

MY TEN MOST DANGEROUS BIRDS

D. B. Hanmer

Some time ago a friend asked how, on a scale of one to ten, I would compare the bite of the Thickbilled Weaver and the Blackcollared Barbet. I forget now how I answered him, but recently I have been thinking about which birds I definitely do not like to handle.

Obviously, big things like raptors and owls (which have strong talons and are not afraid to use them), herons (with sharp, stabbing bills and a desire to put your eye out), ducks and geese (nasty, dirty, clawed feet that will give you septicemia if they do not actually disembowel you) and even Giant Kingfishers *Megaceryle maxima* (with a fibre-glass bill that has all the sharp ends facing backwards and can take all the skin off your hand), are unpleasant to remove from mist nets, but these are not commonly caught by the average bush ringer (although I have done so, to my sorrow). Thus I have limited my list to common species, weighing 100 g or less, which I have trapped in the same area and which, temperamentally, are the most likely to attack the unwary ringer.

1. Blackcollared Barbet *Lybius torquatus*, or perhaps Whyte's Barbet *Buccanodon whytti*. I am not too sure about the latter, as he only managed a small nibble, but as I have not caught the two species together, I feel that either could top the list.
2. Thickbilled Weaver *Amblyospiza albifrons*.
3. Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris* or Puffback *Dryoscopus cubla*. Again, I have not caught the two in the same area, but both are liable to cause much blood-loss.
4. Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter minullus*. Their needle-sharp claws can inflict a painful injury; give me a Giant Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus* or Ayre's Eagle *Hieraetus ayresii* any day.
5. Spottedback Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*. Males of course, females are positively innocuous. [Indeed? Ed.]
6. Forktailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*. One has to watch out for both bill and claws.
7. Southern Black Tit *Parus niger*. This is surprisingly nasty for so small a bird.
8. Brownhooded Kingfisher *Halcyon albiventris*. The Woodland Kingfisher *H. senegalensis* has just as big a bill with the same fibre-glass edging, but it does not seem to use it quite as much.

9. Rattling Cisticola *Cisticola chiniana*. Their needle-sharp claws are very painful when stuck under a human nail.
10. Goldentailed Woodpecker *Campethera abingoni*. Should one consider that you look like a nice block of rotten wood, it will eventually stab right through bones and all.

Perhaps other ringers, those who go out to the nets barehanded and not clutching a portmanteau containing thin, thick or welder's gloves, selotape, masking tape and elastoplast (the former two to bind up bits of bird and the latter to bind up the ringer's hand), rubber bands of various sizes (useful for Kingfishers), quick-un-pick (for quick release of too dangerous birds), scissors, pliers, hammer and a vice-grip (all probably useful for something), might have other ideas about what bites hardest or is a trifle dangerous to handle.

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STRANGE LADY

Gustav A. Swanson

Imagine the thoughts and feelings of the helpful farmer (HF). He was driving his pickup along a lightly traveled rural road in northern Colorado when he saw a strange lady (SL) beside her car 50 feet off the road. He could see the auto tracks where it had left the road and come to rest in a hayfield. His first thoughts were: "That poor little old lady. She must have dozed off and her car left the road. She needs help." So he stopped and called to her:

H.F. Having trouble?

S.L. No, I'm OK.

H.F. Sure you don't need any help?

S.L. No, but thanks anyway.