

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

TWO ADDITIONS TO THE SOMALIA LIST: GREATER FRIGATEBIRD *FREGATA MINOR* AND INDIAN HOUSE CROW *CORVUS SPLENDENS*Greater Frigatebird *Fregata minor*

Difficulties in identifying frigatebirds *Fregata* spp. in the field have not been aided by various unhelpful and often misleading descriptions of their various sex and age categories. The results of Harrison's (1983) detailed study and his illustrations of each sex and age category for all the species are of particular value, and permit almost every frigatebird seen reasonably well to be identified.

Since the 'Birds of Somalia' (Ash & Miskell 1983) was written I have had the opportunity to see many hundreds of frigatebirds of three species, and have spent much time in identifying the various sex and age groups from field sketches. As a result some earlier identifications require revision and birds claimed to be Lesser Frigatebirds *F. ariel* in Somalia are reidentified. The details of plumage are not given here in the following list of records of *F. minor*, for they can be found in Harrison (1983) by referring to the relevant sex and age category.

- a. Gezira (1.56N, 45.11E), 1 November 1978, 1 juvenile 1st stage white breasted form drifting NE along the coast.
- b. Gezira, 8 August 1979, 1 as above feeding with terns Sterninae.
- c. Mogadishu (2.02N, 45.21E), 24 November 1980, 1 immature male 2nd stage, drifting SW along the coast.
- d. Mallable (2.12N, 45.37E), 16 October 1981, 1 juvenile 1st stage white-breasted form, drifting NE along the coast.
- e. Gezira, 12 November 1981, 1 (as d. above), feeding with flocks of terns.
- f. Gezira, 16 November 1981, 3 (as d. above), feeding with a flock of terns.
- g. Gezira, 24 July 1980, 2 frigatebirds drifting slowly NE high above the sea in poor visibility were probably *minor*.

Of the eight individuals of *minor* recorded, one was in August and the remainder within a period of less than six weeks during 16 October to 24 November. All the birds were in juvenile/immature plumage, but this does not necessarily represent recent fledging for this plumage may be retained for up to 2½ years (Diamond 1975). The race *F.m. aldabrensis* breeding in the western Indian Ocean south of the equator on Aldabra, Tromelin and Cargados Shoals (Harrison 1983), is characterized in immature birds by white or yellowish-white heads (Diamond 1975). The evidence suggests that the birds seen in Somalia belong to this race.

The distribution maps in Harrison (1983) show both *F. minor* and ar-

iel along the eastern coast of Africa extending from Mozambique as far north as the equator in Somalia in the case of *minor* (and South Africa as outside its normal range), and *ariel* extending to about 5 degrees N (and the Gulf of Aden as being outside the normal range). Brown et al. (1982) show *minor* extending continuously from South Africa to the equator in Somalia, but *ariel* from about Dar es Salaam in Tanzania along the whole of the Somalia coast to about 15 degrees N in the Ethiopian Red Sea. However, there is only one record of *ariel* from Somalia (Archer & Godman 1937), and previously there have been no records of *minor* (Ash & Miskell 1983). Further south in East Africa, although there are numerous records of unidentified frigatebirds, there is only one of *ariel* from Tanzania, and three records of *minor* - two from Kenya and one from Tanzania (Britton 1980). Bailey (1968) found *F. ariel* and other unidentified frigatebirds off the coasts of Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania, but they were far out to sea - the closest to land being over 60 km out.

The new entry for the Somalia check-list is:

- 19a *Fregata minor aldabrensis**+ Greater Frigatebird 29
Rare non-breeding visitor with 8 recent records on SE coast in Aug, Oct, Nov. 63cd, 69a.

The previous entry for *ariel* needs to be amended as follows:

19. *Fregata ariel iredalei* Lesser Frigatebird+ 30
An old record of 2 birds on the NW coast in Jul. 2a. (Also 2 unidentified *Fregata* in the SE in Jul.)

Indian House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Of special interest now that Indian House Crows are increasing in several areas and have acquired pest status, is a report by Davis (1951) which was overlooked when the 'Birds of Somalia' was being prepared (Ash & Miskell 1983). He describes how four house crows were blown on to his ship as he was leaving Colombo, Sri Lanka, and remained aboard for six days until they flew off at Cape Guardafui (11.50N, 51.17E), Somalia, where they were watched through binoculars as they flew ashore. Ship-assisted passage of this sort has been attributed for the spread of this species to other areas (e.g. Feare & Watson 1984), but it must be rarely possible to substantiate the claim. There is an unconfirmed report of them doing damage to dates at Bulhar (10.23N, 44.25E) in northern Somalia in 1972, but searches by J.E. Miskell and myself failed to find any there in 1979.

The new entry for the Somalia check-list is:

- 406a *Corvus splendens protegatus* Indian House Crow 1174
One old record of the Sri Lankan race from the NE. 7a.

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Scopus 9: 108-110, September 1985

Received 8 May 1985

A RECORD OF THE LESSER FRIGATEBIRD *FREGATA ARIEL* FROM KENYA

During mid January 1980, my daughter Laria and I were at the Ocean Sports Hotel, near Watamu, Kenya (3.21S, 40.01E), outside one of the hotel's cottages on the rise behind the beach. We saw a frigatebird *Fregata* sp. flying northwards, inland of the line of casuarina trees which grow along the top of the beach. We had never seen a frigatebird in the wild before, but I know them well from films. The bird passed overhead at a height of about 40-50 feet (12-15m), and I obtained good views of the underside through binoculars.

Field identification of frigatebirds is difficult (see Harrison 1983), but this individual was readily recognizable as an adult male Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* by its unique ventral plumage pattern which was entirely black apart from a clearly visible oval white patch on each flank, which tapered to a point on the underwing. The flight was leisurely, with very slow, buoyant wing-beats. I immediately made a sketch of the bird's general shape and underside pattern, but did not record the exact date as I was unaware of the absence of earlier records of this species in Kenya. The time was about 16:15 - 16:30, and the date was between 12 and 15 January. The weather was clear, with a light breeze.

The race *F.a. iredalei* breeds on islands in the western Indian Ocean and disperses north to the coasts of India and Somalia (Harrison 1983, Ash & Miskell 1983), however, Ash (1985) has reappraised the Somalia records so that its status in that country now rests on a single old record of two birds in the NW. The only certain records of the species from the eastern seaboard of Africa south of Kenya are single reports in October (a skull) and May at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (Britton 1980, East African Bird Report 1983, Harrison 1983). The present record is the first of the species from Kenya.



Ash, J. S. 1985. "Two additions to the Somalia list: greater frigatebird *Fregata minor* and Indian house crow *Corvus splendens*." *Scopus* 9, 108–110.

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