

Observations of birds of the Soyo area, northwest Angola

by C. STAVROU¹ & M.S.L. MILLS^{2,3}

¹Andrea Avraamidi 91, Nicosia 2024, Cyprus. <stavrouchris@gmail.com>

²A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, University of Jos,
PO Box 13404, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

³Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, DST/NRF Centre of Excellence,
University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa

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Summary

The birds of the Soyo area, in extreme northwest Angola on the southern bank of the Congo River, are relatively poorly known. Here we report observations of 107 species made from November 2009 to May 2010. Among these are 36 species new to the area, bringing the known total to 156. Of particular interest are the wet season observations (January–April), a period during which few previous records have been made.

Resumo

As aves da região de Soyo, no canto noroeste de Angola na margem sul do Rio Congo, são relativamente pouco conhecidas. Aqui apresentamos novas observações de 107 espécies feitas entre Novembro 2009 e Maio 2010. Entre estas contam-se 36 espécies novas para a região, aumentando a lista de espécies para 156. As observações realizadas na estação das chuvas (Janeiro–Abril) são particularmente interessantes, por este ser um período com muito poucos registos até hoje.

Introduction

The birds of Soyo, Zaire Province, northwest Angola (6°8'S, 12°22'E), situated on the southern bank of the Congo River, are poorly known (Dean 2000). Prior to the 2006 surveys of Dean & Le Maitre (2008), only 25 species had been collected in the area. Dean & Le Maitre (2008) reported 110 species, which, with ten species previously collected but not found during their surveys, brought the total species list for the Soyo area to 120. The vegetation of the Soyo area was described by Dean & Le Maitre (2008).

From November 2009 to May 2010, CS made numerous visits to Soyo, to work on the construction of the Angola Liquid Natural Gas (ALNG) pipeline. He made bird

observations as his work schedule allowed, generally along the route of the pipeline and in areas nearby. These include wet-season observations (Jan–Apr), a period during which no previous observations had been made at Soyo but when many species of Ploceidae are in breeding plumage. Dated observations for each species are given, though where there are several observations per month, just the month may be mentioned.

Study area

CS visited various habitats along the pipeline, from Sereia beach to Cadal Channel and into Kwanda base, areas around the “accommodation camp” (hereafter “Camp”) and the road leading to it, areas around the Pangui creek, the dirt road to Sereia beach, the coastal dirt track from Sereia beach south to “PC2” camp and areas in Soyo town (Fig. 1). The range of habitats surveyed includes the coastal savannas of Sereia beach (Fig. 2A), mixed cultivated fields (mainly of Cassava *Manihot esculenta* and Groundnuts *Arachis hypogea*) and wooded land south of the Pangui creek, palm savannah and thickets south of “Road Crossing” (Fig. 2B), with diggings and pools (Fig. 2C), extensive mangrove habitat adjacent to the various creeks (Fig. 2D), tidal pools (Fig. 2E) and a small swamp close to PC2. Dominant trees in surveyed areas were Baobab *Adansonia digitata*, Monkey Apple *Strychnos henningsii* and Ilala Fan Palm *Hyphaene guineensis*.

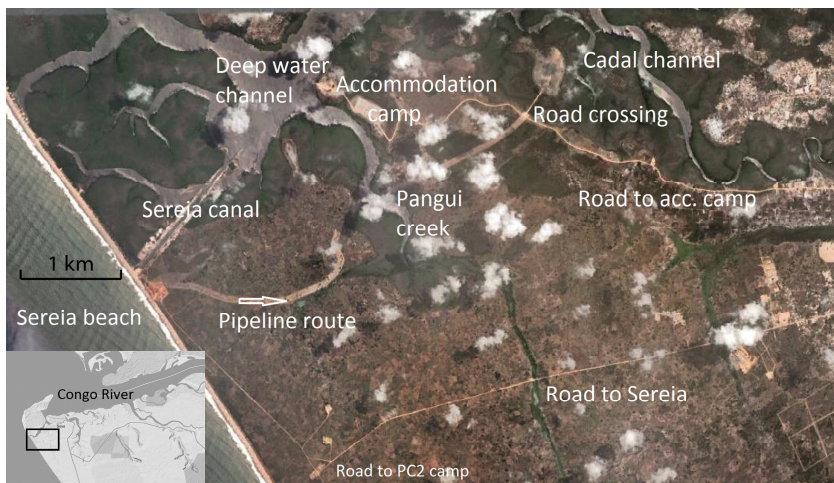


Figure 1. The study area indicating most of the sites mentioned in the text. Inset shows location of this area (black rectangle) near the mouth of the Congo River.

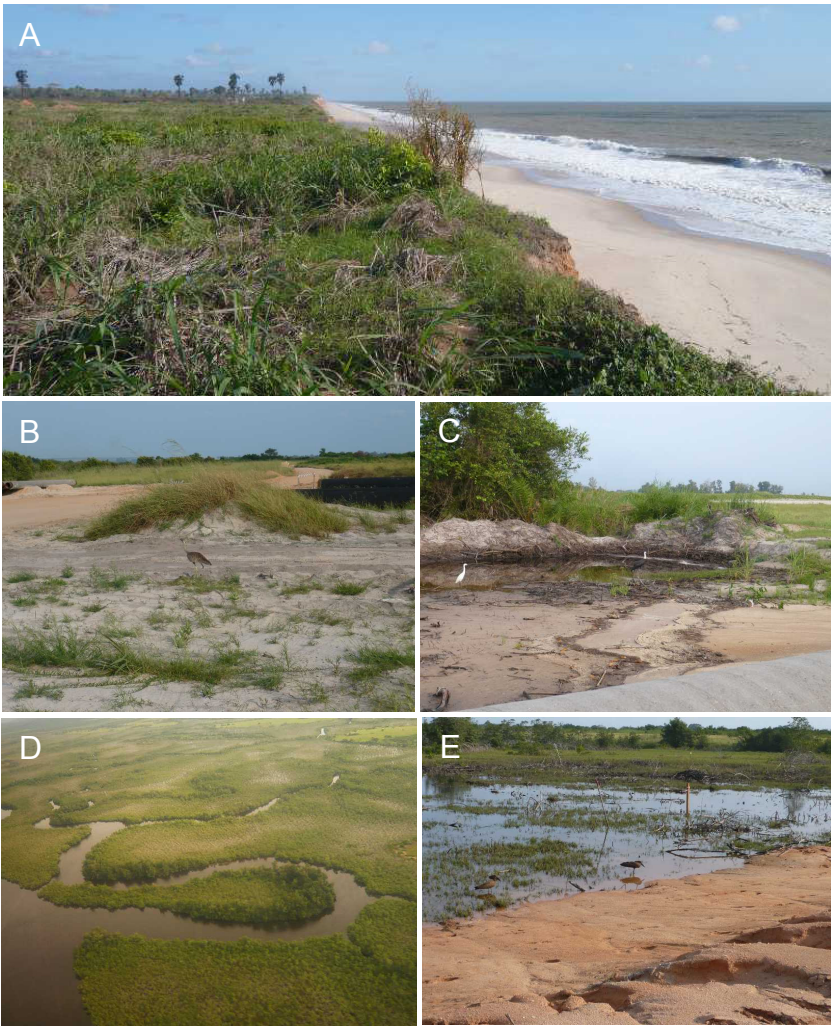


Figure 2. A: coastal savanna at Sereia Beach, 8 Nov 2009. B: Black-bellied Bustard *Eupodotis melanogaster* at Road Crossing, 13 Feb 2010. C: Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* and Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* in pools created along the pipeline route, 2 Feb 2010. D: mangrove creeks on the banks of the Congo, northeast of Soyo, 27 Jan 2010. E: Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* in tidal flood pools close to Camp, 13 Feb 2010.

Results

We report a total of 107 species. The 36 species not recorded previously in the area are marked with an asterisk: many of them were predicted to occur in the area by Dean & Le Maitre (2008). These 36 bring the total known for the Soyo area to 156.

Phalacrocoracidae

Phalacrocorax africanus Reed Cormorant. Four records of single birds flying over the main road or perched in mangroves, 15 Feb, 3 and 6 Mar.

Scopidae

Scopus umbretta Hamerkop. Singles and pairs seen on most days in mangrove clearings at Road Crossing and behind Camp. Nov–May.

Ardeidae

Ardea goliath Goliath Heron. Five records of single birds flying over Camp and PC2. 20 Nov, 4 and 6 Dec, Mar.

A. purpurea Purple Heron. Four records of single birds in mangrove swamps behind Camp, Dec, Feb.

A. melanocephala Black-headed Heron. Pairs seen on three occasions, either perched on trees next to the road to Sereia beach or at the canal close to Sereia beach. Up to 13 regularly counted at Pangui creek. Fifteen birds counted around the swamp close to PC2. Feb–May.

Bubulcus ibis Cattle Egret. Seen regularly in groups of up to 30 at Soyo town rubbish piles, perched on trees along the road to Sereia and in cultivated fields close to Sereia beach, Feb–May.

Egretta garzetta Little Egret. One at Road Crossing, 2 Feb.

**E. intermedia* Yellow-billed Egret. One behind Kinwica Hotel, Feb; another at Road Crossing, 5 Mar.

E. alba Great White Egret. Two records of single birds at Road Crossing, Feb, Mar; one flying over Kwanda base, 25 May.

**E. ardesiaca* Black Heron. One seen in mangrove swamps behind Camp, 18 Dec.

Threskiornithidae

Threskiornis aethiopicus Sacred Ibis. One bird seen on a palm tree close to Kinwica hotel, 14 Feb; two in a palm tree at Kwanda Base, 27 Apr; two flying around the swamp at PC2, 22 May.

Bostrychia hagedash Hadada. Two in the mangrove clearing behind Camp, 21 Dec.

Ciconiidae

Ciconia episcopus Woolly-necked Stork. Frequently seen on mud flats around Camp and at Road Crossing, and soaring overhead. Usually in pairs, largest group 9 birds, 4 Nov–May.

**C. abdimii* Abdim's Stork. One bird in cultivated fields, 2 May; 11 in a clearing next to Pangui creek, 8 May; two at Road Crossing, 13 May. All probably on northwards passage.

Accipitridae

Milvus migrans Yellow-billed Kite. Seen on most days. More than ten together with a flock of 20 Broad-billed Rollers observed catching insects over the rubbish dump and c. 15 observed over the clearing at Pangui creek. Nov–May.

Elanus caeruleus Black-shouldered Kite. One adult seen close to Camp, 19 May.

Pandion haliaetus Osprey. Six records of single birds and one of two birds, flying along the coastline or perched in mangroves, Nov–May.

Haliaeetus vocifer African Fish Eagle. One seen perched over water next to the road to Sereia beach, 2 May.

Gypohierax angolensis Palm-nut Vulture. Seen every day; both adults and juveniles, Nov–May.

**Terathopius ecaudatus* Bateleur. One seen in flight, 9 Dec.

Polyboroides typus Harrier Hawk. Six records of birds in flight close to Pangui creek and Sereia beach, 28 Dec, Feb–Mar.

Buteo auguralis Red-necked Buzzard. Six records of single birds, 11 Nov, Feb, 2 and 25 May.

Falconidae

Falco ardosiaceus Grey Kestrel. A pair seen regularly at Sereia beach, plus five records of single birds, perched on palm trees close to Pangui creek, at Road Crossing or at Camp, 17 Dec, Feb–May.

**F. cuvierii* African Hobby. A single bird perched on a baobab tree close to Sereia beach, 29 Feb.

Numididae

**Numida meleagris* Helmeted Guineafowl. A flock of c. 15 seen flying through thickets next to the main road to Luanda c. 17 km south of Soyo, 24 May.

Phasianidae

**Pternistis afer* Red-necked Spurfowl. A pair in Cassava cultivation next to the road to Camp, 14 May.

Rallidae

**Crex egreggia* African Crane. One bathing in a shallow puddle close to Sereia beach, 16 Feb.

**Amaurornis flavirostra* Black Crane. Three and two birds seen in a swamp close to PC2, 28 Apr, 22 May.

Otididae

**Eupodotis melanogaster* Black-bellied Bustard. Five records of single birds walking in tall grass next to the dirt road leading to Camp, 2 and 13 Feb, 9 Mar, May.

Jacanidae

Actophilornis africanus African Jacana. Four and two birds seen in a swamp close to PC2, 28 Apr, 22 May.

Burhinidae

Burhinus vermiculatus Water Thick-knee. Seen regularly. Three in a clearing in mangroves at Road Crossing. Heard in the evening at Pangui creek and up to nine birds flushed out of mangroves there. Feb–May.

Scolopacidae

Tringa glareola Common Sandpiper. Seven records of single birds, Dec–Mar.

Laridae

Sterna maxima Royal Tern. Four seen in flight at Deep Water Channel. Nov.

Columbidae

Streptopelia semitorquata Red-eyed Dove. Recorded daily, 15 Dec–May.

S. capicola Cape Turtle Dove. Two seen in a Baobab on the coastal road, 26 May.

**Turtur afer* Blue-spotted Wood-Dove. Several seen in Mar. *Turtur* spp. were seen and heard daily but the two species were difficult to distinguish.

T. chalcospilos Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove. One perched close to Pangui creek, 11 May.

**Oena capensis* Namaqua Dove. Two males seen along the dirt road leading to Camp, 17 and 23 Mar.

Cuculidae

Chrysococcyx caprius Diedrick Cuckoo. One male seen, 26 Feb.

Centropus senegalensis Senegal Coucal. A pair and a single bird seen along the coastal road to Sereia beach, and another bird seen regularly in thickets close to Pangui creek, 31 Jan to 9 May.

C. superciliosus White-browed Coucal. Seen and heard regularly on the road to Sereia beach and at Pangui creek, mostly single birds, 28 Jan–May.

Strigidae

**Bubo africanus* Spotted Eagle-Owl. One seen in daylight in mangrove swamps, 20 Dec; one at night on the road to Camp, 2 Feb; two at night perched on pipes along the pipeline clearing close to Pangui creek, 3 Mar; one found dead, 4 Mar.

Caprimulgidae

Caprimulgus fossii Square-tailed Nightjar. One found dead on the front bumper of a vehicle, 2 Feb.

Apodidae

Cypsiurus parvus African Palm Swift. Seen daily around a palm tree in Camp, Nov–May.

Apus affinis Little Swift. A single and two birds seen close to PC2, 22 Mar, 22 May.

Coliidae

Colius castanotus Red-backed Mousebird. Seen daily, usually in pairs, but up to 14 observed together, 11 Nov to 9 May.

**Urocolius indicus* Red-faced Mousebird. Five seen near Pangui creek, 26 Feb.

Alcedinidae

Halcyon senegalensis Woodland Kingfisher. Seen and heard regularly, Nov–May.

H. helicuti Striped Kingfisher. A pair seen on a palm tree at Sereia beach and two single birds at Pangui creek, Feb and 25 May.

Ceyx pictus African Pygmy Kingfisher. Single birds seen frequently, Dec–May. One seen entering its nest burrow with food in Dec.

Ceryle rudis Pied Kingfisher. One seen at a creek close to Kifouma village south of Soyo, 24 May.

Meropidae

Merops pusillus Little Bee-eater. Singles and pairs seen regularly at Sereia beach and close to Pangui creek, Feb–May.

M. bullockoides White-fronted Bee-eater. A pair seen perched on a low branch next to the road to Sereia beach, 6 Feb; *c.* 30 around nest holes in an earth quarry 15 km south of Soyo, 24 May; a flock of *c.* 50 around nest holes in an earth quarry 5 km from Soyo, 27 May.

**M. apiaster* European Bee-eater. Pairs or small groups seen regularly, Nov–Mar. More than 30 flying north, 9 Mar.

Coraciidae

Eurystomus glaucurus Broad-billed Roller. Single birds or pairs seen almost every day, 20 Nov–May. A large group of *c.* 20, together with > 10 Yellow-billed Kites, seen hawking insects over the rubbish dump.

Upupidae

**Upupa epops* Hoopoe. Single birds seen close to Pangui creek, 25 Dec, 12 and 24 May.

Bucerotidae

Tockus fasciatus African Pied Hornbill. Three sightings; two pairs and four birds 15 km south of Soyo, 28 Dec, 16 Feb, 24 May.

Capitonidae

Pogoniulus bilineatus Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird. One seen 15 km south of Soyo, 24 May.

**Lybius minor* Black-backed Barbet. Two seen 15 km south of Soyo, 24 May.

Picidae

**Campethera cailliautii* Green-backed Woodpecker. A pair in trees close to Sereia beach, 22 Feb.

Alaudidae

**Mirafra rufocinnamomea* Flappet Lark. Birds seen in display flights over open savanna at Camp, Nov.

Hirundinidae

**Riparia riparia* Sand Martin. Three records of single birds, and a pair seen around a sand bank. 15 Dec, 5, 10 and 17 Mar.

**Psalidoprocne pristoptera* Black Saw-wing. Four flying overhead close to Sereia beach, 16 Feb; two seen 15 km south of Soyo, 24 May.

Hirundo abyssinica Lesser Striped Swallow. Frequently seen in May; also *c.* 20 seen along the coast, 25 Feb; six close to Pangui creek, 10 Mar.

H. semirufa Red-breasted Swallow. Two seen close to Sereia beach, 14 Feb.

H. rufigula Red-throated Cliff-Swallow. Several seen on two occasions flying around and entering a burnt down oil storage tank next to PC2, and *c.* 50 seen flying over a bush fire, 25 Feb, 22 and 24 May.

Motacillidae

Anthus pallidiventris Long-legged Pipit. Seen every day, usually in pairs, Nov–May.

Campephagidae

**Campephaga quiscalina* Purple-throated Cuckooshrike. Two females and one male seen close to Road Crossing, 28 May. Identification was based on the plumage of the females, but the birds were in rather atypical habitat. Petit's Cuckooshrike *C. petiti* occurs on the north bank of the river Congo (Dean & Le Maitre 2008).

Pycnonotidae

Pycnonotus tricolor Dark-capped Bulbul. Seen every day, usually in pairs, Nov–May.

Turdidae

**Cossypha heuglini* White-browed Robin-Chat. One seen at the swamp close to PC2, 22 May. *Cichladusa ruficauda* Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush. Seen daily in cultivated land, around palm trees and in roadside thickets, Nov–May.

Sylviidae

Cisticola bulliens Bubbling Cisticola. Seen every day, Nov–Mar, frequently in tall grass around Camp, at the edge of mangroves and in palm savanna. Sang most in Nov–Dec.

C. aridulus Desert Cisticola. Seen every day around Camp, Nov–Mar.

**C. juncidis* Zitting Cisticola. One seen in display flight adjacent to the main road to Camp, 29 Apr.

Camaroptera brevicaudata Grey-backed Camaroptera. Single birds seen on three occasions in thickets close to Pangui creek, 9, 10 and 20 May.

Platysteiridae

**Batis minulla* Angola Batis. A pair seen twice in thickets close to Pangui creek, 8 and 12 May.

Platysteira albifrons White-fronted Wattle-eye. One female seen in thickets close to Pangui creek, 11 May; a pair at the same spot the following day.

Paridae

Parus leucomelas White-winged Black Tit. One seen in mangroves at Pangui creek, 7 Mar.

Nectariniidae

Chalcomitra fuliginosa Carmelite Sunbird. A pair seen feeding on flowers in thickets close to Road Crossing, 12 Mar; single females seen on several occasions, May.

Cyanomitra verticalis Green-headed Sunbird. A pair seen twice in thickets close to Pangui creek, 9 and 11 May.

Cinnyris bifasciatus Purple-banded Sunbird. Seen every day, with up to nine in one day, Nov–May.

Malaconotidae

**Tchagra australis* Brown-crowned Tchagra. Two seen in trees close to Camp, 4 Nov; three in cultivated fields with scattered trees close to Sereia beach, 22 Feb.

**T. senegalus* Black-crowned Tchagra. One seen in open grassland close to Pangui creek, 18 Nov.

Laniarius bicolor Swamp Boubou. One seen in mangrove thickets close to Camp, two mating in mangroves at Pangui creek and birds were often seen in thickets close to Pangui creek, 2 Mar–May.

Malaconotus sulfureopectus Orange-breasted Bush-shrike. Single birds seen in thickets close to Pangui creek, 9 and 11 May.

Corvidae

Corvus albus Pied Crow. Seen daily, Nov–May. A pair nested on the communications tower at Camp in Nov. At least 70 seen soaring close to Soyo town, 6 Mar.

Sturnidae

Lamprotornis nitens Cape Glossy Starling. Seen every day, Nov–May. A pair nested in a pole at Camp, Dec.

**Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* Violet-backed Starling. A male seen perched close to Road Crossing, 27 May.

Passeridae

Passer griseus Northern Grey-headed Sparrow. Seen daily at Camp where a pair nested, and frequently seen throughout the study area, Nov–May.

Ploceidae

Ploceus ocularis Spectacled Weaver. Birds were seen going into nests hanging off palm leaves next to Pangui creek, with five nests in use along a short length of the creek, 17 Dec–May.

P. cucullatus Village Weaver. Two colonies (subspecies *nigriceps*) found in Baobab trees: one on the road to Sereia beach, 14 Feb; the other *c.* 2 km inland from Sereia, 19 Mar.

P. superciliosus Compact Weaver. One seen on tall grass close to Pangui creek, 17 Dec.

P. nigricollis Black-necked Weaver. A male seen in thickets close to Pangui creek, 13 May.

**Quelea erythrops* Red-headed Quelea. About 20 seen in a mixed flock with Bronze Mannikins, in tall grass close to Pangui creek, 16 Mar.

**Q. quelea* Red-billed Quelea. One large flock seen with males of both red and white morphs, 18 Mar; another group of eight birds, 23 May.

**Euplectes afer* Yellow-crowned Bishop. One male in breeding plumage on the coastal road to PC2, 28 Apr.

**E. hordeaceus* Black-winged Bishop. Two records of single males: one close to Sereia beach, 2 Feb; the other on the main dirt road to Camp, 11 Mar.

**E. aureus* Golden-Backed Bishop. Two records of single males: one close to Sereia beach, 22 Feb; the other behind Kinwika hotel, 18 Mar.

**E. macrourus* Yellow-mantled Widowbird. Seen frequently throughout the study area, 21 Dec–May.

**E. albonotatus* White-winged Widowbird. Single birds and small groups of the long-tailed Angolan subspecies *asymmetrurus* seen frequently in tall grass, 5 Feb–Mar.

Estrildidae

Lonchura cucullata Bronze Mannikin. Commonly seen in large parties with young, or in mixed flocks with other estrildids in grasslands, cultivated fields and at the edge woodland, Nov–May.

Uraeginthus angolensis Blue Waxbill. Commonly seen on dirt roads or in grasslands and woodland edges, Nov–May.

Estrilda perreini Grey Waxbill. A pair seen in thickets close to Pangui creek, 13 May.
E. melpoda Orange-cheeked Waxbill. Two records of a single bird in a mixed flock, 10 and 17 Mar; 10+ seen in a mixed flock close to Camp, 11 May.

E. astrild Common Waxbill. One seen outside Camp, 19 Dec; a pair observed close to PC2, 25 Feb; one bird in mangroves at Pangui creek, 8 Mar; a flock of *c.* 10 at Camp, 21 Mar.

Viduidae

Vidua macroura Pin-tailed Whydah. Seen frequently throughout the study area, 17 Dec–May; a flock of *c.* 20 male and female birds was seen close to Pangui creek, with some males displaying.

Fringillidae

**Serinus mozambicus* Yellow-fronted Canary. A pair feeding in tall grass next to the main road to Camp, 7 Mar.

S. capistratus Black-faced Canary. Three seen on tall grass close to PC2, 22 May.

Emberizidae

Emberiza tahapisi Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. Commonly seen, 4 Nov–Mar.

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