, we suggest you begin on the next page (2) to conserve paper.

**Devenez membre de la
SOOA et soutenez la
disponibilité future des pdfs
gratuits sur ce site.**

<http://malimbus.free.fr/adhesion.htm>

Si ce lien ne fonctionne pas, veuillez le copier pour votre navigateur et réessayer.
Si vous souhaitez imprimer ce pdf, nous vous suggérons de commencer par la page suivante
(2) pour économiser du papier.

NEWLY DISCOVERED COLONIES OF THE NORTHERN CARMINE BEE-EATER MEROPS
NUBICUS IN GHANA AND TOGO -

Fry (1984, The Bee-Eaters. R. Poyser & A.D. Calton) has listed all the known past and present colonies of the Carmine Bee-Eater Merops nubiscus. For West Africa this amounts to about 40 colonies, although Fry suggests that they probably represent no more than 10% of the true number of colonies. Recently Boswall and Richards (1985, Malimbus 7: 136) have recorded another unreported colony from Senegal.

During helicopter surveys of West African rivers, carried out for the World Health Organisation Onchocerciasis Control Programme, we recently detected 9 colonies of the Carmine Bee-Eater not listed by Fry (1984). During our work we normally fly at 500+ feet above ground level, and at these altitudes Bee-Eater colonies are not obvious. However, we were able to fly at low levels along the Oti river between 10°07'N, 00°21'20"E and 10°34'N, 00°41'25"E on 16 April 1987 and probably detected all the colonies in that stretch of the river. There may have been other colonies further south and probably also to the north. Surveys of the Kara and White Volta rivers were far from complete, even in the stretches covered, and other colonies may well occur there.

All the colonies located were in sandy-clay river cliffs, most of which were probably subject to substantial erosion each flood season. Each colony was photographed and the size (number of nest entrance holes) determined by examination of the resulting slides. It should be noted, however, that the number of nest holes is only a rough guide to the number of nesting birds because of false starts and digging in previous years, although the cliffs on the Oti and Kara appeared to be recut each season.

1. White Volta, left bank, 09°16'40"N, 01°14'30"W (Ghana). This colony was estimated at 380 holes. 12-20 birds were in the air at any one time and were visiting the holes, carrying what appeared to be small green grasshoppers, at 10.30-11.05 hours on 8 May 1987. At the base of the centre of the colony was a 40-hole colony of M. bullocki; a single bird was seen entering one of the holes.
2. White Volta, left bank 09°47'30"N, 00°57'45"W (Ghana). Colony estimated at 350 holes. 20-30 birds were seen visiting holes at 14.10 hours on 8 May 1987.
3. Oti, left bank, 10°29'N, 00°31'E (Togo). Colony estimated at 600 holes. At 11.30 hours on 31 March 1987 about 50 birds were visible, sitting at hole entrances. 40 metres upstream there was an 80 hole M. bullocki colony with 6 birds present, downstream there was a 30 hole colony with 1 bird present; a single M. pusillus was perched by the colony. At 08.30 hours on 16 April 1987 about 100 M. nubiscus were flying about and visiting holes; a single M. bullocki was sitting by the upstream colony.
4. Oti, left bank, 10°18'30"N, 00°27'E (Togo). Colony estimated at 250 holes. 40 birds present and entering holes at 09.30 hours on 16 April 1987.
5. Oti, right bank, 10°16'N, 00°23'30"E (Ghana). Colony estimated at 940 holes. More than 50 birds present at 10.00 hours on 16 April 1987.

6. Oti, left bank, 10°15'N, 00°21'30"E (Togo). Colony estimated at 500 holes. About 40 birds present at 10.15 hours on 16 April 1987. There was a small M. bullocki colony with a few birds present at the downstream end of the M. nubicus colony.
7. Kara, right bank, 10°01'30"N, 00°25'30"E (Togo). Colony estimated at 350-400 holes. More than 50 birds present at 11.00 hours on 16 April 1987. The colony was at the top of a not very sheer bank, and could easily be approached from below. An old fishing net had been erected to trap the bee-eaters. In this there were three dead and two live birds. A Black Kite was disturbed from eating one of the birds. The living birds were cut from the net and released; the net was confiscated. Footprints showed that children were responsible for erecting the net. Four fresh eggs were found below the colony.
8. Kara, right bank, 09°58'30"N, 00°25'45"E (Togo). Colony estimated from aerial photograph taken on 16 April 1987 at 350 holes.
9. Kara, left bank, 09°57'N, 00°29'45"E (Togo). Colony estimated from aerial photograph taken on 16 April 1987 at 490 holes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the help of Captains A. Arney and L. Treadway, pilots of the Hughes 500D helicopter used during our surveys.

Dr J.F. Walsh, Mr S.A. Sowah & Dr Y. Yamagata,
OMS/ONCHO, B.P. 36, Kara, Togo, West Africa

WHAT ARE THE AFFINITIES OF THE BLACK-CAPPED APALIS APALIS NIGRICEPS ? THE NEED FOR FIELD STUDIES -

When working on the material of the genus Apalis in the British Museum (Natural History), at Tring, for the projected volume of The birds of Africa to include the family Sylviidae, and being published by Academic Press, I was struck by the distinctiveness from other members of the genus, of the Black-capped Apalis A. nigriceps. It had quite a different look about it, although its generic status has never been questioned. It is the smallest member of this compact Afrotropical group and found in lowland forest from West Africa to Uganda where it occurs mostly in the canopy in pairs or small parties. Hall & Moreau (1970, An atlas of speciation in African Passerine Birds. British Museum, London) allied it to their A. flavida species-group and A. jacksoni superspecies. However, and more importantly, it differs from others of the genus in possessing an essentially different looking bill. This is short and rather robust for so small a species, measuring from the base of the skull 10-12 (11.1) mm and not attenuated as is usual in Apalis spp. If the ranges and means of bill length in all other Apalis are combined they run from 11.5-17.5 mm (usually 12 and above) and average 12.7 mm. The culmen is always straighter and proportionately finer whether or not the bill tends to be pointed and warbler-like or broad and flycatcher-like in form. In common with other sylviid genera, bill profiles are often quite diagnostic though such differences may be very subtle, and appear generically conservative. They are also a useful indicator of affinities, however such characters may vary inter-specifically.