

AN ETHNO-ORNITHOLOGICAL STUDY IN ÒKÈ-ODÒ AND TÁNKÈ BÙBÙ VILLAGES IN ILORIN, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Introduction

Ornithology, as the scientific study of birds, now stands as a leading example of the power of global science (Sillitoe, 2007) to explain the functioning of the natural world through an experimental paradigm. Ethno-ornithology is the study of birds, and the prefix “ethno” calls to mind ethnology, ethnography – that is, having to do with the diverse peoples of the Earth (Tidemann and Gosler, 2010). The present study will describe the uses of birds in two villages in Nigeria, Òkè odò and Tánkè bùbù



Fig. 1: A map of Africa showing the location of Nigeria (insert), a map of Nigeria showing Kwara State and the Òkè odò and Tánkè bùbù villages (star).

Methodology

This study was conducted from October 2013 to February 2014 during which period ten field visits were undertaken to the two villages: Òke oddò and Táńkè bùbù. The people of these villages have a very good knowledge about nature and its inhabitants. The informants were selected based on the recommendations of the elderly hunters.

Interviews were conducted with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire composed of two parts: subject area and specific questions. To facilitate the interviews, a PowerPoint presentation on 42 species of birds was shown to the informants. The bird photographs were taken between February 2013 and March 2014 around Ilorin in Kwara State in Nigeria.

Results and discussion

The study helped to gather a considerable amount of important information pertaining to vernacular names, edibility, African magico-medicinal uses, ornamental purposes, predictions, superstitious practices, representation in folklore and nesting habits of birds.

Vernacular names

The villagers were able to identify 39 bird species and also provide their local names. Some birds seem to be related; Purple Glossy Starling (*Lamprotornis purpureus*) and Long-tailed Glossy Starling (*Lamprotornis caudatus*) are known as Yóri-yóri, and the Abyssinian Roller (*Coracias abyssinicus*) is known as *Ọba yóri-yóri* which means the king of yóri-yóri. The Laughing Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) is known by another name: *Àtábàor Àdàbà*. The cock and the hen (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) are identified separately as *Àkùkọ* and *Adiye abo* respectively.

Edible birds

Among the 42 species considered for study, 24 were found to be edible. Although the Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) is edible some consider its meat to be black. Many species of birds are not eaten mainly because they are small in size.

African magico-medicinal uses

Among the birds identified in this study, 27 species are used for African magico-medicinal uses, for illnesses such as Arthritis, health problems related to children, and bareness. The whole bird as well as feathers, legs, heads and scales are found to be more useful in preparation of medicine. The usage of birds is also largely reflected in magical practices.

Superstitious practices

The study revealed that 13 bird species are known to be connected with superstitious beliefs. Some of the superstitious beliefs are linked to death. For example, people do not encourage the domestication of the Quail (*Coturnis communi*) because they believe that rearing this bird at home will lead to the death of several people in the house while the loud call of the African Scops Owl is known to be a bad omen.

Representation in folklore

According to the informants, 10 bird species are related to folklore and proverbs, poems and sayings.

Conclusion

In *Òkè-odò* and *Tánké búbú* villages in Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria, birds are utilized for different purposes and are of great social, economic and cultural importance. Birds are useful as food (meat, eggs and bones), in African magico-medicinal uses, as instruments of ritual and magical practices, as ornamental birds, and as pets for pleasure and companionship. Furthermore, birds are also used to afflict “bad” on persons, and in the oral tradition and in proverbs. Most birds are known and recognize through their behavior and vocalizations.

Local bird names originate from color of the plumage, vocalizations, feeding behavior and their preferred habitat. Some of the names have been derived onomatopoeically from their vocalizations. Each of the vernacular names also have different meanings. Thus, bird names are an important part of the social and personal lives of people.

About 27 species of birds are important in African magico-medicinal uses highlighting the knowledge and beliefs of the villagers in the healing capabilities of birds. The use of birds in traditional practices and beliefs of indigenous people in the *Òkè-odò* and *Tánké búbú* villages shows parallelism with Philippines and other Asian and African cultures.

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