

A RECORD OF THE CORNCRAKE *Crex crex*

FROM DAR ES SALAAM

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In their recent paper on the Less Common Palaearctic Migrant Birds of Kenya and Tanzania, Backhurst, Britton & Mann (1973) Jl. E. Africa nat. Hist. Soc. & nat. Mus. 140, point out that little information is available on the movements of the Corncrake *Crex crex*. They note the following records (sight or specimen) from Tanzania: Sanya (April); Ugalla River Game Reserve (mid February); Iringa (March and early April); the Rukwa (February-mid April); and Lake Manyara (April).

On 29th April 1973, a day on which Dar es Salaam received about 100mm of rain, a male Corncrake was brought to me by a grounds worker at the University. Because the bird's feathers were completely wet, it had been easily captured in the tall grass which surrounds the University's sewage oxidation ponds.

The bird was in breeding plumage and very fat. It had testes of 4 x 2 mm. The length of the wing was 147mm, the weight 193.7g. Four Mallophaga of the species Rallicola ortygetrae (Schrank, 1781) were removed from the wing-feathers; these were kindly identified by Dr. T. Clay of the British Museum (Natural History). The bird, prepared as a study skin, is catalogued as UDSM-B-39.

This record, if it were to be supported by further sightings or specimens, would lend credence to the idea that many records from Nairobi and the Kenya Highlands reflect the numbers of interested observers there rather than a lack of movement of birds in other areas. Intensive observations and netting effort in areas known to be suitable for crakes along the East African coast might prove rewarding from February to April, the known northerly migration time for these birds. Such observations might tell us if the Corncrake and the Spotted Crake Porzana porzana both move regularly at least about the same time in eastern Tanzania and on the coast of East Africa, as might be indicated by the records from Kilosa (14th April) and Zanzibar (no date given) in Backhurst et al. (op.cit.).

On the following day, while walking at the edge of the oxidation ponds, I saw a Greenshank Tringa nebularia which was as wet as had been the Corncrake. The bird was completely soaked to the skin. It was unable to fly and could only run rather poorly in its efforts to avoid capture. After a quick examination, it was released. I did not observe its preen gland, but that of the Corncrake seemed to be functioning normally, judged by the copious quantity of oil which flowed from it. The large pile of detergent foam which was present at various points on the surface of the oxidation ponds, on the outflow stream, and on the surrounding vegetation might have been responsible for destroying the water-repelling quality of the feathers of both birds, if they had come into contact with it. None of the other birds present, including other Greenshank, seemed to have been affected.

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