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Chapter 7

A rapid survey of the birds of the Boké Préfecture, northwestern Guinea

Ron Demey

SUMMARY

During 15 days of field work in Boké Préfecture, 239 bird species were recorded: 145 at Site 1 (Sarabaya), 151 at Site 2 (Kamsar: five subsites) and 140 at Site 3 (Boulléré, near Sangarédi). Of these, only one is of conservation concern: Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni*, which is currently listed as Data Deficient and was found to be locally common in farmbush at Site 1. We added two species to Guinea's published avifauna: Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, at Site 1, and Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*, at Site 3. Some 50 species were recorded for the first time in the Kamsar and Sangarédi areas and their records represent more or less significant range extensions. Seventeen of the 33 Sudan-Guinea Savanna biome species recorded in Guinea were found during the study.

INTRODUCTION

Birds are good indicators of biological diversity because they occur in most habitats on land throughout the world and are sensitive to environmental change. In addition, bird taxonomy and distribution are better known than for any other large group of animals or plants (ICBP 1992). However, many areas in Africa still lack detailed ornithological data. The avifauna of Guinea is a case in point: it is comparatively poorly known overall and large areas of the country have yet to be surveyed (Robertson 2001a). Except for coastal waterbirds, no ornithological studies had been conducted previously in the Boké area.

We carried out 15 days of field work, five days at Site 1 (23 - 27 April 2005), five days at Site 2, which consisted of five different localities (29 April - 3 May), and five days at Site 3 (5 - 10 May), during which we recorded 239 bird species (Appendix 8), representing 36% of the country's avifauna.

For the purposes of standardization, we have followed the nomenclature, taxonomy and sequence of Borrow and Demey (2001 and 2004).

METHODS

The principal method used during this study consisted of observing birds by walking slowly along tracks and trails. Notes were taken on both visual observations and bird vocalizations. Some tape-recordings were made for later deposition in sound archives. Attempts were made to visit as many habitats as possible. Field work was carried out from just before dawn (usually 06:00) until 14:00-16:00, and on a few occasions from 17:00 until sunset (around 19:20). Some species were recorded opportunistically during the night. No mist-netting was carried out.

For each field day a list was compiled of all the species that were recorded. Numbers of individuals or flocks were noted, as well as any evidence of breeding, such as the presence of juveniles, and basic information on the habitat in which the birds were observed. No attempt has been made to give indices of abundance based on the encounter rate, as these would be

highly inaccurate for the majority of species, given that extremely few birds were singing and thus many may have remained unnoticed.

RESULTS

We found 239 bird species, including one of conservation concern, two not previously documented for the country, and 17 of the 33 Sudan-Guinea Savanna biome species recorded in Guinea. Some 50 species were observed for the first time in the Kamsar and Sangarédi areas and their records represent more or less significant range extensions.

Site 1: Sarabaya

In total, of the 145 species recorded here (see Appendix 8), only one species was recorded that is of global conservation concern: Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni*. This species is listed as Data Deficient: a species for which there is inadequate information to make an assessment of its risk of extinction (BirdLife International 2000). The occurrence in Guinea of Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, found at this site, had not been documented previously.

Site 2: Kamsar

At this site, which comprised five localities, 151 species were recorded (see Appendix 8). Juveniles of a few species were found, suggesting that some of these species breed during the dry season.

Site 3: Boulléré

In total, 143 species were recorded here (see Appendix 8). Fourteen of the 33 Sudan-Guinea Savanna biome species were found. One species was noted for the first time in Guinea: Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*.

Notes on specific species

(Status in West Africa from Borrow and Demey 2001)

Species of conservation concern

Phyllastrephus baumanni Baumann's Greenbul (Data Deficient). We found up to seven pairs in farmbrush, consisting principally of *Chromolaena odorata*, near the camp at Site 1, and one pair in dense vegetation at the edge of a patch of degraded forest near Tambaya village. This species was previously only known in Guinea from Pic de Fon (Demey and Rainey 2004) and Mont Béro Forest Reserve (Demey and Rainey in press), both situated in the extreme southeast of the country. Previous to this RAP, its known range extended from north-central Sierra Leone to Nigeria. The present records are thus the westernmost to date and represent a range extension of c.300 km. Until recently there were very few reliable records of it anywhere within its range (Fishpool 2000). Baumann's Greenbul is considered an uncommon to rare resident in forest-savanna mosaic in West Africa.

Species new for Guinea

Porphyrio porphyrio Purple Swamphen. Two adults were seen at a small stream near the village of Songolon at Site 1 on 24 April. This is an addition to the country's list, although there is an unpublished report of a single bird at Gaoual, c.200 km inland, in May 1992 (J. Taylor unpubl.). The species is a locally common to rare resident with a patchy distribution in West Africa.

Hippolais icterina Icterine Warbler. One was observed in detail (the characteristic pale wing panel was particularly obvious) at Site 3 on 9 May. This Palearctic migrant is rarely recorded west of the Dahomey Gap. In Guinea's neighbouring countries, it has only recently been reported from Guinea-Bissau (Catry and Mendes 1998), but there are no published recordings from Senegambia, Mali and Sierra Leone.

Other noteworthy records and range extensions

Accipiter ovampensis Ovambo Sparrowhawk. Two together seen at Site 3. This uncommon to rare intra-African migrant, whose status in West Africa is poorly known, was previously reported only from Haut Niger National Park (Nikolaus 2000).

Porphyrio alleni Allen's Gallinule. Two adults were seen at a small stream near the village of Songolon (Site 1) on 24 April. In Guinea, this uncommon to locally common resident and intra-African migrant was previously known only from the extreme south-east (Halleux 1994).

Asio capensis Marsh Owl. Two together were flushed from the edge of harvested, dry rice fields at Kakilissi (Site 1) on 27 April. There is only one previous record from Guinea, also from the coastal area (Altenburg and Van der Kamp 1991). This species is rare to locally frequent in West Africa.

Smithornis capensis African Broadbill. One was heard displaying in second growth at Site 3 on 6 May. In Guinea, this species was previously recorded only from Pic de Fon and Haut Niger National Park (Demey 2003, Demey and Rainey 2004). This record is the westernmost to date and constitutes a significant range extension of this species, which was known to occur as far west as Sierra Leone and is rare to scarce in West Africa.

Criniger calurus Red-tailed Greenbul. Five seen and heard in tiny patches of forest surrounded by farmbrush near Sarabaya (Site 1) on 23 April. In Guinea, this fairly common to common forest resident was previously known only from Kounoukan, at the border with Sierra Leone, and the extreme south-east (Morel and Morel 1988, Halleux 1994, Hayman et al. 1995, Demey and Rainey 2004, Demey and Rainey in prep.). The present records link up with the only more western ones, in Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance, south-western Senegal.

Alethe diademata White-tailed Alethe. Recorded at Sites 1 (up to two) and 3 on several dates. In Guinea, this fairly common forest resident was previously known only from Kindia, Kounounkan, and the extreme south-east (Morel and Morel 1988, Halleux 1994, Hayman et al. 1995, Demey and Rainey 2004, Demey and Rainey in prep.). The only more western records are from Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance, south-western Senegal.

Cisticola eximius Black-backed Cisticola. This species was found to be locally common in dry rice fields and partly burnt open plains at Sites 1 and 2 (found at five localities). There are only three previously known sites for this species in Guinea: near Kindia, in the Haut Niger National Park and at Mont Béro (Demey 1995, 2003; Demey and Rainey in press). A locally fairly common to rare resident in West African grasslands.

Dicrurus modestus Velvet-mantled Drongo. Two pairs were studied in detail at two localities of Site 1. Westernmost records, representing a significant range extension: the species was previously known to occur only as far west as the Kounounkan area, Guinea, near the border with Sierra Leone. At Katamene, the northernmost locality of Site 3, it was being replaced by its congener, the Fork-tailed Drongo *D. adsimilis*.

Pachyphantes superciliosus Compact Weaver. Three in non-breeding plumage in coastal scrub at Taïgbé East (Site 2) on 30 April. First record for the west of the country of this patchily distributed species: previous records are from Haut Niger National Park eastwards (Halleux 1994, Nikolaus 2000).

Ortygospiza atricollis Black-faced Quailfinch. Five near Wamounou on 25 April (Site 1) and another five at Katamene (Site 2) on 3 May. This patchily distributed species was previously known only from Kindia, Kounounkan and the east of the country (Morel and Morel 1988, Halleux 1994, Demey 1995, 2003, Nikolaus 2000).

Spermestes fringilloides Magpie Mannikin. A group of 12 birds seen at Wamounou (Site 1) on 25 April and another of 15 at Katamene (Site 2) on 3 May. This rather patchily distributed species was previously known only from Kounounkan and the extreme south-east (Morel and Morel 1988, Halleux 1994, Demey 2003).

Evidence of breeding

Necrosyrtes monachus Hooded Vulture. An adult sitting tightly on its nest at Katamene (Site 2) on 3 May.

Ptilopachus petrosus Stone Partridge. Two coveys with small chicks at Boulléré (Site 3) on 5 and 6 May.

Campethera maculosa Little Green Woodpecker. Two almost fully grown young taken from their nest by children at Tarensa (Site 2) on 2 May.

Picooides obsoletus Brown-backed Woodpecker. A female excavating a nesthole at Boulléré (Site 3) on 6 May.

Platysteira cyanea Common Wattle-eye. A pair with two juveniles at Taïgbé East (Site 2) on 30 April.

Turdoides reinwardtii Blackcap Babbler. Three adults with two juveniles (with dark eye and yellow gape) at Taïgbé East (Site 2) on 30 April.

Prionops plumatus White Helmet-shrikes. Groups with begging juveniles at Boulléré (Site 3) on 7 and 8 May.

DISCUSSION

The most significant result of this study is that some 50 species were recorded for the first time in the Kamsar and Sangarédi areas. These records represent significant or minor range extensions, as compared to the most recent distribution maps (Borrow and Demey 2004). The discovery of *Phyllastrephus baumanni* in farmbush is particularly noteworthy and confirms this species' preference for degraded habitats. Some previously unknown calls have been tape-recorded during this study. The species is expected not to be threatened, but to have been overlooked so far due to its skulking habits, its inconspicuous plumage and the lack of published recordings of its vocalizations. It is probably locally not uncommon in farmbush and edge situations throughout its range.

The sites visited are probably of relatively little importance for the conservation of bird biodiversity in Guinea and globally.

CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Although no globally threatened species were found and are likely to be found at the study sites (Baumann's Greenbul, currently listed as Data Deficient, being unlikely to be threatened due to its preference for degraded habitats), it would nevertheless be advisable to monitor the environmental impact of the planned industrial activities and to document the changes in bird populations. This may indeed yield data that could be useful for future conservation projects.

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