

**The Birds of Ghana**, by L. G. Grimes. B.O.U. Check-list No. 9, British Ornithologists Union; London (1987). Pp. 276. No price quoted.

Llewellyn Grimes' '*Ghana*', next Old World tropical check-list after the giant of the series, '*Wallacea*' (reviewed in this journal), returns to more customary proportions and format. Taxonomy is reduced in most cases to a mere notification of the published use of alternative scientific (mostly generic) names, bridging gaps from the Old Bannerman and Mackworth-Praed & Grant stand-bys. Sister publication of '*Nigeria*' (ELGOOD, 1982), it covers a major slice of the same fauna, distributed over the same east-west striking vegetation zones though with some differentiation in high forest on account of its refugium status west of the Dahomey Gap. Ghana, however, is only half the size of Nigeria and nowhere extends to Sahelian latitudes, or to montane altitudes.

54 pages of introductory material open with a couple of paragraphs on the tumultuous political history of the country (a brief whose coup for non old-coasters) before plunging into more serious stuff. Indeed, despite all, it is impressive how fieldwork has pushed ahead in modern times. The history of ornithological studies is treated discursively, as in other African numbers, rather than in the list form of Asian numbers to date (an editorial dichotomy?). This is followed by a most thorough physical geography, ranging from geology and soils via drainage patterns and climatic variables to the zonation of vegetation, embellished by more good photographs than any preceding check-list in the series. Those of the tree savanna of the coastal Accra plain are particularly striking and readers even in Thailand, attuned to pyromaniac peasant farmers, may have difficulty in believing most of this was formerly high forest (evidence for which includes the finding of relic rock-fowl, *Picathartes*, nests!). A shot of the Volta H.E.P. lake, which has so altered wild conditions in east-central Ghana, would have been worth the extra space. As everywhere in West Africa, especially in the high forest zone, the impact of agriculture on distribution and abundance of wildlife runs deep. Conservation in this zone is an uphill task, as instanced by Bia National Park which in the first three years of its existence shrank from 305 to a mere 77 km<sup>2</sup>.

The text then moves to review in detail links between arthropod abundance, plant phenological cycles and precipitation and cloud cover (no less than six seasons are recognised in the forest zone), as a prelude to avian breeding season data. Patterns that emerge have general similarity to those over comparable latitudes of tropical Asia but with greater emphasis on year-round activity, especially among insectivores and nectarivores (though I still hesitate to believe in a real difference). Migration patterns, a subject of abiding interest to West African ornithologists and extensively researched especially in Nigeria, get seven pages that present a synthesis entirely lacking for tropical Asia. The hundreds of recoveries of ringed birds in Ghana (Appendix 2) reflect the country's longitudinal position relative to Western Europe.

Short concluding sections treat differences between Ghanaian and Nigerian faunas (18 endemic forest tree species and 32 bird species of forest otherwise

belonging to the Lower Guinea fauna indicate the ancient refugium status of this area), and possible lines of new work. Much must depend on the entry of more educated Ghanaians into the field (depressingly few feature in the bibliography) but opportunities are vast. Thus, no-one yet seems to have exploited illuminated structures to assay nocturnal migration in Ghana, by way of an example.

721 species of confirmed occurrence and 15 pending are covered in 151 pages of systematic section. Grimes packs in ecological information, to the extent that format will permit, and has clearly scoured the literature. Up-dating seems thorough. '*Nigeria*' has provided a model for the handling of breeding and migration data, with much cross-referencing between countries, allowing a comparison that it would seem sensible to extend to the up-coming Sierra Leone check-list. To have drawn on seasonality data from as far away as the Congo basin, though, may not have been especially useful. From an Asian perspective it is hard to offer criticism in detail though one or two of the generic names used still seem a little parochial, eg., *Verreauxia* for the broader, more conservative *Sasia*, among the woodpeckers. A more general systematic point is that the series has yet to adopt a consistent sequence of families or, for that matter, an agreed set of family names. These are small but surely desirable objectives.

The work concludes with a number of appendices, treating status, impressive ring recovery data (though the table of retraps from M. Lockwood's work at Tafo is of limited information value), a very useful eco-taxonomic analysis by habitat category, some little-known specimen collections, weights, taxa named from Ghana, a gazetteer and a full bibliography – more references, in fact, than are actually cited in the text. In sum, avifaunal studies in Ghana are now well served.

With the next review to appear, B.O.U.'s series breaks into double figures. Enthusiasm for the production of these exhaustive, authoritative paper-backs shows no sign of waning and the policy of restricting them to areas that have had no modern or accessible treatment is clearly now a liberal one. Already they are far more than the traveller's companions that may once have been envisaged and as coverage grows the series is destined to become an important world source for certain categories of information. A need may perhaps arise to weight their content and role against that of more traditional regional handbooks, the various kinds of atlases now in vogue and even field guides. Successor editions seem almost inevitable and the general editor must long ago have begun to wonder just where the whole thing will end.

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