

MAN-BIRD INTERACTION: ETHNO-ORNITHOLOGY OF OFFA, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Ethnoornithology of indigenous birds in Nigeria has been poorly studied. This research was conducted in Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria to access human-bird interactions. Twenty-seven (27) species of birds were encountered, 20 were diurnal and seven (7) is nocturnal. The survey showed awareness of all the respondent about all these species and their local names were obtained. Fifteen (15) of these birds were reported to be consumed as meat in the area. Domestic chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) and Quail (*Coturnis communi*) were mostly consumed and they were availability for sale in the market. Also, nine (9) species of these birds were used for ornamental purposes, six (6) of the species were reported superstitious. It is important to document the economic value and anthropogenic considerations for these bird fauna for conservation purposes.

Keywords: Bird fauna; Biodiversity conservation; Offa, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Ethnoornithology is the study of the relationship between people and birds (Berkes, 1999). It refers broadly to the complex of inter-relationships between birds, humans, and all other living and non-living things, whether in terrestrial or extra-terrestrial spheres or the body or spirit (Gosler, 2012). Ethnoornithology as a concept involves exploring how people of various times and places seek to understand the lives of the birds around them. It involves the recognition of the diversity of birds by humans' especially indigenous people (Gosler, 2012). People give local names to birds by way of describing the birds' voice, colours, action, or dwelling place. By so doing, these indigenous people share almost the same knowledge with the professional ornithologists (Arbon, 2008). These indigenous people already have knowledge for many generations about their interaction with the physical and spiritual world through processes of conceiving, considering, and experimenting (Trafzer *et al.*, 2008). Anthropologists, linguists, biologists, geographers, historians, folklorists, curators, activists, and indigenous scholars serve as contributors to ethnoornithology (Sillitoe, 2007). The precise period of the start of Ethnoornithology cannot be determined because it depends on how different cultures perceive birds. In Nigeria, indigenous people have ethnoornithological knowledge but this knowledge is not properly reported or studied. Hence, the present study aimed to find out ethnoornithological information from the indigenous people in Offa area of Kwara State for conserving Nigeria's biodiversity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

This study was carried out in Offa, Southern Eastern part of Kwara State, Nigeria. It has savannah vegetation. It covers an area of 85km² and is situated between latitude 8^o 9' and 8^o 150'N of the equator and Longitude 4^o 43' and 4^o 717'E of the Greenwich Meridian. The area has a tropical climate with two major seasons: the wet seasons (April to October) and dry season (November to March). The area is known for having different species of birds.

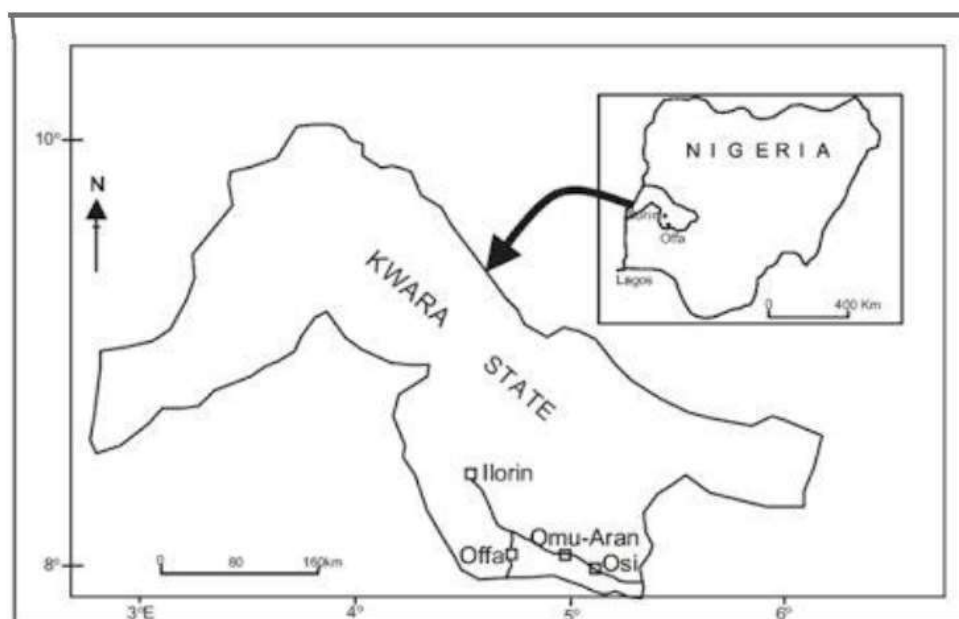


Figure 1: Map of Offa and neighboring villages in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Ethno-ornithological survey

During the fieldwork, four villagers who were indigenes of the place were employed. They comprise of men and women with experience in farming and hunting; they were randomly selected and interviewed and found familiar with the birds in that area. Some birds were caught in the area, photographs were taken using a Nikon DSRL- 40 camera. For some birds that are recognized to be native of the area that was not captured, photographs from literature and Kwara State museum were also used.

Ethno ornithological information was collected utilizing formal discussions and unstructured interviews with the selected groups (20 times). During the interviews, a PowerPoint presentation which included photographs of 27 bird species was shown to the participant in order to gather information. The content of the information sought from the participant was presented in Table 1 during the interview their responses were taken.

Table 1: The list of questions used to obtain information about birds in Offa.

Main question	Specific questions
Local name	Derivation of local names and reasons
Feeding	What, when, and how
Egg-laying	Where, when, and time of the year
Nesting habits	Types of the nest, and where does the nests built
Behavior	Special behavioral aspects
Bird songs	Type of bird songs
Mating	Mating behavior and season
Edibility	Meat or Egg

Prediction	Usage in predicting future events
Medicinal value	Which parts and for what kind of illnesses
Biological control	Are they used, how
Ornamental value	Are they used, how
Superstition	Is any attached to the birds, what
Folklore	Is any attached to the birds, what
Predators	To which animals they become prey

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey identified twenty-seven birds and they were selected for the study. All the 27 were well recognized by the participants as 22 were provided with local names (Table 2) while five were not identified with local names by the respondents. The birds have one or more local names. Generally, all the birds were collectively called “Eye” in the Yoruba Language and by Offa people. So each bird’s local name is usually preceded with “Eye” followed by the specific local name of the bird. For example, Bearded barbet (*Lybius dubius*) is called “Eye Olosan” and they also call the same bird “Olosan” without the prefix “Eye”.

Fifteen birds of the list were reported to be edible and were consumed by the Offa people. Seven bird species were reported to be non-edible due to their link with superstitious beliefs. Five of the birds had no information about the edibility (Table 2). However, domestic chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) and quail (*Coturnis communi*) are eaten mostly by the villagers as the former is domesticated and the latter is found in the market. Except for domestic chicken and quail, others are found in the traditional markets along with the herbs and bush meat sold by the traditional doctors and hunters. Hunting of birds as a food source and income generation is a known practice by multi-ethnic groups of Sukuma in Shinyanga and Mwanza regions of Tanzania (Loibook *et al.*, 2002; Bitanyi *et al.*, 2012).

Nine species of birds in the list also have ornamental value for the villagers mainly due to their bright and colourful plumages while 19 had no ornamental value (Table 2). The plumage is used in decorating caps usually worn by rulers, chiefs, and other various kinds of monarchs within the villagers. During cultural dances and ceremonies, the artist used feathers in decorating clothes as well. Table 3 shows the list of birds used for ornamental purposes. Ethno-ornithology of Offa in this research reveals its connection to language, ethnography, folklore, philology, geography, and literary scholarship. Such interactions had been reported (Bright, 2003; Njeri and Maundu, 2008).

Bird’s local names in the area were derived from bird’s characteristics such as bird songs or calls, morphology, color, feeding behaviour, flying pattern, and habitat. The Colour of the plumage and type of beak is the most important morphological characters that help in identifying the birds. Table 2 shows the local names and their derived features. A study of bird singing characteristics was reported by Kassagam, (1997) as a way of deriving its local names and cultural beliefs among the peoples of Kenya.

Few bird species on the list are related to superstitions. Some of them are considered agents of evil and fortune. According to the villagers, superstition is attached to six bird species from the list provided. Domestic chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) was believed to be a good sacrifice for the god of wealth and fortunes, sacrificing it was believed to be rewarded with fortune. Pied crow (*Corvus albus*) was believed to be non-egg laying but it incubates

eggs of other birds to hatch their chicks. Cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) was believed to be a bad omen if one point at it by the finger while it is flying, the images will appear on the fingertip as white. Killing and cooking of cattle egret is a taboo and it brings death to the consumer. According to the villagers, 23 bird species from the list were diurnal and only one was nocturnal. Table 3 shows the diurnal and nocturnal birds, no information was obtained on the life habit of three species. In general, the Offa people ethno-ornithology has not shown any practice of preserving or protecting the sacred birds, and no important means of sustainable conservation of birds for various uses and future avitourism was reported throughout the survey. Further study on the biology of bird species in Nigeria is important to achieve its conservation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This is one of the pioneer documentation of ethnoornithology studies done in the Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. This study document information about the man-bird relationship. Birds were found to be an important natural resource for people as sources of food, medicine, spiritual object, ornamental, and agent of communication. As some birds are seasonal. This type of ethnoornithology research may help understand the need for the conservation of nature. Future research for extended period will give information on seasonal and migratory bird in the area.

Table 2: Birds identified by indigenous people of Offa, Kwara State Nigeria

Scientific Name	Common Name	Local name	Food	Superstitious	Ornamental	Time of Activities
1 <i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i>	Domestic Chicken	Akuko (Cock), Agbedo (hen), Oromodiye (chicken)	Yes	Yes	Feathers	Diurnal
2 <i>Lamprotornis purpureus</i>	Purple glossy stsrling	N.A	N.A	No	Feathers	N.A
3 <i>Cornifer piscator</i>	Western plaintain eater	Kolikoli	No	No	N.A	Diurnal
4 <i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Common Gordon bulbul	Pee , Asoso	Yes	Yes	N.A	Diurnal
5 <i>Coracias Abyssinians</i>	Abyssinian roller	Okin Igbo	Yes	No	Feathers	Diurnal
6 <i>Lamprotornis caudatus</i>	Long tailed glossy starling	Baba dudu	No	No	Feathers	Diurnal
7 <i>Corvus albus</i>	Crow	Kana kana	No	Yes	N.A	Diurnal
8 <i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	Drongo	Opeere	Yes	No	N.A	Diurnal
9 <i>Centropus senegalensis</i>	Senegal coucal	Elulu	Yes	Yes	N.A	Diurnal
10 <i>Corvinella corvine</i>	Long tailed shrike	N.A	Yes	No	N.A	Diurnal
11 <i>Turdus pelios</i>	West African thrush	N.A	N.A	No	N.A	Diurnal
12 <i>Tockus nasutus</i>	African grey hornbull	Atiala, Atiolo, Tiolo, Saeke	Yes	No	N.A	Diurnal
13 <i>Halcyon Leucocephala</i>	Grey Kingfisher	Pejapeja; Yojayoja	Yes	No	Feathers	Diurnal
14 <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Cattle egret	Lekeleke	Yes	Yes	Feathers	Diurnal
15 <i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>	Pearl spotted owlet	Owiwi, Oyo	No	Yes	Feathers	Nocturnal
16 <i>Lybius dubius</i>	Bearded barbet	Olosan	N.A	No	N.A	Diurnal

17	<i>Chalcomitra senegalensis</i>	Scarlet chested sunbird	Eye Karo	Yes	No	N.A	N.A
18	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>	Wood hoope	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
19	<i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>	Red cheeked cordon blue	Agarun	Yes	No	N.A	Diurnal
20	<i>Mesopic goatee</i>	Grey woodpecker	Akoko	Yes	No	N.A	Diurnal
21	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Laughing dove	Odeere, Adaba	Yes	No	Feathers	Diurnal
22	<i>Ploceus melanocephalus</i>	Village weaver	Ega	Yes	No	Feathers	Diurnal
23	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Black kite	Asa Awodi, Asa idi, Idi	No	No	N.A	Diurnal
24	<i>Ploceus tricolor</i>	N.A	Ega	Yes	No	N.A	Diurnal
25	<i>Turdoides plebejus</i>	Brown babbler	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	Diurnal
26	<i>Turdoides plebejus</i>	Brown babbler	Opeere	N.A	No	N.A	Diurnal
27	<i>Cortunis communi</i>	Quail	Aparo	Yes	No	N.A	Diurnal

Table 3. Local names, meanings and their derived factors

Common name	Local name	Meaning of the name	Derivation factor
Long-tailed glossy starling	Baba dudu	Dudu means black and baba means man in the Yoruba Language i.e Blackman	Colour
Domestic Chicken	Akuko	Calling song “Kukuruku”	Bird song
Common Gordon bulbul	Pee	Calling song “Pee-pee”	Bird song
African grey horn bull	Atiala, Tiolo Atiolo, Saeke		Movement and Bird song
Cattle egret	Lekeleke	The name was derived from the superstition attached to the bird. When flying, you must not point at it; the image of the bird will appear on your fingernails. The adding of images on your nails is termed “leke”	Superstition
Grey Woodpecker	Akoko	From the pecking sounds produced when pecking on wood “koko”	Behavior
Laughing dove	Odeere	Also derived from the calling song “Odeerekuukuu”	Bird song

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