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bobbing display and calls, its throat patches and details of plumage, but it may yet prove to be more closely related to the Damaraland form than its yellow-eyed neighbour. Joris Komen of the State Museum of Namibia assisted me to obtain tissue of the Damaraland form, and plans are being made to compare its proteins and mitochondrial DNA with those of the other populations, to another angle on its status. Your help in discovering the contact zone, where possible cases of hybridization can be studied, would be much appreciated.

Dr Alan Kemp, Department of Birds, Transvaal Museum, P.O. Box 413, Pretoria, South Africa.

LEAVES AND FLOWERS IN THE DIET OF GREY LOURIES AND YELLOWBILLED HORNBILLS IN NAMIBIA.

Both the Grey Lourie Corvithaixoides concolor and Yellowbilled Hornbill Tockus flavipatrulus are well known species in southern Africa, yet information on their diets is scanty. This is especially true for information on plant material in their diet. During October 1988 both these species were seen feeding on young leaves of several tree species and, in one instance, Aloe leaves.

At CDM Camp, about ten kilometres west of Tsukwe, Bushmanland, both species were seen feeding on young leaves and leaf buds of Boscia albitruna. Several Grey Louries could be found in Boscia trees at any one time. Leaf buds were selected in preference to leaves and considerable time was spent "choosing" the right bud, on occasion buds being picked and then rejected. Yellowbilled Hornbills were observed doing this on only one occasion, and they were not selective in their choice of leaves or buds. One hornbill (presumably male) would occasionally feed the other bird (female?) with a leaf or bud, but only after the female "demanded" the bud or leaf by hopping close to the male and extending her beak towards him.

Grey Louries were observed feeding on leaf buds and young leaves of Acacia erioloba at Leeupan in the Kaudom Game Reserve, Kavango. In the surrounding deciduous Burkina woodland they were seen to eat the flowers of Burkina africana. The flowers of this tree are probably wind-pollinated and are therefore likely to be low in nectar. The direct benefit to the birds is probably only as raw vegetable material, not the high energy sugars normally found in nectar.

At CDM Camp, a large stand of Aloe zehriina plants have been cultivated near the house. Several Grey Louries were seen foraging in this stand of plants and were initially thought to be catching insects. On closer inspection they were found to be feeding on the leaves of the plants. The soft fleshy base of the leaves was eaten first and then the central portion was eaten outwards leaving only the tough marginal spines. Several plants were reduced to a spiral of leaf "stumps" in this way.

Yellowbilled Hornbills are normally insect eaters and although Grey Louries are known to eat a range of plant parts their preferred food is fruiting material. The behaviour and observed diet of these birds is ascribed to a shortage of preferred food items at this time of the year. The high temperatures and dry conditions, and the phenology of the food plants at the time when the observations were
made, preclude the normally preferred food items of these two species, viz. insects and fruit. The utilization of Aloe zebra plants is interesting because the plants occurring naturally in the veld at this time of the year are usually reduced to a small, dried out stem with a few dried leaves still attached. The Aloe is therefore unlikely to be a food item normally utilized by Grey Louies at this time of the year, although it may form part of the diet of this species later in the summer when the plants in the veld have regrown.

Diets of birds are generally poorly known, especially those of certain groups of near-passerines and passersines. The phenomenon of birds utilizing non-preferential food items during times of stress must be widespread especially in semi-arid and arid environments, but is seldom reported. Casual observation over a period of time can reveal much about what a bird is eating, when and possibly why. The feeding requirement of a bird species is often an important aspect of management strategy for the conservation of that species, but as is so often the case our knowledge of the species with regard to its food and feeding is lacking and we are often too late in finding out these exactly are. The importance of casual observations cannot be stressed enough and I would encourage anyone who has the time to observe any species of bird closely to keep notes, which after a while can result in a surprising large body of publishable information.

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YELLOWBILLED HORNBILL FEEDS GREY HORNBILL NESTLINGS

I am currently studying four species of hornbills (Monteiro's, Grey, Yellowbilled and Redbilled) breeding in nest boxes in Daan Viljoen Nature Reserve, near Windhoek. The study largely aims to investigate the energy requirements of the different species at various stages of the nesting cycle. To obtain the required information on energy requirements I visit the boxes every three to four days.

On 19 May 1990 I was driving along and noted an adult male Yellowbilled Hornbill flying past, carrying food in his beak. Being unaware of any Yellowbilled Hornbills breeding in that immediate area, I stooped and followed his movements. With great surprise, I saw him alight in a tree and hop up to a nest box which contained three Grey Hornbill chicks, aged about 28-30 days. He presented the food at the nest hole entrance and this was apparently taken by the nestlings.

Such unusual and maladaptive behaviour is hard to explain. I am certain that the male did not mistake the nest hole as his own, since no Yellowbilled Hornbills nested in boxes nearby.

John Mendelsohn, The State Museum of Namibia, P.O. Box 1203, Windhoek.

DISTRIBUTION OF GREATER SWAMP WARBLERS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

According to Maclean (1985) and Newman (1983) the Greater Swamp Warbler's Acrocephalus rufescens southern African distribution is restricted to the Okavango delta in Botswana. Elsewhere in Africa, they are commonly found in suitable habitat south of the Sahara, ranging from West Africa across to south-central Africa (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Large areas of the East Caprivi, bordering the Zambezi, Kwando and Chobe Rivers, as well as the Mahango Nature Reserve bordering the Kavango River in eastern Kavango, have large perennial and seasonal wetland areas. In these areas, inundated Hyparrhenia grassland, extensive mixed Cyperus papyrus, Typha latifolia and Phragmites australis reedbeds are permanent or temporary homes for large numbers of European Sedge A.A. schoenobaenus, African Marsh A.A. rusticatus, Cape Reed A.A. gracillimemus and Reed A.A. arundinaceus Warblers. Greater Swamp Warblers appear to be restricted to Papyrus swamps where they may be quite common.

During a few birding visits to the Kavango River and East Caprivi wetlands during 1986 to 1988, Greater Swamp Warblers were trapped, collected, recorded and seen at a number of Papyrus swamp localities (Figure 1). Since these warblers are territorial and show vigorous response to playback of male advertising calls, the status of the species is readily recorded. On the Kavango River outside the Mahango Reserve, Greater Swamp Warblers were only documented at two localities; the Cuito-Kavango junction near Katera and Popa Falls. The presence of the warblers (at least two males) at Popa Falls was surprising since the papyrus vegetation there covers a tiny area in contrast to areas of papyrus swamp observed elsewhere. No warblers were found at any of the accessible small patches of papyrus vegetation between Popa Falls and the Bagani bridge.

It is noteworthy that the Greater Swamp Warbler has not been reported further east along the Zambezi than the present record of a few birds at an isolated ‘malapo’