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FURTHER NOTES ON THE BIRDS AND MAMMALS OF THE CHIMANIMANI MOUNTAINS

by

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INTRODUCTION

These notes were made during a brief visit to the Chimanimani Mountains with Mr J. R. Shaw from 3 to 9 June, 1974, when we hiked the inner circuit from the Hut to Two Tarns via St George's Cave and back via Camp Portage and the Valley of the Apostles. They are supplementary to my earlier general papers on the Chimanimani fauna (Jackson, 1973a; b) and should be read in conjunction with them.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Data are presented in systematic order, following Clancey (1971) and Smithers and Tello (1972). For localities see Jackson (1973b); the Valley of the Apostles runs from Skeleton Pass to The Plateau. All records fall within the quarter degree square 1933C3.

BIRDS

Aquila verreauxii

Black Eagle

Two pairs were found breeding, one in Moçambique and the other in Rhodesia. The Rhodesian pair was nesting on the sheer face to the south of Mawenje (=Turret Towers), the site referred to by Hodgson (1971). This site faces west and overlooks the Bundi Valley. An adult was seen leaving the nest at 1100h on 5th June, flying a few hundred metres north to a buttress lower down the slope. It was carrying prey upon which it fed for the next 20 minutes; it then flew back towards the nest and settled on another

buttress where it preened and loafed for at least half an hour. Meanwhile a second adult had flown in from the west and settled on the nest after flying over its feeding mate; it sat very low in the nest, apparently incubating, but we could not see the nest contents.

The Moçambique nest site, which does not appear to have been reported before, was found on 8th June at 1000h when one of two soaring, calling birds flew straight to the nest and settled on it. The other settled on a tree lower down the slope, but at 1115h flew to a rock ledge higher up, passing over the nest en route. This nest site is on the lower north slope of Binga and overlooks the Valley of the Apostles at a point about halfway between Skeleton Pass and The Plateau. We had earlier, on the 4th, seen a solitary *verreauxii* being harassed by two Cape Ravens *Corvus albicollis* high up on the north face of Binga; and just to the west of it (in High Valley) the first Rock Dassie *Procavia capensis* that we have seen in the Chimanimani Mountains. It would be interesting to know what the Black Eagles of the Chimanimanis feed on, for both Rock Dassies and Red Rock Hares *Pronolagus crassicaudatus* appear to be very scarce.

At each site an alternate nest was noticed within 100m of the occupied one; at the Binga site an accumulation of sticks in a pothole could possibly be an old nest. The two nest sites are only *ca* 5km apart, suggesting somewhat restricted territories, a view supported by the fact that we failed to record this species during extensive visits to the Chimanimanis in 1973 (Jackson, 1973a; b). However, it must be conceded that the birds are remarkably difficult to see against a background of rugged massif and are only conspicuous when silhouetted against the sky, so we could have overlooked the species in 1973.

It is opportune here to report on a specimen of this species recently received at the Umtali Museum. An adult male in breeding condition, testes 27 x 13 (L.) and 24 x 13mm (R.), was found dead beneath a high tension power line on 27th April, 1974, by Mr W. S. Nicolson; he tells me that a second Black Eagle was perched on a tree nearby. This was at Christmas Pass, which is within 2km of the well known breeding site on Victoria Kop in the Umtali Municipal Area (18° 57'S., 32° 38' E., 1300m). Mr D. C. H. Plowes, who has been studying the Victoria Kop pair for many years, informs me (pers. comm.) that at about this time some fresh green leaves had been added to the nest but that no further breeding activity took place during the 1974 season. It seems likely therefore that the dead bird was one of the Victoria Kop pair. If so, mate

replacement may have taken place very quickly for I saw two Black Eagles soaring near Victoria Kop just one week after the specimen was received. On 24th August, 1974, two Black Eagles were seen soaring over Victoria Kop and the suburbs of Umtali, one of the birds several times doing the "pendulum" display flight of the species.

The only superficial sign of injury on the corpse was a severe abrasion on the dorsum, consistent with the bird having flown into the power lines. This could well have happened during courtship flight or while hunting. It weighed 3 000g, to the nearest 50g, on a Salter 10kg x 50g spring balance.

Bubo capensis Cape Eagle Owl
 Heard calling near Camp Portage in the evening of 7th June and again early the following morning. This means that it is widespread in the Moçambique Chimanimanis (Jackson, 1973a; b; c).

Campethera abingoni Goldentailed Woodpecker
 Heard just east of Skeleton Pass. Not mentioned by Hodgson (1971), but previously heard by us on Gossamer Range (Jackson, 1973a). A sight record would now be welcome.

Psalidoprocne pristoptera Black Roughwing
 McLachlan and Liversidge (1970) do not mention the voice of this species. We noted several calls while listening to a flock flying over us in the Valley of the Apostles. All the sounds, except one, were high pitched and sibilant. The exception was a harsh tearing sound, perhaps an alarm call. The others may be written as "tseeert", "tseeoo" and "wheet"; they reminded us of squeaky hinges and more particularly of the sounds produced when drawing a wet finger across a pane of glass.

Parus griseiventris Smallbilled Grey Tit

Parus rufiventris Rufous Tit
 A mixed party of these two species was seen behind the Mountain Hut early on the 4th June. Neither species has been recorded in Moçambique south of the Zambezi River (Clancey, 1971), so should be looked for in the miombo of Gossamer Range.

Phyllastrephus flavostriatus Yellowstreaked Bulbul
 Hodgson (1971) suggests that this species may be absent above 1 370m, but we saw it in a forest patch at about 1 650m in the Valley of the Apostles. As at Poacher's Cave (Jackson, 1973a), we found Stripecheeked Bulbuls *Andropadus milanjensis* in the same patch of forest.

Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris

Mocking Chat

As mentioned previously (Jackson 1973b), much commoner than Hodgson (1971) suggests and occurring well above the upper altitudinal limit of 1 830m given by him; in fact we saw this species right on top of Binga, which is, at *ca* 2 440m, the highest peak in the Chimanimani Mountains. The pair at St George's Cave (Jackson, 1973a) continues to be unusually tame, the female entering the cave to pick up scraps within 5m of people moving around. Occasional tameness has been recorded previously for this rather shy species (McLachlan and Liversidge, 1970), but in the vicinity of homesteads rather than out in the wilds. Similar behaviour was noted for a Cape Robin *Cossypha caffra* at St George's Cave.

Apalis chirindensis

Chirinda Apalis

A couple seen sharing a tree with Barthroated Apalises *A. thoracica* on the edge of a ravine forest in the Valley of the Apostles near The Plateau at *ca* 1 620m. Another small party of *ca* 5 was seen in the canopy of some evergreen forest at about the same altitude on the lower north slopes of Binga.

The bills were wholly black, meaning that the Musapa Mountain deme (Jackson 1973a, and Irwin and Jackson, 1971) occurs well into the Chimanimani Mountains; in fact the main range may well be the barrier separating it from the Chimanimani deme.

Batis capensis

Cape Batis

Batis molitor

Chin-spot Batis

The upper altitudinal limits given by Hodgson (1971) and Jackson (1973b) should be increased to 1 680m, since these species occur regularly at the Hut.

Telophorus zeylonus

Bokmakiri

Recorded 13 times during our visit. Synthesising these records with those in Hodgson (1971) and Jackson (1972; 1973a) we can now assess the altitudinal range of this species in the Chimanimani Mountains as between 1 350m and 2 000m. It is widespread within these limits but has not yet been recorded north of the Musapa Gap. Although usually fairly shy, it can be approached to within a few metres while sunbathing and preening early in the morning and in the evening. Song can be heard at all times of the day and is one of the characteristic sounds of the higher elevations of the Chimanimanis. An unusual call (not mentioned by McLachlan and Liversidge, 1970) was given by a solitary bird from the top of a low rock. It may be written as "kok-kok-kok, scratch-scratch-

scratch", the first part being liquid and the second very harsh; this was uttered several times with the bill pointing vertically skywards, thus presenting the yellow throat and black gorget fully. The bird appeared to be alone and had evidently been foraging on the ground until we passed nearby, for it returned there after the vocal outburst.

Onychognathus morio Redwinged Starling

Both at St George's Cave and at Camp Portage a pair of this species went to roost just inside the cave. At St George's the birds were remarkably persistent in the face of repeated disturbances caused by our presence. They were occupying a small niche (barely large enough to hold them both) in the roof less than two metres above our heads. That this was their regular roost site was evident from the accumulation of droppings about it.

Promerops gurneyi Gurney's Sugarbird

Two adults were seen attending a fledgling on 4th June just east of the Bundi R. opposite the Hut. The young bird's tail was only *ca* 20mm long and its bill about half the length of an adult's; its appearance and indeed its posture and movements immediately brought to mind the recent findings of Sibley and Ahlquist (1974), for they reminded me strongly of a young starling. It solicited and received an insect from one of the adults, so providing one of the few breeding records for this species in Rhodesia; the eggs were presumably laid in April, which is unusual for the species (Skead, 1967; McLachlan and Liversidge, 1970).

MAMMALS

Papio ursinus Chacma Baboon

Seen regularly. One troop of *ca* 15 near Binga was deliberately tearing down some tall aloes in order to eat the flowers.

Felis serval Serval

A partially decomposed leg of this species was picked up beside the Bundi R. at *ca* 1 600m on 13th August, 1974, by Robert Plowes and Tony Carroll, and handed in at the Umtali Museum.

Procavia capensis Rock Dassie

One solitary Rock Dassie seen at 2 000m just west of Binga is the only one that I have seen in the Chimanimani Mountains, despite having spent some 75 days in various parts of these mountains over the past eight years. Rumour has it that the Rock Dassie population was decimated by disease some years ago, but I have been unable to obtain reliable information on this.

Oreotragus oreotragus

Klipspringer

A pair was seen as high as 2 150m on the south slope of Binga, another as low as 1 375m in Bailey's Folly just above the Base Camp. A third pair, seen in the Valley of the Apostles, gave alarm calls very similar to those described in Jackson (1973a). These were short, harsh, nasal hoots reminiscent of the old rubber bulb hooters.

Hippotragus niger

Sable

A herd of 18 was seen beside the headwaters of the Mevumozi R. at ca 1 680m (due east of Turret Towers); this included three young less than halfgrown. The herd was in the ecotone between a grassy plain and the foothills of the main range.

Taurotragus oryx

Eland

The herd on the Saddle consisted of only 10 Eland this time compared to 15 previously (Jackson 1973a; b).

SUMMARY

Notes are provided for some 20 species of birds and mammals. The distributions of the Cape Eagle Owl *Bubo capensis*, the Golden-tailed Woodpecker *Campethera abingoni*, the Smallbilled Grey Tit *Parus griseiventris*, the Rufous Tit *P.rufiventris* and the Rock Dassie *Procavia capensis* are discussed. The altitudinal ranges of the Yellowstreaked Bulbul *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus*, the Cape Batis *Batis capensis*, the Chinspot Batis *B.molitor*, the Bokmakiri *Telophorus zeylonus* and the Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus* are adjusted.

Breeding data are provided for the Black Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*, Gurney's Sugarbird *Promerops gurneyi* and the Sable *Hippotragus niger*.

The voices of the Black Roughwing *Psalidoprocne pristopectera*, the Bokmakiri and the Klipspringer are described.

Roosting behaviour of the Redwinged Starling *Onychognathus morio* is mentioned, the Chacma Baboon *Papio ursinus* was seen eating aloe flowers, and an extremely confiding Mocking Chat *Thamnodia cinnamomeiventris* was encountered.

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