

Chapter 10

Rapid survey of the birds of the Atewa Range forests, Ghana

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SUMMARY

During 16 days of field work (7 – 22 June 2006) in Atewa Range Forest Reserve, one of the two important remnants of Upland Evergreen rainforest in Ghana, 155 bird species were recorded. Of these, six are of conservation concern, amongst which three are classified as Vulnerable and three as Near Threatened. Six of the 11 species restricted to the Upper Guinea Forests Endemic Bird Area and 115 (or 64 %) of the 180 Guinea-Congo Forests biome species now known from Ghana were observed during the study. A song, heard and partly tape-recorded, was thought to be from Nimba Flycatcher *Melaenornis annamarulae*, a Vulnerable species not previously found in Ghana; this record, which constitutes a major eastward range extension, was confirmed by sightings of the species in May 2007. The site, listed in 2001 as an Important Bird Area, was found to have a remarkably rich avifauna, with relatively large mixed-species flocks being a particularly conspicuous feature. Some species, such as Green-tailed Bristlebill *Bleda eximius* and Yellow-bearded Greenbul *Criniger olivaceus*, are at the eastern limit of their known range here. Several species that are rare in Ghana and uncommon to rare in their global range also occur in the reserve.

INTRODUCTION

Birds have been proven to be useful indicators of the biological diversity of a site, because they occur in most habitats on land throughout the world and are sensitive to environmental change. Their taxonomy and global geographical distribution are relatively well known in comparison to other taxa (ICBP 1992). The conservation status of most species has been reasonably well assessed and is regularly updated (BirdLife International 2000, 2004). This permits rapid analysis of the results of an ornithological study and presentation of conservation recommendations. Birds are also among the most charismatic species, which can facilitate the acceptance of the necessity to implement protective measures by policy makers and stakeholders.

As West African forests are rapidly disappearing, the survival of the birds of the Upper Guinea forests is becoming increasingly dependent on ever fewer areas. Despite a number of field studies conducted in the region in recent years (e.g. Demey and Rainey 2004, 2005; Rainey and Asamoah 2005; Demey 2007), the avifaunas of the majority of these forests remain inadequately known.

Atewa Range Forest Reserve is, together with Tano Offin, one of only two main forest reserves in Ghana holding remnants of upland evergreen rainforest (Hall and Swaine 1976). The reserve, which has a roughly north-south alignment, covers 23,663 ha and consists of a steep-sided, mostly flat plateau at 700-800 m a.s.l. The forest has been logged in the past and numerous transects are being cut at present for mineral exploration. On lower slopes it has been severely degraded by encroaching cultivation and illegal wood cutting. The forest canopy on the plateau is of variable height and presents many gaps, with larger trees reaching up to 40-50 m emerging above a closed sub-canopy of 10-25 m height. A few small streams cross the ridge and some swampy areas occur.