

Short communications

The Mascarene Martin *Phedina borbonica* in Tanzania with comments on other records from mainland Africa

Britton (1980) summarized the occurrence of this species in East Africa as, "The Madagascar race *madagascariensis* has been recorded as a non-breeding visitor to Pemba in small numbers between September and March, but not during the past 50 years. A flock of 16 at Lake Jipe, southeastern Kenya, on 24 June 1978 is the only other record."

This record from Pemba is that of Vaughan (1930) who wrote, "I have seen it mostly between November and March, but only in very small numbers, never more than three at a time. In 1928 there were two hawking insects over Kichanje pond in August and September. I know of no other records of its occurrence outside Madagascar, and its appearance in Pemba is therefore of some interest. Of the two specimens obtained the female was shot on 1 November, 1925, and the immature bird, which was in moult, on 10 February. A note of this occurrence has already been made by Mr Bannerman (*Bull. B.O.C. xlvii. July, 1926, p. 127.*") These records of Vaughan's are the only ones mentioned in Pakenham (1979) in his summary of the birds of Zanzibar and Pemba.

The first documented record from Kenya was from Zimmerman (1978) when he observed a flock of 16 at Lake Jipe on 24 June 1978. There have been two additional records in Kenya. Turner (1980) reported a single bird with a flock of Lesser Striped Swallows *Hirundo abyssinica* at Watamu on 23 June 1980. On 18 June 1993 Mel Ogola, observing from the Kenya shore, noticed a number of Mascarene Martins roosting with Plain Martins *Riparia paludicola* at Lake Jipe. Approximately 200 birds in total were going to roost at the time (Pearson & Turner 1998) but it is not clear how many Mascarene Martins were included in the 200 total.

Despite regular visits by birders to Pemba in recent decades, there have been no further reports of these martins until Geene (2001), who wrote, "One record on Pemba of 15 individuals together in Micheweni peninsular on 27 January 1998. Largest group ever recorded in Zanzibar archipelago."

The Atlas database holds a record from Theophil Gaus, a visiting academic and noted birder from Switzerland who found 5 to 10 birds from the bridge while crossing the Rufiji River on 2 August 2009. There are no doubts attached to this record despite it not being supported by photographs or having been submitted to the East African Rarities Committee.

On the 24 March 2013 I with (RM, JS and JJ) was scanning the tidal flats from the sea wall of the Livingstone Hotel north of Bagamoyo town when I found a "brown martin" flying south. It had already passed us and continued south partially hidden by a fine drizzle. Knowing what it might have been only added to our acute disappointment at the time. After the rain cleared, we visited our usual weekend birding site at the Stanley Salt Works 1 km north of the hotel but were forced to retreat early as the rain returned and RM located a single Mascarene Martin with Wire-tailed Swallows *Hirundo smithii* on the power cables close to where we had parked. On the 3 September 2013 we again found a single martin in the same locality, perched on the very same cables. Figure 1 relates to this observation.



Figure 1. Mascarene Martin on power line and in flight at Bagamoyo town, 22 September 2013.

Table 1 gives all ten records for Tanzania, with day dates where known. Localities are given to five decimal places where possible and to three decimal places when not precisely known. Note that the Lake Jipe record from the eastern shoreline was approximately 1 km from the centre of the lake so was not actually observed in Tanzania.

Table 1. Mascarene Martin records in Tanzania

| Locality | Day | Month | Year | Counts | Observer | Latitude | Longitude |
|----------------------|-----|-------|------|--------|---------------------|----------|-----------|
| Pemba Kichanje ponds | 1 | 11 | 1925 | | Vaughan | -5.184 | 39.847 |
| Pemba Kichanje ponds | 10 | 2 | 1925 | | Vaughan | | |
| Pemba Kichanje ponds | 0 | 8 | 1928 | | Vaughan | | |
| Pemba Kichanje ponds | 0 | 9 | 1928 | | Vaughan | | |
| Lake Jipe | 24 | 6 | 1978 | 16 | Zimmerman | -3.614 | 37.776 |
| Micheweni Pemba | 27 | 1 | 1998 | 15 | Geene <i>et al.</i> | -4.981 | 39.855 |
| Rufiji | 2 | 8 | 2009 | | T. Gaus | -8.015 | 38.971 |
| Livingstone Hotel | 24 | 3 | 2013 | 1 | This note | 6.42691 | 38.90256 |
| Bagamoyo Salt Pans | 24 | 3 | 2013 | 1 | This note | 6.42243 | 38.89508 |
| Bagamoyo Salt Pans | 23 | 9 | 2013 | 1 | This note | | |

Clearly, records for March, August and September south of 6 degrees South are of birds on passage. Records from Pemba in November, January and February are surely of birds on their non-breeding grounds on the north-east coast of Pemba. There are no records in Tanzania for April, May, July or December.

These few observations suggest that only a small proportion of the breeding population migrate to East Africa. Although where the large number of birds seen at Lake Jipe in June 1993 (see above) might have spent their non-breeding season remains a mystery. Ash & Miskell (2013) do not record this species for Somalia.

Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett (2008) record small numbers in Malawi at four sites on 12 July 1987, 20 July 1985, 25 March 1989 and 6 April 1959. They also quote Benson (1944) detailing hundreds present at Lake Chilwa 28 June to at least 30 July 1944. Dowsett *et al.* (2006) do not record this species for Zambia. Clancey *et al.* 1969 report on large numbers seen and nine collected in southern Mozambique in June and July 1968. This is still the only record for Southern Africa (Harrison *et al.* 1997) although there is a claim from Imagine Dam in Phinda Private Game Reserve 10 August 2016 that has yet to be verified (D. Dell e-bird). Safford & Hawkins (2013) state that this

species is found in all months in Madagascar and give August to November for the breeding season.

This suggests that birds seen in Bagamoyo in September and Rufiji in August were on their return migration and those in March were moving north to winter quarters despite the fact that the bird observed at the Livingstone Hotel was flying south. Birds observed in Pemba in November, January and February could be said to be on their wintering grounds. The flocks at Lake Jipe in June could be said to be on their way south to breed and had wandered (been blown perhaps) off course. Birds on Pemba in August and September would also be ready to return to Madagascar to breed.

Anyone visiting Pemba Island from November through February is encouraged to visit the northeastern coastal zone and look for this species feeding over the numerous small ponds.

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