

## NOTES ON THE MIGRATION AND DISPERSAL OF BIRDS AT KITUI

By

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Kitui Township lies eighty two miles practically due East of Nairobi. Two miles beyond the town the rolling plains which stretch eastwards from the Ukambani hills at an altitude of between 3,700 and 4,000 feet are broken off by a fault scarp running from North to South. The ground drops precipitously through hilly country for over a thousand feet into the desert bush which extends almost unbroken to the coast. Kitui is thus situated on the brink of the high plateau of Kenya. The escarpment hills produce orographic rain and Kitui is placed in a marked rain belt surrounded on both East and West by areas having only between 15 and 30 inches of rain. The onset of the October rains is violent and within a month the countryside is transformed from its state of four month old desiccation. The bare trees take on heavy foliage and dense undergrowth and grasses develop. The rains tail off towards the year's end, but sporadic rain begins again in March and there is no second dry season to compare with that from May until October.

In ten months spent in Kitui from 1st July, 1960 until 12th April, 1961 the writer kept day by day records of the species of birds present in the Township and the results are shown on the accompanying charts. Fig. 1 shows the palaeartic migrants (the migrating Alpine Swifts, Apus melba (Linn.) were not identified as to race). Besides showing the wide range between the dates of the earliest and latest arrivals this chart also shows that some species are passage migrants and of these some pass apparently in one direction only, though as visible migration was not seen, local movements may be involved. In this chart, as in the others, the relative abundance is roughly indicated by the use of a broken line to show that the species was present but only in small numbers.

Fig. 2 shows two groups of species which are resident in tropical Africa. Group 'A' were present for the greater part of the period of observations but temporarily disappeared, whereas group 'B' only appeared temporarily. The movement of these species seemed to be clearly related to the rainy season. Of those which disappeared from Kitui about the onset of the rains four were noted as returning accompanied by juveniles and a possible explanation of their disappearance is that they moved into the hot lower country to breed during the brief wet season, moving back into the rain belt gradually as the country dried up and food supplies decreased. Of the seven species which appeared in Kitui at or soon after the onset of the rains, it will be noted that five were cuckoos.

Fig. 3 shows a group of species showing no common features in their times of appearance. The appearance of the Crested Francolin, Francolinus sephaena grantii Hartlaub and the Spotted Thicknee, Burhinus capensis (Lichtenstein), both abundant in the lower country East of Kitui, raises interesting questions as to the nature of the local movements involved. The Mottled-throated Spinetail, Telacanthura ussheri stictilaema (Reichenow), about the movements

GROUP 'A'	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
460. LILAC-BREASTED ROLLER <i>Coracias caudata</i> L.										
477. GREY-HEADED KINGFISHER <i>Halcyon leucocephala</i> (Müller)										
619. MUBIAN WOODPECKER <i>Campethera nubica</i> (Boddaert)										
743. WHITE-EARED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus dodsoni</i> Sharpe										
799. S.AFRICAN BLACK FLYCATCHER <i>Melaneroria pammela</i> (Stan.)										
1090. STRAIGHT-CRESTED HELMET-SHRIKE <i>Prionops plumata</i> Shaw										
1167. BLACK-HEADED ORIOLE <i>Oriolus larvatus</i> Lichtenstein										
1188. BLUE-EARED GLOSSY STARLING <i>Lamprocolius chalybeus</i> (H. & E.)										
1219. YELLOW WHITE-EYE <i>Zosterops senegalensis</i> Bon.										
1251. VARIABLE SUNBIRD <i>Cinnyris venustus</i> (Shaw & Nodder)										
1261. AMETHYST SUNBIRD <i>Chakomitra amethystina doggetti</i> (Sharpe)										
1358. GROSBEAK WEAVER <i>Amblyospiza albifrons</i> (Vigors)										
1359. RED-HEADED WEAVER <i>Anaplectes melanotis</i> (Lafresnaye)										
1373. WHITE-WINGED WIDOW-BIRD <i>Colius passer albonotatus</i> (Cassin)										
1459. YELLOW-RUMPED SEED-EATER <i>Serinus atrogularis</i> (A. Smith)										
GROUP 'B'										
404. AFRICAN CUCKOO <i>Cuculus canorus gularis</i> Steph.										
406. RED-CHESTED CUCKOO <i>Cuculus solitarius</i> Stephens										
407. BLACK CUCKOO <i>Cuculus cafer</i> Lichtenstein										
415. BLACK-&WHITE CUCKOO <i>Clamator jacobinus</i> (Bodd.)										
417. DIDRICH COCKOO <i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i> (Bodd.)										
644. WHITE-RUMPED SWIFT <i>Apus caffer</i> Lichtenstein										
1062. RED-RUMPED SWALLOW <i>Hirundo daurica</i> L.										

Fig.2

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
195. CRESTED FRANCOLIN <i>Francolinus sephaena</i> (Smith)										
262. SPOTTED THICKNEE <i>Burhinus capensis</i> (Licht.)										
463. BROAD-BILLED ROLLER <i>Eurystormus glaucurus suahelicus</i> (Neum)										
641. MOTTLED SWIFT <i>Apus aequatorialis</i> (Müller)										
647. MOTTLED-THROATED SPINETAIL <i>Telacanthura ussheri</i> (Sharpe)										
648. BOEHM'S SPINETAIL <i>Neorapus boehmi</i> (Schalow)										
792. PALE FLYCATCHER <i>Bradornis pallidus</i> Müller										
1075. BLACK ROUGH-WING SWALLOW <i>Psalidoprocne holomelema</i> (Sun)										
1138. SULPHUR-BREASTED BUSH-SHRIKE <i>Chlorophoneus sulfureopectus</i> (Lesson)										

Fig.3

Migration of Birds at Kitui

## Bird Migration at Kitui

of which little is known, was represented by a number of birds which gradually increased from two in late August to eight by mid-October. Nothing was seen to suggest breeding. Of Boehm's Spinetail, Neafrapus boehmi (Schalow) only one was ever seen at any one time.

In sum the charts raise more questions than they answer but could provide a useful basis for comparison with similar observations in other areas. Of particular value for comparison would be details of movements in an area lying in the desert scrub belt between the Highlands and the coastal region.

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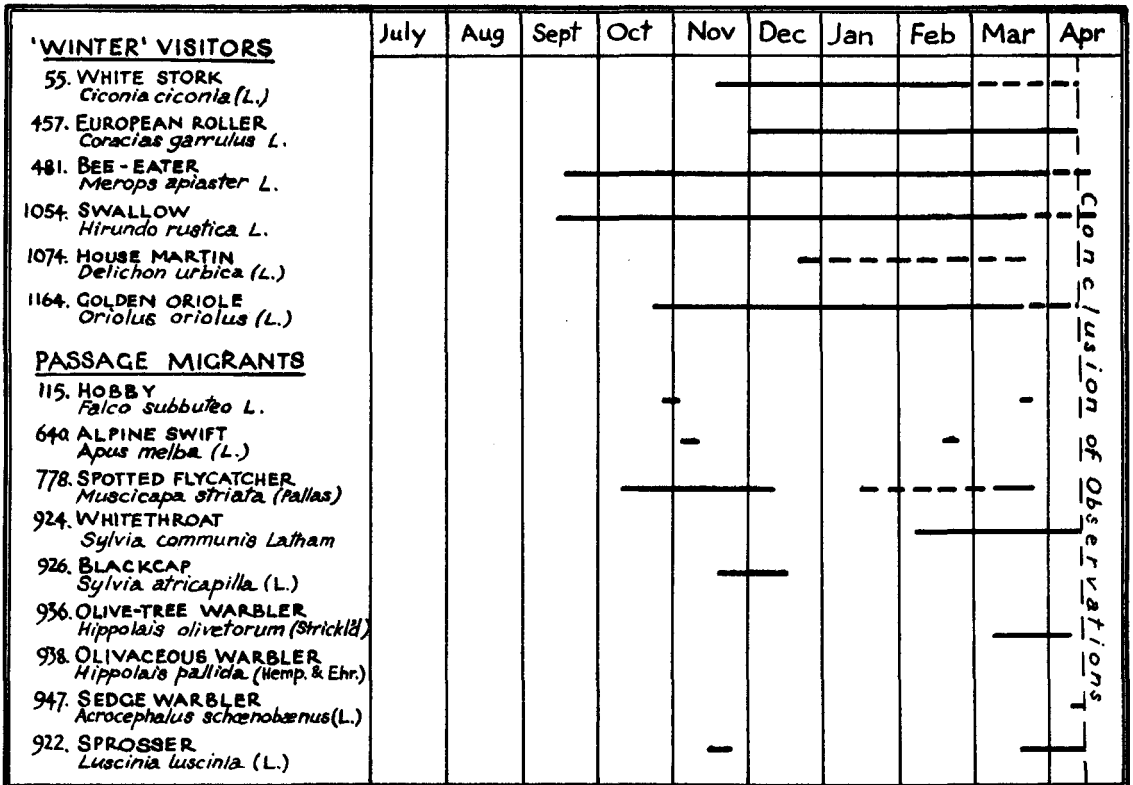


Fig.1