INTRA-AFRICAN MIGRATION IN OUR BUSH BIRDS

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I am of the opinion that it needs to be proved that any particular bush bird is resident in a named area. Brooke (1975) reported on a 12½ year study of the bush birds in 218 ha of Acacia woodland near Salisbury, Rhodesia. 207 species were recorded and of these only 24 or 12% were recorded in every month of the year. Only these 24 species are candidates for resident status and two of them, the Red-billed Quelea Quelea quelea and the Grey-rumped Swallow Pseudhirundo griseopyga, certainly did not breed in the area. Ringing data, prolonged methodical bird watching and taxonomic analysis of collected material all show that partial or total migration is the normal situation in southern African bush birds. Unfortunately, the literature on this subject is fragmentary and scattered through many publications except for a few species where the migratory pattern is very obvious or it has recently been reviewed by a worker.

Three of Hanmer's (1977) migratory species in southern Malawi are more interesting than she has supposed. The Black Cuckoo-Shrike Campephaga phoenicea is a wide-spread visitor to the Rhodesian and Zambian plateaus from September to April (Benson et al. 1970). It would appear from Hanmer's data that the lower Shire valley is a major wintering area for plateau birds. The Coppery Sunbird Cinnyris cupreus is a breeding visitor to Rhodesian plateau from September to April (Howells 1971). Again it would appear from Hanmer's data that the lower Shire valley is a major wintering area for plateau birds. The Coppery Sunbird Cinnyris cupreus is a breeding visitor to the Rhodesian plateau from September to April (Howells 1971). Again it would appear from Hanmer's data that the lower Shire valley is where they go to. The Purple-banded Sunbird Cinnyris bifasciatus is a breeding visitor to the Rhodesian plateau from July to December (Brooke 1970) and again it would seem that they go to the lower Shire valley. In short, Mrs Hanmer's work nicely complements that done on the plateaus and provides probably non-breeding grounds for three visitors to the plateaus.

References

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Dale Hanmer replies:-

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I would agree with Richard Brooke that bush birds are probably not continuously resident in one particular small area because of the possibility of insufficient food sources in some months. I feel that it may not be possible to equate behaviour in a small area with overall behaviour in southern Africa, nor to equate behaviour with that occuring in tropical lowlands where a more equable climate may provide food over most of the year.

Brooke gives a 12% residence rate for a small area (218 ha) near Salisbury but at Dichwe Forest (40 ha) near Mangula, Rhodesia, Talbot (1976/77) seems to have 33% apparently resident, or at least present both summer and winter. Cooper (1972) found about a 20% resident rate for the Zambezi valley between Kariba and Zumbo (which I think is rather low). My own work in the lower Zambezi, between Dona Anna and Chinde (Hanmer 1976) gives a residence rate of 52% for the not so small area (7 000 ha) round the village of Mopeia and 72% for the whole area. For the lower Shire valley, sighting figures have not yet been computed but it appears from my trapping figures that about 50% of the species netted are resident in the small area (300 ha) about my home. For the whole valley, residence rates are probably as high or higher.

I feel it is a bit sweeping to suggest that all Black Cuckoo-shrikes, Coppery and Purple-banded Sunbirds from the Rhodesian and Zambian plateaux, come to the lower Shire for the non-breeding season. I should expect most of them to be found in the Zambezi valley and on the coastal plains of Mocambique, although birds from eastern Zambia might well join highland Malawian birds in the Shire valley. Unfortunately, the literature at my disposal is scanty and equivocal on the subject. Cooper (1972) found the Black Cuckoo-shrike in the "middle" Zambezi only in the non-breeding season but the two sunbirds were found in the breeding season. Talbot (1976/77) found the Black Cuckoo-shrike and Coppery Sunbird in Dichwe Forest in the non-breeding season (although they might have been in transit) but the Purple-banded Sunbird was apparently present only during the breeding season. Hanmer (1976) found both the Black Cuckoo-shrike and the Purple-banded Sunbird to be resident in the lower Zambezi (with no noticeable influx in the off-season). Admittedly the Purple-banded Sunbird concerned was the sub-species which is supposed to be resident on the Mocambique coast (Clancey 1971). The Coppery Sunbird did not, apparently, occur in the area. Benson and Benson (1977) states that the Black Cuckoo-shrike in Malawi migrates from above 1 000 m to low valleys during the winter and that the Coppery Sunbird migrates from above 480 m to (apparently)