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NOTES ON BIRDS SEEN IN GHANA IN 1964

R.W.W. Sutton

INTRODUCTION From January to July 1964 I stayed at Denu in Ghana, half a mile from the coast and 3 miles West of the Togo border, except for a four-week period in March and April when I travelled some 1,500 miles through the Northern Region and in the forest area. At the end of July three days were spent at Tarkwa in the forest belt in Western Region. Brief notes on the status etcetera of the birds noted in these areas are given below; an asterisk * signifies additional mention in Sutton, R.W.W., (1965) Notes on Ghanaian birds seen in 1964. Ibis 107 : 251-253.

I : THE BIRDS OF DENU (VOLTA REGION) Denu is situated 50 miles East of the Volta River, near the coast and the Togo border, and lies ten miles East of the actual Keta lagoon, although there is a complex system of marshes, ponds and lagoons in the immediate area.

The area around St. Pauls, the school at which I was teaching, can be divided into four main parts. First, the seashore, rather barren ornithologically except for Sandwich Terns Sterna sandvicensis and Black Terns Chlidonias nigr. Second, the coastal lagoons, which dried up almost completely around Denu in April; the rains had filled them up again by June. These were very good for birds, especially herons, terns, waders, gallinules and crakes. Coconut palms grew in the drier parts of the marsh. The third area comprised a 30 ft. escarpment, connecting the marsh with the higher and drier ground, and the strip of grass and bushes between the scarp and the actual marsh. Typical birds of this productive area were the Black Coucal Centropus grillii and the Yellow-throated Long-claw Macronyx croceus. The fourth area lies above the scarp, and on it the school is situated; it is fairly typical savanna, with rather few trees and plenty of land under cultivation, especially cassava. Typical species of this drier belt were Long-tailed Parrakeets Pittacula kraeri, Striped Kingfishers Halcyon chelicuti and Grey Hornbills Lophoceros nanutus, and the birds here seem with few exceptions (e.g. Zebra Waxbills Estrilda subflava) to be those found on the Accra plains.

I used two mist-nets on and off in February and March, and again in April and May until the rain became too heavy. I usually placed it in an extensive thicket about a mile from the school compound and here I caught over a hundred birds in one net in two weeks, the great majority being Village Weavers Plesiositagra cucullatus.

Localities mentioned in the text are shown in Fig. 1.

Long-billed Plover Macrotalpus Six flew over the compound on 11th January, and on 12th, 24 flew west. About 300 on Keta lagoon near Aayako on 8th February.

Pink-backed Pelican Pelecanus rufescens About 10 amongst the flock of Rosy Pelicans off Anyako, 8th February.

Heron Grey Herons Ardea cinerea were very common in the marshes but Purple Herons Pyrrherodia purpurea were even more abundant. Great White Herons Casmerodius albus were quite common wherever the water was sufficiently deep, and the same was true of Reef Herons Demigretta gularis. Both Little Egrets Egretta garzetta and Cattle Egrets Bubulcus ibis were extremely common; the latter had left the area by June. The Squacco Heron Ardeola ralloides was also common in the reeds, and the Green-backed Heron Butorides striatus was not very often seen, but was evidently widespread.

Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax One in one of the Agbosome pools on 7th February. 20 sitting in trees away from a reed fire on 4th May.

Little Bittern Ixobrychus minutus Abundant in the marshes during the rainy season; first seen on 31st May.

White-faced Duck Dendrocygna viduata In the rainy season, large numbers were seen either feeding on flooded grass by day, or flying around in the evening.

Pygmy Goose Nottapus auritus Several pairs on one of the Agbosome pools on 7th and 8th February.

Spur-winged Goose Plectropterus gambensis Three in a flooded meadow near Agbosome on 31st May.

Osprey Pandion haliaetus One off Anyako on 8th February.

*African Hobby Falco cuvieri Common in the dry season, as many as three being seen in the same tree. It hunted throughout the day, catching small birds and dragonflies on the wing and eating them in flight.

Grey Kestrel Falco ardosiaceus Only one; near the compound on 20th January.

Black Kite Milvus migrans The commonest bird of prey in the dry season. A pair attacked me like Bonxies Catharacta skua when I approached a nest in March.

Black-shouldered Kite Elanus caeruleus A very common and attractive bird. A pair started building a nest at the end of February. 20 years ago, Holman found it a rare bird at Kota.

Red-tailed Buzzard Buteo auguralis A pair occasionally seen soaring near the compound.

*Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus One on the Agbosome pools on February 8th. At least two pairs on marshes around Denu at the end of February and the beginning of March.

Purple Gallinule Porphyrio madagascariensis One on the marsh near Denu on 24th February.

Allen's Gallinule Porphyryla alleni Several pairs seen on the Agbosome pools in the dry season. Probably in fact a resident.

Lesser Moorhen Gallinula angulata One near Agbosome on 31st May, and many seen in flooded meadows in July.

Painted Snipe Rostratula benghalensis On 15th January, one near Denu. On 29th May, two pairs feeding in a small pool at the same place.

Kittlitz's Sand-Plover Leucopoliis pecuarius Three at Anyako on 7th February and two near Denu on 12th March.

*Palaearctic waders The Ringed Plover Charadrius hiaticula and Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola were the commonest species, staying until the third week of May, together with large numbers of Common Sandpipers Actitis hypoleucos, almost as many Marsh Sandpipers T. stagnatilis, small numbers of Grey Plovers Squatarola squatarola and Bar-tailed Godwits Limosa lapponica. There were six Little Ringed Plovers Ch. dubius on 25th January near Denu, 20 Curlew-Sandpipers Erolia testacea on 7th February on the Keta lagoon, and on 9th May there was a flock of 100 Little Stints near Denu. Common Redshank T. totanus were heard even in June and July, and on 13th March an exceptionally large flock of about 75 Dusky Redshanks T. erythropus passed through. Most Greenshank T. (Glottis) nebularis had left by May, but a few were still present at my departure on 16th July. I saw Whimbrel Numenius phaeopus only once - 4 on 1st July on the Keta lagoon, and Ruffs Philomachus pugnax also only once, 5 at Anyako on 7th February. Black-winged Stilts Himantopus himantopus were quite common, although most of them left when the rains came.

*Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa One on the marsh at Denu on 29th May is the first for Ghana.

Pratincole Glareola pratincola - After 7th February, when I saw one near Agbosome, Pratincoles gradually became quite common. They may breed near Afife (10 miles West of Agbosome).

*Gull-billed Tern Gelochelidon nilotica 20 seen on the Denu-Keta road on 18th January, feeding on a roadside lagoon.

*Caspian Tern Hydroprogne caspia Several seen on 18th January at the "Kedzi Canal", 5 miles East of Keta. Also there on May 10th.

Black Tern Chlidonias nigra Plentiful. First-year birds still present in July.

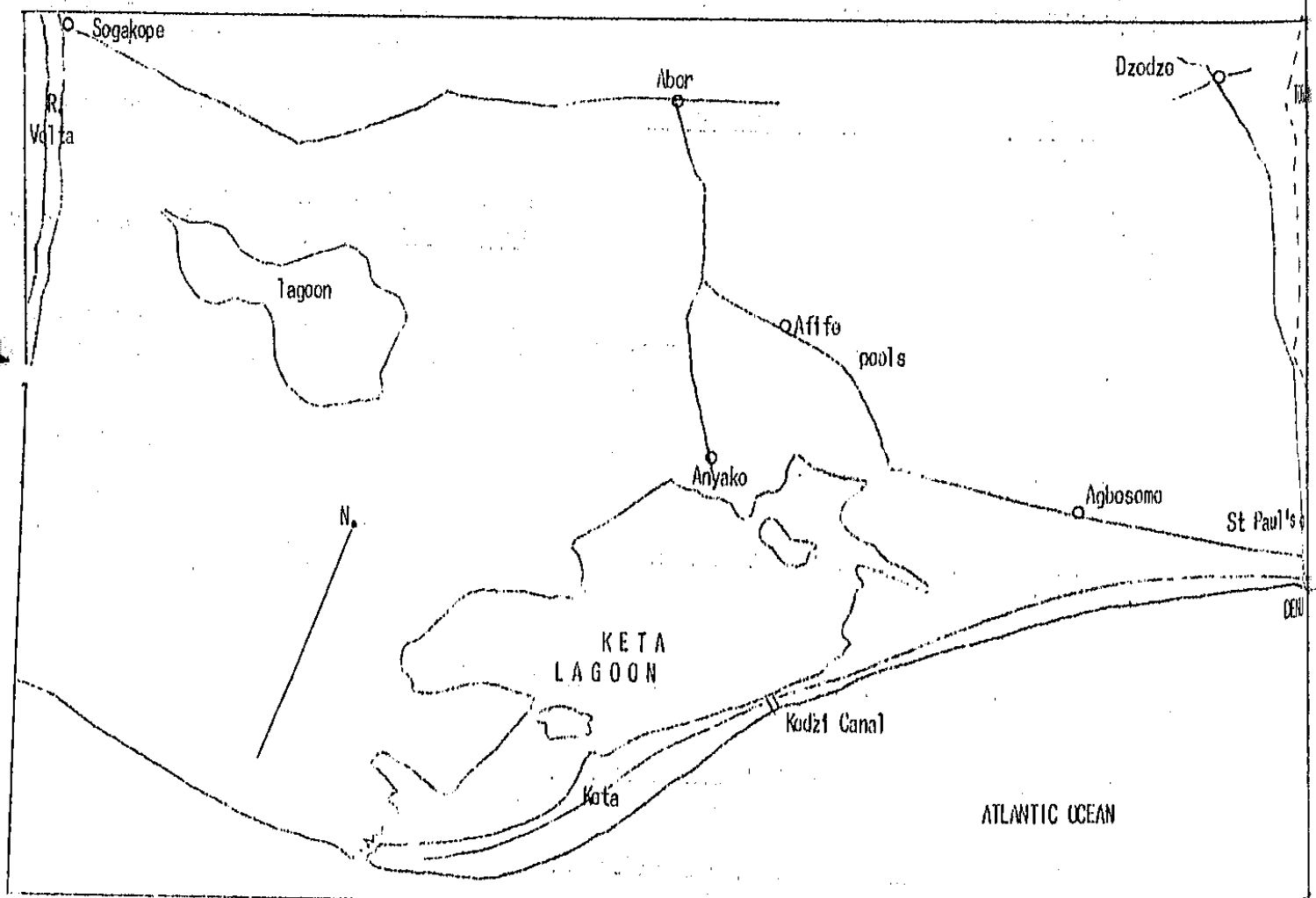


Fig. 1 - Sketch-map of coastal S.E. Ghana, with localities mentioned in text

White-winged Black Tern Chlidonias leucoptera One in almost full summer plumage was seen near Denu on 9th May.

Red-billed Wood Dove Turtur afer Quite common in dry areas. Two were mist-netted.

Black-billed Wood Dove Turtur abyssinica Status much the same as that of T. afer. The two species are found side-by-side and, again, two were caught in a mist-net. It is a much paler and greyer bird than afer - really quite distinctive.

Green Fruit-Pigeon Vinago australis Sometimes noted in the trees on the edge of the marshes. They were certainly not V. waalia, which Holman reported.

Senegal Parrot Poicephalus senegalus One flew overhead, ten miles East of Sokakope, on 7th June.

Long-tailed Parrakeet Psittacula krameri A common and beautiful bird, which I heard every evening, squawking as they flew over the compound. I saw it only in the dry areas; never over the marshes.

*Red-headed Lovebird Agapornis pullaria A pair flew over on 3rd July, in open bush country near Agbosome. The species is supposed to be almost extinct in coastal areas.

*Great Spotted Cuckoo Clamator glandarius First seen on 20th January, with some three further records in February and March. A dry season visitor.

Didric Cuckoo Lampromorpha caprius Abundant and conspicuous in the rainy season, after March.

Black-bellied Coucal Centropus grillii Rarely seen in the dry season, but in the rains birds were often seen in the long grass of the marshes, perched on top of the stems. Those birds noted in the dry season were always brownish rather than black.

Rufous-bellied Coucal Centropus epomidis On 20th January one flew out of a bush near the compound, with two Senegal Coucals C. senegalensis.

Long-tailed Nightjar Scotornis climacurus Rarely seen. One netted, two feet above the ground, on 13th March.

Rufous-crowned Roller Coracias naevius A few were to be seen on the Denu-Accra road in the dry season. Many more appeared in the rains and I counted 36 on 4th June.

Kakelaar Phoeniculus erythrorhynchus Quite common during the dry season, in noisy parties of up to 7 birds. On 5th July a pair near the compound were seemingly carrying food, but I could not trace a nest.

Pygmy Kingfisher Ispidina picta I caught several in the mist-net in dry bush.

Striped Kingfisher Halcyon chelicuti Many in the dry season, fewer in the rains. A bird of the dry bush.

Rosy Bee-eater Merops malimbicus First seen on 25th January, and last on 12th March. Up to 10+ together, generally in flight and seldom perching. The short call-note is very distinctive.

White-throated Bee-eater Aerops albicollis Abundant in the dry season; last seen on 22nd June.

West African Barbet Lybius vieilloti Seen frequently, mainly in bushes on the edge of marshes.

African Pied Wagtail Motacilla aguimp On 11th January I saw two of these birds at Dzodze. One was attacking its own reflection in a car head-lamp. The species was not recorded any nearer to Denu.

Blue-headed Wagtail Budytes flavus Plentiful in the dry season. A few birds were heard in the second half of April, but most had left in March.

Yellow-throated Long-claw Macronyx croceus A characteristic bird of the marsh edges, where I constantly flushed it in the bush and grass area. It was a very conspicuous species, which would sit on top of a clump of grass uttering its shrill disyllabic note. Although usually found near water, there was a pair on the compound.

Sudan Brown Babbler Turdoides plebeja Rather uncommon, but more numerous in the rains. Found in both wet and dry areas.

Blackcap Babbler Turdoides reinwardii One flying noisily around the edge of a marsh on 15th February.

Simple Leaf-love Pyrrhurus simplex On 3rd July two were seen in the bush near Agbosome. It is really, I suspect, quite common.

Kurrichane Thrush Turdus libonyanus Not common. Mostly in palm trees in marshy areas.

Whinchat Saxicola rubetra Extremely common until March.

Nightingale Luscinia megarhynchos Single birds netted on 8th February and 5th March.

*Icterine Warbler Hippolais icterina One netted on 1st May. Full details of plumage and wing formula were recorded. The date of capture indicates that the bird was on migration.

Great Reed Warbler Acrocephalus arundinaceus A single bird netted on 1st May.

Willow Warbler Pylloscopus trochilus Birds believed to be of this species were quite commonly seen in the dry season, especially in bushes in marshy areas.

Green-backed Eremomela Eremomela pusillus 26th April, one near the marsh.

Grey-backed Camaroptera Camaroptera brevicaudata Quite commonly seen in many different habitats

Moustached Scrub-Warbler Melocichla mentalis Quite common in reed-filled ditches and long grass in marshes.

European Swallow Hirundo rustica Very common in the dry season. All birds had left by the middle of May.

Ethiopian Swallow Hirundo aethiopica After April 26th, one or two were always to be seen on telegraph wires by the road over the marsh.

Pied-winged Swallow Hirundo leucosoma First seen on 22nd April; thereafter I found it locally distributed in the drier areas during the rainy season.

Mosque Swallow Hirundo senegalensis After February this bird gradually increased in numbers, and virtually replaced H. rustica in the rains. Found of wet areas.

Rufous-chested Swallow Hirundo semirufa First identified on 1st March. Probably quite common after this but I often confused it with H. senegalensis.

Fiscal Shrike Lanius collaris A typical bird of the bushes of the marsh-edge, in the same habitat as M. croceus. Common in such places.

Woodchat Lanius senator Common in dry bush until March.

Barbary Shrike Laniarius barbarus Quite common but shy; heard everywhere. One netted.

Little Blackcap Tchagra antichromus minutus A pair on the edge of a marsh in the evening of 31st May, perching on top of bushes and tall grasses. In flight, the dark shoulder patches and shorter buff-tipped tail separate it from Tchagra senegala.

*Black Magpie Ptilostomus afer I was surprised to find 2 birds of this species perching on fronds of coconut palms growing in a marsh on 2nd May, near Denu. Later I saw Black Magpies there and at Agbosome.

Short-tailed Glossy Starling Lamprocolius chalcurus The only starling I identified at Denu, where quite common. Fond of gathering on the topmost branches of a tree in the evening, uttering their almost canary-like calls.

Copper Sunbird Cinnyris cupreus Quite common, especially in damper regions. Readier to feed in the grass than other sunbirds.

Splendid Sunbird Cinnyris coccinigaster A rather local species, fond of tall trees.

Yellow-bellied Sunbird Cinnyris venustus Only seen after 2nd May, amongst bushes growing in damper areas.

Little Weaver Sitagra monacha During the rains I occasionally saw small black-masked weavers in bushes over water, which were thought to be of this species.

Village Weaver Plesiositagra cucullatus Abundant. 78 were caught in one net in two weeks. Nesting was in full swing by the beginning of May.

*Compact Weaver Pachyphantes pachyrhynchus Two pairs lived in the bushes around the edge of the marsh at Denu. Only once did I see a bird in dry bush.

Orange Bishop Euplectes orix After 19th May these were noted wherever there was long grass. E. hordeacea was not recorded here at all.

Napolean Bishop Euplectes afra Males in full plumage were noticed after 19th May, in reeds over water.

Yellow-mantled Whydah Coliuspasser macrourus Quite common on the marsh edge.

Bronze Mannikin Spermestes cucullatus The commonest estrildine finch in every habitat.

Bar-breasted Fire-finch Lagonosticta rufopicta Elusive but, I believe, quite common; usually found feeding on foot-paths through the bush in early morning.

Waxbill Estrilda astrild Uncommon. Only a few records, mostly in grass by wet places.

*Zebra Waxbill Estrilda subflava On 19th May I saw a flock of about 40 birds feeding amongst Cassava near the compound. Some appeared to be young males changing into adult plumage, for they had yellowish underparts with only a large spot of orange on the breast. Seen several times during June, usually in dry areas, but sometimes near water.

Orange-cheeked Waxbill Estrilda melpoda After Spermestes cucullatus, the commonest estrildine finch. Very fond of long grass and cassava.

Pin-tailed Whydah Vidua macroura Males were much in evidence after 5th May.

Further species recorded at Denu

Long-tailed Shag <u>Phalacrocorax africanus</u>	Little African Swift <u>Collocalia affinis</u>
Hooded Vulture <u>Necrosyrtes monachus</u>	Palm Swift <u>Cypsiurus parvus</u>
Eritrean Shikra <u>Accipiter badius</u>	Broad-billed Roller <u>Eurystomus afer</u>
Double-spurred Francolin <u>Francolinus bicalcaratus</u>	Pied Kingfisher <u>Ceryle rudis</u>
Black Crane <u>Limnocorax flavirostra</u>	Malachite Kingfisher <u>Corythornis cristata</u>
Common Jacana <u>Actophilornis africanus</u>	Senegal Kingfisher <u>Halcyon senegalensis</u>
Lesser Black-backed Gull <u>Larus fuscus</u>	Grey Hornbill <u>Lophoceros nasutus</u>
Sandwich Tern <u>Sterna sandvicensis</u>	Plain-backed Pipit <u>Anthus leucophrys</u>
Little Tern <u>Sterna albifrons</u>	Garden Bulbul <u>Pycnonotus barbatus</u>
Vinaceous Turtle-Dove <u>Streptopelia vinacea</u>	West African Prinia <u>Prinia subflava</u>
Senegal Dove <u>Stigmatopelia senegalensis</u>	Long-tailed Shrike <u>Corvinella corvina</u>
Grey Plantain-eater <u>Crinifer piscator</u>	Black-crowned Tchagra <u>Tchagra senegala</u>
Levaillant's Cuckoo <u>Clamator levaillantii</u>	Pied Crow <u>Corvus albus</u>
Senegal Coucal <u>Centropus senegalensis</u>	Grey-headed Sparrow <u>Passer griseus</u>

II : SOME BIRDS AT AMEDJOPE (VOLTA REGION) Amedjope is situated in the forested hills, up to 3,000 ft., East of the Volta.

Long-crested Hawk-Eagle Lophoætus occipitalis Once seen flying out of a tree.

Red-tailed Buzzard Buteo auguralis The commonest hawk.

Tambourine Dove Tympanistra tympanistra Several seen, both amongst cassava crops and in the tops of highest trees.

Green Fruit-Pigeon Vinago australis Very conspicuous, especially in the evening.

*Thick-billed Cuckoo Pachyoccyx validus One was watched for over 15 minutes, in ideal conditions, flying around and crashing into the tree-tops, clumsily using both wings and feet to balance itself. In flight, it bore a remarkable resemblance to a Goshawk Accipiter sp. Only the second record for Ghana.

Emerald Cuckoo Chrysococcyx cupreus Once observed in high canopy.

Didric Cuckoo Lampromorpha caprius Abundant; heard constantly.

Allied Hornbill Lophoceros semifasciatus The only hornbill seen, although not very common.

Black-throated Toothbill Tricholaema hirsutum Quite common, nesting in holes in dead trees.

Naked-faced Barbet Gymnbucco calvus Abundant.

Fire-bellied Woodpecker Mesopicos pyrrhogaster Quite common; several seen on dead stumps.

Moloney's Akalat Illadopsis moloneyanus A pair seen at close quarters on the edge of thick undergrowth, chasing each other.

Leaf-love Pyrrhurus scandens One party of six, calling loudly.

White-bearded Bulbul Trichophorus calurus A party of four seen in a thick patch of forest, low down, sometimes descending to the ground to feed.

White-tailed Greenbul Baeopogon indicator Only two positively identified, but probably commoner.

Finsch's Rusty Flycatcher Stizorhina finschi Quite a few were noted - a tame bird. Distinguished with difficulty from Neocossyphus poensis.

Shrike Flycatcher Mogabyas flammulatus One seen perching on top of a dead tree.

Purple-throated Cuckoo-Shrike Campephaga quisqualina Solitary birds seen on two occasions, working their way along quite near the ground.

Sharp's Square-tailed Drongo Dicrurus sharpei A common bird, often seen flycatching, in pairs.

Red-billed Shrike Sigmodus caniceps A party of over 10 birds made themselves very conspicuous, calling loudly and perching in the open. They stayed mostly at least 20 ft. above ground level.

Fiery-breasted Bush-Shrike Malaconotus cruentus A bird seen in the same place on two consecutive mornings, moving through the tree-tops over the path.

Black-headed Oriole Oriolus brachyrhynchus Common.

Black-winged Oriole Oriolus nigripennis Only once clearly identified, but more suspected.

Olive-bellied Sunbird Cinnyris chloropygius Plentiful.

Buff-throated Sunbird Chalcomitra adelberti Many were feeding in the trees in the compound of the Teachers' Training College.

*Yellow-mantled Weaver Melanoploceus tricolor Several feeding high up in the canopy.

Crested Weaver Malimbus malimbicus Seen once.

Red-headed Weaver Malimbus rubricollis Common. Very fond of searching for food in the bark of trees.

Blue-billed Mannikin Spermestes poensis A flock of 12 in a cassava clearing.

Grey-crowned Negro Finch Nigrita canicapilla Seen sitting on a dead branch in the evening, calling occasionally.

Blue-billed Weaver Spermophaga haematina One seen at close quarters, creeping along the floor of the forest, turning over twigs and leaves.

(To be concluded.)