

BULLETIN
OF THE
BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

Volume 88

Number 1

Published : 4th January 1968

The six hundred and forty-seventh meeting of the Club was held at the Rembrandt Hotel, London, on the 19th December, 1967.

Chairman: Mr. R. S. R. Fitter

Members present: 17; Guests 3.

The Chairman introduced two of the Fauna Preservation Society's colour films, one entitled "Lake Wilderness" taken at St. Lucia, Natal, and the other entitled "A Million Flamingos" taken at Lake Nakuru, Kenya.

Affinity of *Turdus litsitsirupa*

During a visit to Britain I have been struck by the similarity of the Aethiopian *Turdus litsitsirupa*, though comparatively shorter-tailed, to the Palearctic *T. philomelos* and *T. viscivorus*. Both C. W. Benson and myself had independently considered it to be nearer to *T. viscivorus*, and he was interested in the fact that my observations of the nests and eggs reinforced this impression. The slightly larger eggs of *T. viscivorus* strikingly resemble those of *T. litsitsirupa*, and the nests are decidedly similar in site, construction and lining, differing from the egg-type and distinctive cemented lining of *T. philomelos*. Although authorities like Meinertzhagen (1951, *Ibis* 93: 443-459) and Voous (1960, *Atlas of European Birds*) have not commented on the relationship between *T. viscivorus* and *T. litsitsirupa*, it may merit superspecific recognition.

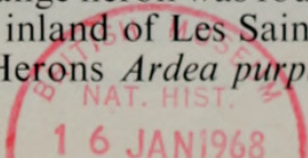
P. LE S. MILSTEIN

A hybrid Purple × Grey Heron on the Camargue

by JEFFERY HARRISON AND PAMELA HARRISON

Received 29th September, 1967

On 26th April, 1967, a strange heron was found feeding on the Camargue in the south of France, just inland of Les Saintes Maries de la Mer. There were a number of Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea*, also feeding along the



same channel, from which it was quite distinct. After studying and photographing it at ranges down to 25 yards we came to the conclusion that it could be nothing other than a hybrid between the Purple and the Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*.

In size it was slightly larger than the Purple Herons and its general stance was different, for it stood with its neck held much straighter and thus lacked the characteristic kink of the Purple Heron.

In colour it bore a superficial resemblance to the Grey Heron. The main striking difference between either of the two species mentioned was in the pattern of the head and neck. The whole crown was black as in the Purple Heron, but the black was far more extensive behind the eye. This could be accounted for as being derived from the black band running back from the eye in the Grey Heron. The black line running from the base of the mandible, below the eye back to join the extensive black on the back of the head is clearly derived from the Purple Heron.

The black lines running down the side of the neck appeared more conspicuous than in either species. The back of the neck was pale grey, the front white and the ground colour showed a distinct trace of chestnut.



Hybrid Purple x Grey Heron on the Camargue.

The mantle, long scapulars, wing-coverts, rump and upper tail-coverts were also pale grey with a trace of chestnut on the scapulars. The underparts were whitish. The flanks were black, which showed as a black patch in front of the shoulder at rest and there was no sign of any chestnut. However, the feathers of the thigh were definitely yellowish rather than white.

In flight, the contrast between the blackish flight feathers and the grey wing-coverts was more marked than in the Purple Heron.

The beak was a bright orange-yellow; the irides and legs a paler yellow.

Confirmation of our field identification came from Dr. James Harrison, who had recently seen hybrid Purple \times Grey Herons bred in captivity in the Tel Aviv Zoo, Israel. These birds were very similar to the Camargue bird.

The Purple Heron is a common nesting species on the Camargue, where the Grey Heron is still a rare nesting bird, although three pairs proved to be nesting in 1964. Although in general, the Grey Heron tends to nest in tall trees and the Purple Heron in reed beds, both occasionally nest in low bushes, (the Camargue Grey Herons were in dead tamarisk bushes) and the Grey Heron has been found nesting on the ground. There is no complete ecological barrier therefore, which could prevent hybridisation. This would seem most likely to occur in the fringe area of a species expanding its range, where a lone bird of the expanding species is more likely to find itself in isolation from its own species. This would apply to the Grey Heron had the hybridisation occurred on the Camargue, where it is now regularly seen in summer.



Photos: Pamela Harrison

The hybrid in flight showing the contrasted wing pattern.

We are most grateful to Dr. James Harrison, Dr. Luc Hoffman and Mr. Alan Johnson for their advice with this note.

Reference:

Blondel, J., (1965). Le Heron cendre, *Ardea cinerea* L., nicheur en Camargue. *L'Oiseau* 35: 59-60.

The tracheae of hybrid Anatidae

by J. V. BEER

Received 27th September, 1967

Gray (1958) has listed some 400 inter-specific, inter-generic and even inter-tribal hybrids in the Anatidae, many of which show a remarkable degree of fertility, a characteristic of this family (Johnsgard, 1960a). Their plumage is usually intermediate between that of the parent species but hybrids may also show novel characters or sometimes resemble other species (Harrison, 1953; Harrison & Harrison, 1963; Gillham, Harrison & Harrison 1966; Sage, 1966). The behaviour of hybrids shows a comparable pattern and Sharpe & Johnsgard (1966) consider that both plumage and behavioural characters are under the control of relatively few genes. These features have both evolutionary and taxonomic significance.

The structure of the tracheae of the Anatidae is a valuable taxonomic character (Johnsgard, 1961a) and, despite their diverse form, only one brief comment, in a paper by Harrison (1964), has been found on a trachea from a hybrid.

Hybrid tracheae have been obtained from post-mortem material examined at the Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, and from material supplied by Mr. J. Hall. Dr. J. M. Harrison loaned several specimens from his museum collection of tracheae.

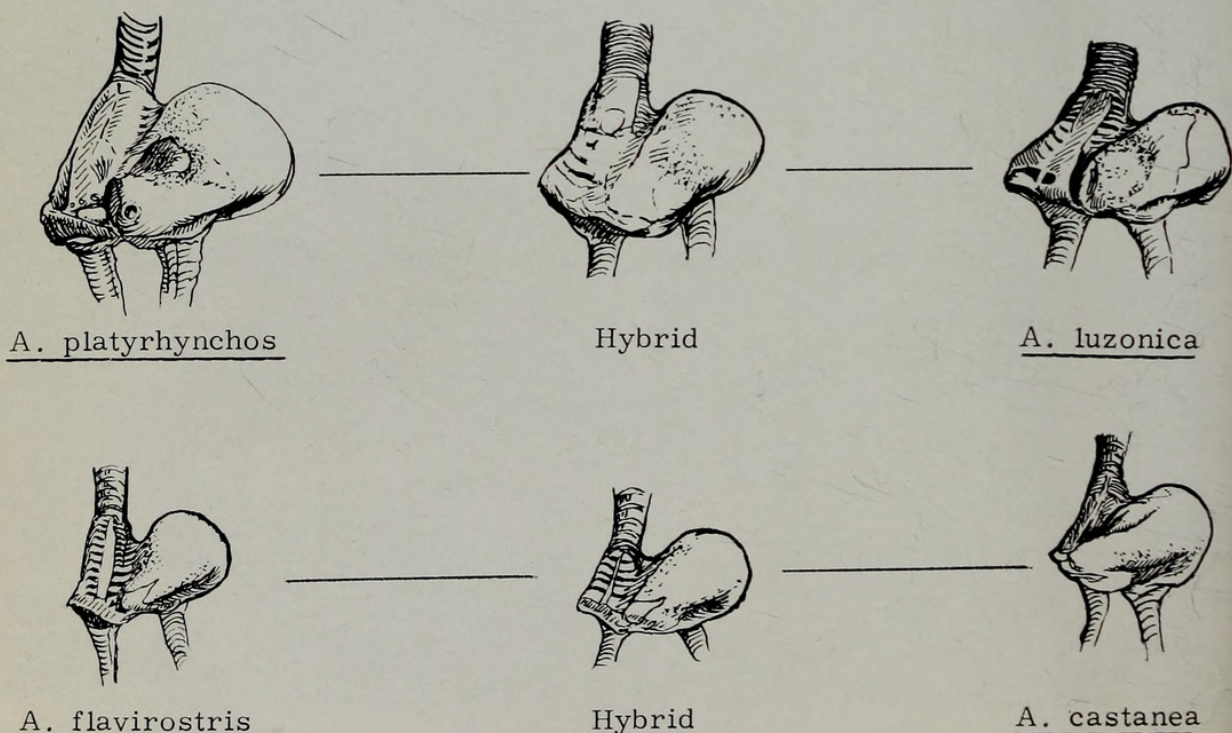


Fig. 1. Syringes of hybrid Anatini—Mallard and teal forms. Ventral view $\times \frac{2}{3}$



Harrison, James M. and Harrison, P. 1968. "A hybrid purple x grey heron on the Camargue." *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 88, 1-4.

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