

First records of Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* for Ghana

Phil Gregory^a, James Ntakor^b and Andrew Amankwa^c

Premières mentions du Guêpier d'Orient *Merops orientalis* pour le Ghana. Le 15 avril 2016, deux Guêpiers d'Orient *Merops orientalis* adultes avec trois juvéniles ont été observés au barrage de Tono près de Bolgatanga, au nord du Ghana. Les oiseaux étaient apparemment présents depuis plusieurs mois, car un adulte a été photographié dans la même zone le 21 janvier 2016. Ces observations sont les premières pour le Ghana.

In the afternoon of 15 April 2016, we visited Tono Dam near Bolgatanga, Upper East Region, northern Ghana, as leaders of a Field Guides tour. AA alerted us that he had just seen three Little Green Bee-eaters *Merops orientalis*, and we quickly located three juveniles in light farmbrush, with two adults nearby.

Identification of the small, all-green bee-eaters was straightforward. All exhibited a black eyestripe narrowly bordered pale bluish green below, pale greenish underparts with a slightly paler throat, and rufous flight feathers bordered dark on the trailing edge. The adults had a narrow black gorget and one possessed long, slender pointed tail-streamers (Fig. 1). The juveniles lacked any

obvious gorget and tail-streamers. Little Bee-eater *M. pusillus* was in the same area for comparison.

AA had never seen the species before, while JN's only previous record in Ghana was at this site, at the same season, in 2014. PG observed it in northern Nigeria in 1979–80 and is familiar with the taxa *M. o. cyanophrys* in Oman and *M. o. ferrugiceps* in Cambodia. The latter were recently split by del Hoyo & Collar (2014) as Arabian Bee-eater *M. cyanophrys* and Asian Green Bee-eater *M. orientalis*, respectively, with African birds named African Green Bee-eater *M. viridissimus*.

A photograph of the two adults has been archived in the Internet Bird Collection (<http://ibc.lynxeds.com>), which also contains a



Figure 1. Adult Little Green Bee-eaters *Merops orientalis viridissimus*, Tono Dam, Bolgatanga, Upper East Region, Ghana, 15 April 2016 (Phil Gregory)

Guêpiers d'Orient *Merops orientalis viridissimus* adultes, barrage de Tono, Bolgatanga, Upper East Region, Ghana, 15 avril 2016 (Phil Gregory)

photograph of an adult taken by M. Lilje in the same area on 21 January 2016 (ibc.lynxeds.com/node/332512), so the birds have apparently been present for some time. *M. o. viridissimus* is a resident and partial migrant over a broad band of Sahelian and Soudanian savannas from Senegambia to Eritrea (Fry *et al.* 1988, Fry 2001, Borrow & Demey 2014). Its occurrence in Ghana is not mentioned in the most recent publications on the country's avifauna (Borrow & Demey 2010, Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2014), nor is Little Green Bee-eater included in the ABC Ghana checklist (Dowsett *et al.* 2016). The records presented here appear to be the first for the country. The species is perhaps no more than an irregular visitor to this regularly visited area, but it is recorded to the north-west at Nazinga (11°10'N 01°25'W), in Burkina Faso (R. J. Dowsett *in litt.* 2016), and at a lower latitude in Comoé National Park, in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire (Salewski 2000, Borrow & Demey 2014). In Benin there is no acceptable record significantly south of 11°N, north of which it is locally quite common; the species is still unknown in Togo (R. J. Dowsett *in litt.* 2016).

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- ^a Kuranda, Queensland, Australia. E-mail: info@sicklebillsafaris.com
- ^b Ashanti Africa Tours, Cape Coast, Ghana. E-mail: ntakorj@yahoo.com
- ^c Ashanti Africa Tours, Cape Coast, Ghana. E-mail: amankwaa9090@gmail.com

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