Other records from the same general area have also been mentioned but have not been confirmed. Further records are needed especially to establish which species are being parasitized by this cuckoo.

M. C. Jennings.

MOUNTAIN NIGHTJAR: A NEW BREEDING BIRD FOR ARABIA

In November 1982, whilst camped in a mountain wadi in the highlands of the Asir Province (IA13) of Saudi Arabia, I heard a night-call that I did not recognise. I had with me a mini tape recorder, used for noting sightings, and with this I was able to record the call. The recording quality was poor but ultimately, as I will explain, it proved to be invaluable in identifying the bird making the call.

In the weeks that followed I searched the bird literature I had to hand to place the mystery bird but to no avail. I then sent a copy of the tape to various ornithological friends but none could put a name to it. Unfortunately, because of business pressures, I was unable to return to the wadi in question before my company transferred me to Riyadh.

The tape then lay archived for eight years until my memory of the event was stirred by reading the article on the spotted thick-knee in Arabia by Michael Gallagher and Karen Stanley Price in Sandgrouse Vol. 12. I wrote to Michael and sent a copy of the mystery bird tape and asked him if he thought the call might have been from one of the Burhinidae. Shortly after I received a letter from Prof Hilary Fry, whose opinion had been sought by Michael Gallagher, with the surprising and exciting comments:

"It is one of the Caprimulgus pectoralis complex, of three or four species of African nightjars, called Litany birds, because of their liquid rendering of "Good Lord Deliver"! From spectographic analysis and comparison with others in the group it was most probably C. poliocephalus - mountain nightjar."

In Professor Fry’s view the fact that the bird was singing, almost certainly indicated that it was breeding and it was also possible that, because its song was pitched lower than the nominate African species, it might be a new subspecies. (At this point in this brief account I must also gratefully acknowledge the considerable technical achievement of Dave Waters and Dr Peter Gray of Sultan Qaboos University for getting the best spectogram possible from a recording that was weak and of very poor quality to start with).

Since that time Peter Symens and Dr Steve Newton, both working for the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, Riyadh, have devoted considerable time and energy to securing positive proof of the identity of the mystery bird. Recently a specimen was mist-netted by Dr Newton and was positively confirmed to be C. poliocephalus by Peter Symens. A detailed note on this extremely localised new breeding species is currently being prepared and I shall therefore comment no further at this stage, other than to observe that, but for a chance recording and the ornithological and technical expertise of many people, I might still be puzzled by that haunting call I heard in the night so many years ago.

Arthur Stagg, British Aerospace, PO Box 34, Khamis Mushait, Saudi Arabia.

Note Vol 3 of the Birds of Africa records that in the Ethiopian highlands, this species inhabits the edges of olive, juniper and other moist forests. It forages over open ground, ploughed fields, pastures etc. Eggs are laid on bare ground in Ethiopia in May and possibly February. Ed.

BAYA AND STREAKED WEAVERS ARE NOW WIDESPREAD

Both the Baya weaver Ploceus philippinus and streaked weaver P. manjar are increasingly being recorded in Arabia and there seems little doubt that all owe their origin to released or escaped captive birds. Young of both species have been heard in nests in July 1991 near Riyadh (MB26), Saudi Arabia (D R James). Both may breed in Bahrain (See Erik Hirschfeld’s note on Bahrain escaped species below). The streaked weaver has also been seen at various spots in the UAE (see Colin Richardson’s UAE escapes and introductions report below). The following note on nest building and breeding activity of the streaked weaver near Qatif (PB30) eastern Saudi Arabia by Eamon Sarson and Mike Athendriou, illustrates how a lot of singing and nest building activity by weavers does not necessarily mean breeding is proven.

NEST BUILDING ACTIVITIES OF STREAKED WEAVER NEAR QATIF, EASTERN PROVINCE, SAUDI ARABIA

On the night of 28-29 April 1989 there were severe storms with very high winds, thunder, lightning and heavy rain (about 4 cm recorded) in the Eastern Province. However by 29 April midday it had become hot and still, when we made our regular visit to the sewage lagoon of the new King Fahd International Airport (PB30). It was clear from the deposit of debris that the overnight winds had been from east south east.

We became aware of an active group of unusual birds in a reedbed. Their striking yellow heads were prominent from a long distance. There were between six and eight birds in the dense reeds which also contained many warblers and house sparrows. The unidentified birds were very active and noisy. We assumed there were three or more males (which had the striking yellow crown) and a similar number of duller females. The male had a vivid
yellow crown, a very black face, cheeks, chin and nape. It had a heavily streaked back and a similar streaked breast but on a paler base and reddish legs. It was a compact bird, very much at ease on the reed stems, swaying easily with them and moving constantly. It had a strong, blackish bill. We were satisfied that they were a species of weaver.

We saw the birds again on 30 April and this time identified them as streaked weaver *Ploceus manyar* from King, et al., 1975; The Birds of South East Asia. Our initial field identification was later confirmed from photographs.

We saw the birds regularly in the next 22 days and, using the car as a hide, compiled the following details of their nest building activities, vocalisations and behaviour.

On 4 May we first noted nest building activities. A male was seen to settle about a foot from the top of a reed. It carefully 'nicked' the edge of the fresh green reed leaf and proceeded to tear off a very thin strip right to the top, taking flight to complete the severance in expert fashion. It then dropped out of sight into the reeds. Later as the wind moved the reeds back and forth we were able to see the male nest building at this spot. This reed leaf cutting action was repeated five times on this visit and on numerous occasions later, each time there was loud calling as the male approached the nest site and similar calling within the reeds followed by a silence as work proceeded on the nest. Males were also seen tearing off short lengths resembling string from the dead sheaths covering the lower reed stem.

One apparent aspect of nest building which we never understood was that the male often went down to the water's edge and appeared to bring back to the nest a beakfull of mud. On these occasions there was generally no calling except for a subdued chatter on the to and fro flights. When apparently collecting mud it would always go to the same spot at the base of the reed stem at the water's edge, alighting on the stem and then moving deliberately down to water level. It could more easily have landed directly on the ground. It would work away at completing a beakfull of material before flying back up to the nest site. Thirteen separate beak movements were counted to complete a load.

The male was also seen to regularly carry away what appeared to be discarded nest building materials from the nest site.

At the height of nest building activity the male could complete five reed cuts in five minutes and then make six consecutive 'mud collections' in rapid time. Most nest building activity was early in the morning, the bird being difficult to locate at midday. Nesting material was collected within 10 m of the nest except on one occasion the male made a long flight of 60 m across the corner of the lagoon where it cut and brought back a long length of reed. Occasionally the male would settle on top of the reeds and call loudly. Sometimes up to three males were seen in the vicinity of the nest which prompted much calling. Males were also seen at other locations.

After the first observation on 29 April the only other time a female was seen was on 10 May. After twenty-five minutes of constant activity by the male he was absent for twelve minutes. With an explosion of calls, three birds came to the nest site, two males and a female. The two males engaged in aggressive activity one chasing the other. The female went directly into cover at the nest site. Only one male returned from the chase (presumably the nest builder) and immediately commenced leaf cutting and nest building, with some strips about 40cm long, the longest seen. It then delivered a quite beautiful song from the nest site, as opposed to the repeated chatter heard in previous visits. There was no further sign of the female. Early in the morning on 13 May the male was seen at the top of a reed at the nest site preening vigorously and calling. It dropped into the nest site and two minutes later reappeared carrying nest material and flew south out of the reed area. After five minutes it returned apparently chasing a female house sparrow *Passer domesticus* which continued on its way as the male dropped into the nest site. Some time later this manoeuvre was repeated, and the male returned again, apparently shepherding two female house sparrows and all three made as if to go down to the nest site but only the streaked weaver did so, the two house sparrows perching on reeds nearby. It was deduced from this behaviour that in the absence of female weavers the male was extending its efforts to attract a mate to other species. A few minutes later the male reappeared and cut three further strips and continued work on the nest. Finally it perched on the highest reed top and burst into its full song.

Nest building and song were observed on 18 May but the last observations were on 22 May, when two males were again found at the nest site, calling and in full song.

In July mechanical reed clearance was in progress in the vicinity of the nest site so we decided to inspect, photograph and retrieve the nest. It was only partially complete and like an upturned basket with the handle towards the ground from which the male performed its calling routine. It was attached to only one reed stem and was built over water. The most puzzling aspect was that we could find no evidence of the mud which we had apparently seen the male collecting so assiduously. There was no trace of mud either inside or outside of the nest. We checked the reed area carefully but did not find any other nests.
It is well known that most weaver species are inveterate nest builders and nest building is no proof of breeding. On this occasion we gained no proof of breeding but had there been (more) females breeding may well have progressed.

The appearance of this group of weavers on 29 April after severe storms was mysterious. The normal western limit of the range of the streaked weaver is Pakistan. At first we thought it possible they were storm driven to Arabia by the east-south-east winds, but the winds could have, just as easily, dislodged another feral population from elsewhere in the Gulf. Alternatively they could have been escapes from a consignment of wild birds brought to Saudi Arabia for the pet trade that co-incided with the storm.

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REPORTING PROCEDURES: BREEDING EVIDENCE CODES FOR CUCKOOS

With the discovery that the Eurasian cuckoo Cuculus canorus probably breeds in Arabia (in addition to Klaas’s and didric cuckoos Chrysococcyx klaas and C. caprius) observers need to note a special variation of the Breeding Evidence Code (BEC) which relates to brood parasites. Finding a young cuckoo, or a cuckoo’s egg, in a nest, is confirmed breeding for both the cuckoo and the host species.

There is still virtually no information available for Arabian breeding Chrysococcyx cuckoos but in Africa Klaas’s cuckoo C. klaas parasitises the nests of small insectivorous passerines such as warblers and sunbirds and the didric cuckoo C. caprius parasitises weavers. Note that the great spotted cuckoo Clamator glandarius breeds in coastal areas of the African side of the southern Red Sea and in the Ethiopian highlands. This makes it a good possibility for breeding in south west Arabia. It lays its eggs in the nests of crows and starlings.

OMAN BIRD RECORDS

Bird recording in the Sultanate of Oman is now handled by the Oman Bird Records Committee (OBRC) which was established in 1986. The aim of OBRC is to collect all reports of birds observed in Oman, to serve as a rarity committee, to periodically produce an official list of birds of Oman (the Oman Bird List) and to encourage conservation and protection of birds in the Sultanate.

The committee has at present six members: Ralph Daly (Chairman), Michael Gallagher (Secretary), Matt Cummins, David Foster, Hilary Fry, and myself as Recorder. Scarce species (those with less than ten accepted records) require acceptance from all members. Usually the observer fills out a Rare Bird Report and/or submits photographs to the committee. The Recorder sends a photocopy of the claim along with a cover note detailing previously accepted records to each member. If all members do not accept the claim at this stage, it is discussed at the next meeting. We often seek help from experts abroad, especially from the British Museum (Natural History) and from members of the British Birds Rarity Committee. The latest Oman Bird List (third edition) is dated 28 February 1990. At present 425 species have been accepted.

All regular contributors of bird observations are members of the Oman Bird Group (OBG). There is no membership fee but everybody receives the Oman Bird News, edited by Michael Gallagher and issued twice yearly. This publication has grown into a very interesting newsletter with many articles on the birdlife of Oman and nearby areas. At present, OBG does not arrange field trips or talks since these are already organised by the Historical Association of Oman of which most birdwatchers in the capital area are members.

I joined OBRC in 1987 and became Recorder two years later. By this time the Oman Central Records (in the form of a card index) contained some 5,000 cards, listing an estimated 60,000 records. It was clear to me that the way to go would be to computerise the records.

A database management system was developed in Foxbase+ (compatible with dBaseII+, but much quicker). The system consists of four databases. The main database containing each bird record lists the species by Euring number, the observer as a three letter code, the number of birds seen, the site as another three letter code, the first and last date of a given observation, breeding evidence code as used by ABBA, sex and the age of the birds if known. In addition it is possible to include any further comments, long or short. The second database is a list of the species on the Oman Bird List and also contains information of where each species has been recorded in each of the five geographical regions that the country has been divided into. The third database is a list of all observers who have contributed with records, including addresses and telephone numbers where known. Finally, the fourth database is a listing of all bird sites in Oman giving the three-letter code, the ABBA square, and the exact latitude and longitude. By combining the main database with each of the three supporting ones it is possible to extract and present the data in a variety of ways. The system becomes extremely powerful by devising computer programmes written in the Foxbase language.

As an example we can produce a histogram based on 10-day intervals for any species over the whole country or in a given area or period. We can produce a list of all species observed in a specific site. We can list all records for Qurum Nature Reserve for the second half of September between 1980 and 1990 if we so desire. We