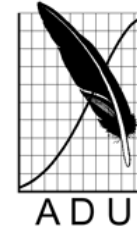


Ornithological Observations



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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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ON THE STATUS OF FULVOUS DUCK AND SLATY EGRET IN MOZAMBIQUE

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Fulvous Ducks in southern Mozambique

The Mozambique bird atlas survey reported a marked decline in the population of Fulvous Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor* in southern Mozambique for the period 1996-2003 (Parker 1999) compared to the results of a waterfowl survey of 1971 (Milstein 1984).

In 1971, Milstein reported over 12 000 Fulvous Duck at Lake Chuali. To date, this is the largest concentration of the species recorded anywhere in southern Africa. During the 1960s and 1970s, Lake Chuali was renowned for its abundance of waterfowl, with Fulvous Duck predominating, and the now derelict hotel at the roadside catered exclusively for weekend duck hunters from Maputo (then Lourenço Marques).

By contrast, during the period 1996-2003, the number observed at any time at Lake Chuali did not exceed 1 000, and the estimated population for the whole of southern Mozambique south of the Save River was no more than 5 000.

To understand the differences in the observed populations for the two periods, it is more useful to consider why the population in 1960s and 1970s was so high rather than why it was so much lower in 1996-2003. During the former period, rice was cultivated in the fields surrounding Lake Chuali, and it was primarily the rice fields which supported the waterfowl populations. In the post independence

period, no rice has been grown there. The surrounding fields have instead been utilized for grazing and the production of maize and sugar.

The rise and fall of waterfowl populations at Lake Chuali was repeated nearby in Swaziland. In the northern tip of Swaziland there is a region still known as Ricelands (less than 200 km inland from Lake Chuali), where rice was formerly cultivated but was discontinued in the late seventies. Legends persist of the vast flocks of waterfowl that used to be encountered there. In more recent times, no such concentrations have been observed there.

Slaty Egret in the Zambezi Delta

By the time of the completion of the bird atlas survey of central Mozambique, rumours of the occurrence of Slaty Egret *Egretta vinaceigula* in the Zambezi Delta had been heard, but the sources of the rumours could not be traced. The atlas of the birds of central Mozambique (Parker 2005) therefore did not report the presence of the species. Subsequently it has come to my attention that several sightings of single birds were made near Marrromeu in the Zambezi River Delta between 2003 and 2005, and some of these are confirmed by photographs (B. Gibson, pers. comm). No breeding attempts were observed. The species must now be considered at least an occasional non-breeding visitor to central Mozambique.

Exploration in Mozambique

The Mozambique Bird Atlas Project carried out field surveys of southern and central Mozambique and the Niassa Reserve during the period 1995-2003. The project was terminated without completing the planned survey of northern Mozambique due to a lack of funding. Since 2003, there has been no systematic exploration or monitoring of the avifauna of Mozambique, despite the fact that the



distributions and populations of species in northern Mozambique are largely unknown.

In an era when there is growing concern for the conservation of our natural heritage, it is not yet generally recognized that knowledge of distributions and population sizes is a pre-requisite for effective conservation.

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