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Editor: Dr. R.M. Harwin,
P.O. Box 647, Gwelo.

Gwenoro Dam

Gwenoro Dam, a new dam lying about 20 miles south of Gwelo and 10 west of Selukwe was completed and filled up at the end of the 1957–58 rainy season, but has already been colonised by some interesting species. The first to arrive and stake their claim were the White-breasted Cormorants, which started building in May, in a few trees which had been surrounded by water and are fast rotting. Their breeding season lasted until October, when the site was taken over by a colony of African Darters. The Reed Cormorant has been less common, but young of this species have been seen as well.

The heron family is particularly well represented, and at least two species have bred. A Green-backed Heron built a nest in some dead branches just above water-level. No nest of the Night Heron [Black-crowned Night-heron] has yet been found, but the species is very common, and numbers of young just able to fly were seen in November.

Lake Terns [White-winged Tern] are common, and reliable observers have reported the Caspian Tern, “a large gull-like bird, with orange-red beak and legs and much black under the primaries.” They also mention the black cap on the head, indicating breeding plumage.

Several species of duck occur, and the Egyptian Goose has established a breeding colony. An African Finfoot which appeared to have a nest somewhere was also seen.

Probably many of these birds have been there all the time, but the flooding of their homes in reed and sedge has forced them up into parts where there is less cover.

R.H.R. Stevenson

The Mana Pools

These pools were mentioned in *Bulletin* No 26. They are forty miles downstream, from Chirundu, and two miles from the Zambezi, being flooded by the Zambezi annually. Probably they formed part of the riverbed at some time in the past. G.R. Thomson has written an account of a visit he and his brother paid there in September 1958.

There is an abundance of water birds, including the Goliath Heron, African Openbill and Saddle-billed Storks, African Sacred Ibis, Hadedda Ibis, and African Spoonbill, as well African Skimmers and bee-eaters. Plovers were also to be seen, but at too great a distance to be identified. Apparently all these birds were nesting, but without a boat it was impossible to confirm this.

We spent a morning on the Zambezi, which was conveniently close, and came across a mixed colony of bee-eaters. The most common species were the Southern Carmine, White-fronted Bee-eaters and Madagascar Bee-eaters. All three were caught on the nest with eggs. Some distance from the Zambezi Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters were found nesting.

Of the other species African Fish-eagles were plentiful, and were observed calling both while in flight and perched. The spintails and the large Hamerkop clutches were mentioned in *Bulletin 26*. Our stay was, as always, too short, but what we did discover was most interesting.

Kafue notes

Mrs. G. Attwell writes that Dr. Gilges' Barotseland Notes bring back memories of 3 trips to the Kafue River. She says:

During September and October 1958, my husband and daughter and myself spent several weeks in a boat on the Kafue River and travelled from the Road Bridge to Meshi Teshi, a distance which we estimated at approximately 200 miles. Most species of heron and at one pan, we found Cattle Egrets, Little Egrets, Great Egrets, Squacco Heron and Black Heron, together with Glossy Ibis, Great White Pelican, Spur-winged Goose, Knob-nosed [Comb Duck], Blacksmith Lapwing (Plover), African Jacana, African Sacred Ibis and African Spoonbills. There must have been over 300 birds in this small pan, the herons continually croaking and bickering. We put up a hide in order to get some photographs; they all dispersed a short distance, but were so anxious to get back to their feeding ground that they started to return before we had time to get into the hide.

Trees are very scarce on the Kafue Flats. One acacia supported the nests of a pair of Yellow-billed Kites and a pair of Pied Crows. All went well until one of the kites flew over the wrong side of the tree and then the crows would get very angry. One of the kites helped itself to a piece of meat which we were using as bait for fishing.

There were numerous African Fish-eagles on the river, many in immature plumage. We noted instances of one pair on the ground, and another pair flying, calling to each other. In the one case the pair in the air settled and those on the ground took off. They then resumed calling to each other.

Our two further trips during 1957 were of much shorter duration. We saw over 100 species altogether.

African Fish-eagle. Replying to Major Trollope's comments in Bulletin No. 26, Mr. G.W. Parnell writes

I see Major Trollope is dubious about the Fish-eagle going when striking [sic]. I can assure him that they do. A pair has nested for a good many years in a large msasa tree on the banks of the Makwadzi River on the Banket – Mtoroshanga Pass Road. It is only some 5-6 miles as the crow flies to my dam, and the birds are frequent visitors.

The dam, incidentally, contains a crocodile, and I was waiting one day for a crack at him when I saw one of the birds overhead. As I watched, it stooped and went clear under with a huge splash. Then first the white head and neck emerged, and gradually the body followed. After resting for a few seconds, the bird began paddling with its wings, just as Major Trollope describes. It eventually became airborne with – much to my surprise – a small barbel certainly not more than a foot long. Using as it does, its talons, the eagle went in with a gigantic 'belly-flop' and not head-first as a Pied Kingfisher would. Once in flight the bird shook itself to get rid of the water.

Mr. Parnell goes on concerning his dam, "It is amazing the unusual birds which turn up. I had two Woolly-necked Storks here a year or two back, but I never expected a pelican. This morning (13.12.58) I saw a very large bird coming from the direction of my dam and could hardly credit what I at once recognised. Sure enough it was a pelican. It passed over my head at about 100 feet, began to soar and glided off in the direction of one of my neighbours who also has a dam. It was an immature bird still showing traces of brown plumage. I imagine that the nearest regular habitat would be Beira, but it will be interesting to see whether such species eventually colonise Kariba. With the increase in farm dams, many of which are of considerable size, certain ducks, of which the knob-nose [Comb Duck] is one, which we only expected to see during the rains, now stay all the year.

Reverting to St. Lucia, I saw a number of House Sparrows there, which I am sure were not present in 1948. I also saw them in the streets of Piet Retief."

From Plumtree, Dr. Wragg tells of an interesting half-hour, which began with the question of which species of bird a nest belonged to.

On Sunday 16th November, [we] were foraging around a kopjie, when I noticed a cup-nest built into a point of a small tree where 3-4 branches formed a fork. The nest was very open about 10 feet up, and eggs could be seen from the ground. My son climbed up and pronounced the nest to be of "shrike" origin, but with unusual eggs. One which he passed down to me was buff colour, with numerous small reddish-brown dots collected at the thick end into a ring. I thought it might be an abnormal bulbul's egg. Both Layard's Bulbul [Dark-capped Bulbul] and Tropical Boubou (Shrike) were in the vicinity.

We went off about 15 yards to await arrival of the owners. A pair of bulbuls sitting around were most inquisitive about us, but showed no interest in the nest. The boubous were calling in the distance, and after about a quarter of an hour, arrived in our vicinity. After hanging about for a further 10 minutes or so, one flew to the nest. Through binoculars it was seen to be eating something, so I jumped to the conclusion that the nest belonged to the bulbuls and that it was stealing the eggs, although the bulbuls were most unconcerned.

The boubou made several short stays at the nest, each time eating something. On two occasions both birds were present, although only one was pecking away. To save something of the wreckage, we decided to interfere, and my son again climbed the tree. What he found was that one of the eggs had hatched and the chick was covered with ants. So it was evident that the nest did in fact belong to the shrikes and that the parent bird was picking the ants of the chick, which was intact and showed no sign of injury. We left on discovering this, so as not to disturb the birds further.

Among the queries arising is this; do ants normally invade a nest when the chick hatches, or did this invasion occur because the parent birds were not present at the time of hatching, to deal with shells, and any debris resulting from the hatching, such as blood or shell veins?"

To which I would add that the parents had ample opportunity to indulge in anting, but did not do so. Probably the urge to get rid of the invaders of the nest would have been powerful enough to overcome the desire to ant, in any case.

Mr. P.H. Linton, Drayton Farm, Beatrice, tells a tragic tale of the havoc wrought by a hailstorm. On the night of September 12th last year his farm experienced a fall of 1½" of rain, but hail occurred along a belt running through several farms including a neighbours. Next morning his neighbour saw a boy in the veld dragging a sack, and every now and then stooping to pick up something. He found out that the whole compound was out picking up dead birds. This particular boy had 73.

There was a strong wind from the west, which must have carried the hail almost horizontally, as the house windows were broken. The stones were the size of shillings. It might have been assumed that the toll was so great because it was early spring and there was as yet little foliage, but dead birds were lying thickly even under the evergreen orange trees. Unfortunately it is not known what species were most involved in this disaster.

Mr. Linton concludes "What a hard time birds have with predators and parasites, the arduousness of migration, the desperate adventure of learning to fly, and now the above. Casualties must have been 100%".

White-rumped Swifts Mr. Miles Markus of Pretoria asks if anybody has tried nesting boxes for this species. He has put up boxes under the eaves of his house, where the swifts can find them in their prospecting excursions, and one has now been used for the second season. The box is a plain wooden box with an entrance hole at one of the bottom corners.

Mr. Miles informs me that of 33 nesting cards for *Apus caffer*, 6 or 7 are from the Magistrate's Court Building, Gatooma, and one from the eaves of the Mines Dept., Gatooma, in the nest of a Wire-tailed Swallow, but that there are no others from buildings and suggests that this is because we have fewer old buildings than the Union.

Nest Record Cards A feature of the nest records received this season has been the number of nests found to be parasitised by cuckoos. The more important of these are being written up for publication in the *Ostrich* or *Bokmakierie*.

Mr. Miles is proceeding on leave from June to September, so everybody is asked to send him their cards before May at the latest, and not while he is away. In case anybody doesn't know his address, or has not contributed previously to the scheme, but would like to do so, it is P.O. Box 8156 Causeway.

Injury feigning A nest record card submitted by Mrs. R.V. Collins for the Golden-breasted Bunting records that on the 24.11.54, she was able to get very close to the nest, almost touching the sitting bird, when the hen "fell" to the ground, pretending she was badly wounded, fluttering around, limping and trailing a wing, and gradually getting further away from the nest. She remained on the ground out of sight. The nest was at the junction of the Sanyati and Umfuli rivers, and contained 2 young 2-3 days old, and one infertile egg.

Field Work

The SAOS is at present reviewing its programme of Field Work which was first drawn up in 1951. This programme was divided into six headings.

1. **Nest Record Cards** The record of the ROS in respect of these cards has been a good one, chiefly owing to the efforts of our enthusiastic organiser, Mr. Miles. But there is no reason for complacency, and while the number of cards submitted continues to increase year by year, the number of contributors does not. Once again we stress that every nest found should be recorded on a card, and there is no reason why every member should not submit at least one card per season.

2. **Food** This is an almost virgin field for research. The ROS has as yet carried out no organised investigation into food habits, but the field is wide open for anybody who is interested, both for systematic recording of the content of birds' stomach-contents, and for random recording of observations of food birds are seen to take.

3. **Migration** Again the ROS has not undertaken any organised migration recording, but everybody should have received, and returned, the migration cards sent out by Mr. Liversidge of the Port Elizabeth Museum.

1958-59 seems to have been a good season for migrants. I have received a series of observations from Mr. A.J. Tree of Bulawayo, which cover 25 migratory species, in spite of the fact that Mr. Tree is a "new Rhodesian" who has only been in the Federation since November. Mr. Tree observed a Garganey at the Matopos Dam on the 23rd November, and other observations cover such species as the Common Cuckoo, Caspian Plover¹, Common Ringed Plover and (European) Sedge Warbler, which, while not rare, are not easily recognised.

Autumn Migration should be in full swing during the next few months. Keep your eyes open and record any conspicuous migratory movements and final dates, both of individuals and flocks.

4. **Observations on the White Stork** In this connection members are once again reminded of the observations on this species required by the ICBP for the current season. To refresh your memories again, these are, briefly, the number, date and locality of any birds seen, and from those who live in an area where White Storks occur regularly, a comparison with their numbers during 1957-58. The response so far has been good, but the season is not over yet, and records must keep coming in.

5. **Habits and movement of Swifts** A familiar, but still very little understood family of birds. Perhaps the nest-boxes described by Miles Markus elsewhere in this bulletin could be a starting point.

6. **Check Lists of Areas covered by Branches** Check Lists for both Northern and Southern Rhodesia were published during 1957. However, this is no reason for sitting back and taking things easy. The lists were necessarily the work of a very few members, and it is now the duty of everybody to see how the information therein can be added to or modified.

¹ Tree (pers. comm., 2014) did not record a Caspian Plover. He did, however, note a Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, a 'rare' bird at the time