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Rediscovery of the White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* in Ghana

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The White-necked Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* is endemic to the Upper Guinean forests of West Africa (Fry *et al*. 2000) from Guinea to Ghana. Throughout this range, the rapid fragmentation and destruction of lowland rain forest threatens the survival of this remarkable species (BirdLife International 2000). Recent studies have focused on various demographic and ecological questions regarding populations of *P. gymnocephalus* in Guinea (Halleux 1994), Liberia (Allport 1991), Sierra Leone (Thompson 1993, 2001, Thompson & Fotso 2000), and Ivory Coast (Salewski *et al*. 2000). However, no recent records of this bird are available from Ghana. The most recent published records of *Picathartes* in the country are those of

Grimes (1964, Grimes & Darku 1968), the latter summarising results from a 1966 survey. Since the 1960s, attempts to locate this species in Ghana have been unsuccessful (John Mason pers. comm.). As a result, it was widely believed that *P. gymnocephalus* had been extirpated from Ghanaian forests. Here we report on the recent rediscovery of *P. gymnocephalus* in the Brong-Ahafo Region, Ghana.

On 14–30 March 2003 we conducted an avifaunal survey in a block of forest reserves in Brong-Ahafo Region. Our survey relied heavily on a line of 26 consecutively-strung mist-nets running along the boundary line between Ayum and Subim forest reserves (06º71'N, 02º73'W). The forest in this region is dominated by *Celtis* spp., *Ceiba* and *Pterogota* tree species and has many large boulders and rocky outcrops. On 26 March 2003 at 1040 h we mist-netted a *P. gymnocephalus* (Fig. 1), videotaped, photographed and released it unharmed. On 28 March 2003 we showed the video of the *Picathartes* to a local hunter in Asumura to discover whether he was familiar with the species. He immediately recognised the bird and told us that he had encountered at least three individuals in the nearby forest reserves. He reported some of the life history attributes of the species, such as breeding period (the fifth month of the year) and nest site. On 30 March he led us to a nest site. The nests were located on a boulder *c*.5 m high with a cave-like overhanging face sloping at a steep angle down to the ground. The two nests were constructed from mud and plant fibres, attached to the overhang with the cup of the nest forming a semi-circle *c*.30 cm wide, 15 cm high, and 15 cm deep. They were positioned less than 1 m apart at approximately the same height (*c*.2.5 m). On the floor of the shelter formed by the

Figure 1. *Picathartes gynmochepalus* mist-netted in Ghana on 26 March 2003 (J. D. Weckstein & B. D. Marks)

over-hanging rock were several hundred snail shells; snails are a potential food source for this species (Fry *et al*. 2000). The local hunter noted that when he first found this nesting site there was only one nest and that the second nest was new. JO and the hunter revisited the nesting site on 22 April 2003 and noted that one of the nests had undergone further construction, making it 18.5 cm high. The activity at the nest site, coupled with the hunter's report of other *Picathartes* in different sites in this forest reserve system, suggest that this location may hold a viable population of *Picathartes*. The Ghana Wildlife Division, Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC, a Ghanaian NGO), and the Chief of Asumura are making an effort to protect the species in these reserves. Further work is needed to census the area for other individuals and nests to determine the viability of this *Picathartes* population.

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