White-necked Rockfowl (Picathartes gymnocephalus)

The white-necked rockfowl (also known as the white-necked picathartes) is a large and unusual bird with a bright chrome yellow and black featherless head and a long neck and tail. It is considered one of Africa’s most desirable birds by birders and is a symbol of ecotourism across its range. They are usually a silent bird however on the occasion that they do call, the sound has been compared to the clucks of a chicken.
Dear reader,

The NKO Magazine is back! You are welcome to the 2019 edition of the NKO Magazine. This magazine is not a scientific journal but expected to help you discover more about the environment and the things that impact on it. We all have the responsibility to learn about the things that impact on the environment and how we can help protect the planet. Since this is a club magazine, club members are encouraged to contribute articles and drawings to the publication, as this is one way to develop a sustained interest in them.

The threats to our environment and wildlife habitats are legion, making it imperative for all concerned to devise strategies no matter how small, to help combat the threats. That is why the formation of Wildlife Clubs of Ghana (WCG) and the NKO Magazine to disseminate information to the public is very necessary. Our approach will not be one of self-righteous indignation. We should come across as normal citizens with responsible concern and interests regarding our natural heritage. All comments from readers will be incorporated in subsequent issues. Indeed, the feedback from readers will determine to a large extent the direction of the magazine.

Part of the charm and beauty of wildlife is the myriad of colours and designs available in different manifestations, hence, colourful photographs and illustrations will form an important part of future editions.

In this regard, the Editorial Team will rely not only on the support of members of WCG, but also on all other well-wishers, both local and foreign to contribute either poems, stories, riddles, jokes, articles, photos, drawings or paintings and mystery bird letters to us.

In conclusion, we wish our readers a happy reading and hope that the dialogue in these pages will lead to a better appreciation of the wildlife conservation issues at stake and help promote the conservation of wildlife in the country as a whole.

Ako

If you are reading this magazine, it already shows that you care about nature, the environment and wildlife conservation. Most of us must have heard, read stories or watched documentaries about dolphins, leopards, bees, owls and pythons and yet have never seen any of them. According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), out of about 100 million different species coexisting with us on earth, an estimated 10,000 to 100,000 species go extinct each year. This is very alarming, isn't it? For the past few decades, there has been a growing concern for wildlife conservation as individuals and governments across the globe are increasingly becoming aware of the benefits of wildlife species and the damaging effects of wildlife destruction. In this issue of Nko Magazine, you will read articles about some threatened wildlife species in the world, including the White-necked Rockfowl (Picathartes gymnocephalus) in Ghana. Wildlife is viewed as a threat to some people and their livelihoods. When we over-exploit natural resources by encroaching tropical forests, grasslands and other ecosystems where wild animals live, they are compelled to search for food elsewhere, including our homes. In doing so, they may destroy crops, feed on livestock, and become dangerous and defensive when people attempt to drive them away.

But the wild animals some people consider as dangerous like the elephants, snakes, butterflies and dolphins are only a small fraction of wild animals. There are several different species of birds, butterflies, turtles and dolphins that live in the wild and all of these, including those that some people consider as dangerous, play vital roles that ensure the sustainability of the human race.

For example, wild trees and plants clean the water we drink, air we breathe, provide the food we eat, the materials for shelter and clothing, regulate the global climate, mitigate against floods and serve as medicine. For instance, 60% of childhood malaria cases in Ghana are first treated with herbal remedies. Species such as spiders literally filter insects from the air and animals such as elephants, lions, cheetahs, turtles and dolphins contribute huge revenues to several countries.

It’s, however, sad to see that humankind’s greed for wealth, luxury and power had resulted in the overexploitation of the earth’s esteemed wildlife resources. Today, countries are still confronted with wildlife management challenges such as habitat destruction, poaching and over-harvesting of wild plant species. These threats are increasingly driving species to extinction.

You and I can still take actions and help wildlife thrive! We must learn more about Ghana’s wildlife, the challenges they face and how we can help educate our peers about wildlife, join wildlife groups and campaigns, publish articles in our local newspaper, participate in beach clean-ups, tree planting exercises and other environmental projects, sign wildlife petitions and engage with renowned politicians and celebrities to become wildlife ambassadors.

Yes! Wildlife can sometimes be destructive and dangerous so can cars and airplanes, which kill far more and destroy a lot more properties than wild animals. But that does not stop us from joining cars and airplanes, so why do away with our precious wildlife. Saving wildlife is saving ourselves and the future generation!
Africa’s strangest rockfowl!

Flip page to read more.
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS AND RANGE
Also known as the bare headed Rockfowl, the Picathartes is a brightly-coloured featherless-head bird, with a black patch around the back of its head. Formerly declared extinct in the 1960s, the Picathartes was rediscovered in 2003 in Ghana and in some Upper Guinean forests of West Africa.
This normally silent bird has a dark bluish tail and underparts, whereas the neck and upper part of the bird is white. It is mostly said to resemble the Leather aviators cap, as they possess a jet-black pair of eyes with a very conspicuous orange patch around the eyes. Due to its affinity for rocky environment (hence the name Rockfowl), the Picathartes prefers clearings within primary and secondary forests.

FEEDING
The bird has long black beaks and only feeds on invertebrates from the forest floor, especially worms and army ant colonies. During the breeding season, the Picathartes is known to feed on larger invertebrates such as snails and in some cases, on frogs.

BREEDING AND NESTING
Breeding takes place in rocky areas such as on cliffs and cave foots. However, some nests of the Picathartes have been found in fallen hollow large trees.

IUCN STATUS, THREATS AND CONSERVATION
The bare-headed Picathartes is classified on the IUCN Red List 2007 as vulnerable and also listed on Appendix I of CITES.
Human disturbances, timber felling, mining for minerals in Ghana have put pressure on the species, as the conversion of these forests to farmlands over the years has affected the reproductive rate of this striking bird.
The low reproductive rate of the Picathartes is susceptible to the compounding ecological pressures of nest-predation, competition from other birds etc.

Although protected by law in Ghana, the legislations are in fact ineffectual, thus prompting the creation of “Picathartes focus groups” to champion research and conservation actions to further save the rather dwindling population of the Rockfowl.
Following the rediscovery of the bare-headed Rockfowl in Ghana by the British Ornithologist’s Club in 2003, the Ghana Wildlife Society began a project of running population surveys to better understand the population size and range of this species.
**HOW THE ZEBRA GOT HIS STRIPES, AND THE BABOON HIS RED BOTTOM**

In the early days, when the earth was young, the climate was very hot and dry. In the parched desert land, which stretched for miles, water could only be found in a few small isolated pools. At one of these pools, the Baboon stood guard, claiming only he was the rightful owner. “This water is mine and mine only, so no one else can drink here apart from me,” he would shout if anyone approached.

Because the nights were bitterly cold in the desert area, he had built a fire next to the pool. One day, the Zebra, arriving from a long and tiring journey, saw the water and desperately needed to quench his thirst. He approached the water, the Baboon jumped up in anger, shouting “Who are you, how dare you come near my water? I am the Lord of this water, go away immediately!” But the Zebra, tired and thirsty, was in no mood to listen to this selfish Baboon and was not intimidated by him. He shouted back “Be quiet you ugly monkey! This water is not just for you and mine only, so no one else can drink here apart from me.”

Hurt and frightened, he galloped off into the plains, where he has remained ever since. Eventually, his new and different apparel grew on him, and he became very proud of being like no other animal, with his beautiful black and white stripes. However, the Baboon had landed on his buttocks with a mighty thud, right on the hard rocks. He has remained there ever since, nursing his bald red bottom and still as angry as ever.

**HOW THE TORTOISE OUTSMARTED THE UNGRATEFUL EAGLE**

It was not often that the Tortoise and the Eagle met, for both spent most of their time in totally different habitats, one flying around high in the clouds, and the other moving very slowly down on the ground. However, when the Eagle heard what a warm-hearted fellow the Tortoise was, he decided to pay a visit on him.

The Tortoise’s family was very kind and hospitable to the Eagle and fed him very lavishly, so the Eagle revisited again and again. But every time he flew away he would laugh to himself, “Ha ha! I can enjoy the Tortoise’s hospitality on the ground, but I will never have to feed him as he can never reach my nest in the tree tops!”

The Eagle continued to visit the Tortoise family often, and gradually his selfishness and ingratitude became the talk of the forest. The Eagle and the Frog were never on speaking terms, since usually the Eagle would swoop down to carry a poor frog home for his supper.

One day, the Frog called to the Tortoise from the river bank “Friend Tortoise, if you give me some food, I will give you wisdom.” After enjoying the meal, the Frog said “Friend Tortoise, the Eagle is really abusing your kindness, for after all of his many visits he flies away laughing, saying he will never have to repay your kind hospitality. So next time he visits you, say to him “Give me a gourd, and I will send food to your wife and children too.”

Eventually, his new and different apparel grew on him, and he became very proud of being like no other animal, with his beautiful black and white stripes.

The Eagle flew high up into the clouds shaking his leg, and fell staggering back into the Baboon’s fire, sending the burning sticks flying up into the air. This left black scorched marks all down the Zebra’s white coat.

The Tortoise followed the Frog’s advice, and when the Eagle called on him, he told him to bring a gourd. The Eagle returned with a gourd, saying “I will call later for the present for my family.” He flew away laughing even more to himself.

When the Eagle reached his nest, and emptied the gourd, the Eagle crawled out and said “Friend Eagle, you have visited my home so many times that I thought it would be nice to enjoy some of your hospitality too.” The Eagle was furious, however, and screeched “How dare you! I will peck the flesh from your bones!”

The Tortoise turned and twirled, then darted down at the speed of an arrow, but to no avail. He could not rid himself of the Tortoise, so he set him down on the ground. As he flew away with the gourd, totally unaware that the tortoise was inside. This time, the Eagle could hear every wicked word as he laughed “Ha! That Tortoise is even more stupid than I thought!”

When the eagle reached his nest, and emptied the gourd, the Eagle crawled out and said “Friend Eagle, you have visited my home so many times that I thought it would be nice to enjoy some of your hospitality too.” The Eagle was furious, however, and screeched “How dare you! I will peck the flesh from your bones!”

The eagle replied “Take you home? I will fly you to the ground and you will be smashed to bits!” The Tortoise bit hold of the Eagle’s leg hard, who screamed “Let go, let go!” The Eagle replied “Only when you have set me down at my home”, and tightened his grip even more.

The Eagle flew high up into the clouds shaking his leg, turned and twisted, then darted down at the speed of an arrow, but to no avail. He could not rid himself of the Tortoise, so he set him down on the ground. As he flew away, the Tortoise called after him “Friendship requires the equal contribution of both parties. If I welcome you, you should welcome me too. Since you have made a mockery out of our friendship and laughed at me for my hospitality, you need not call again.”
Wildlife Clubs participated actively in the 2019 World Wetlands Day celebration which took place at the Mother’s Nest Montessori School in Accra on the theme, “Wetlands and Climate Change.” Forty-five (45) club members engaged in a drawing competition that highlighted the roles wetlands play in combating climate change. Awards, comprising of educational materials and souvenirs, were presented to the winners.

The Society, the US Embassy, WABiCC, Kali Kteh and A Rocha Ghana commemorated the day with club members in Greater Accra Region through a clean-up exercise, essay and debate competitions. The theme was “Life below water: for people and planet”. The beach clean-up exercise took place at the Mensah-Guinea beach and saw 225 club members participating.

A member of the Gag Blessed Home School emerged as winner of the essay writing competition. The Presbyterian Boys’ Senior High School (PRESEC-Legon) and the Amasaman Senior High School debated on the imposition of the one-month annual fish ban in Ghana, which saw PRESEC-Legon emerging as winners.

Wetlands and Climate Change

Attewa Exhibition 2019

An Attewa Exhibition was organised in Accra to showcase the remarkable diversity of wildlife species at Attewa Range Forest Reserve and garner more support for the conservation of the site. The exhibition was led by A Rocha Ghana with the Ghana Wildlife Society, IUCN and other civil society organisations (CSOs) as key partners. Sixty-five (65) club members in Accra joined in the exhibition. The club members were taken through photo exhibitions and a canvas session on using the arts to communicate biodiversity conservation.
Club News

Club News

WORLD CLEANUP DAY 2019

The Society, Let’s Do it Ghana and other partners organised a clean-up exercise at the Mensah Guinea Beach in Accra to mark the day appropriately themed ‘People for a clean Planet’. The event was meant to contribute to the conservation of the local environment, habitat and nesting sites of sea turtles in Ghana. Fifty-eight (58) club members participated in the clean-up exercise. T-shirts were distributed for promotional purposes.

CONSERVATION SCHOOL

Two clubs, the Legacy Academy and St. Theresa’s Preparatory Schools in Accra, were educated on feeding relationships and trophic levels within the wild ecosystems, using games and presentations. This aimed at getting the members to appreciate the need for the conservation of wildlife species.

SPRING ALIVE (SA) PROJECT

Hundred and five (105) club members in Accra were trained on how to reduce bird collisions with glass windows, using card paper, scissors and transparent vinyl papers to make window and door stickers. A PowerPoint presentation was also carried out to educate participants on the importance of SA birds, the plight faced by migratory birds and actions to take to minimise the threats. Bookmarks were shared for promotion of the project.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2019

The Society, Let’s Do it Ghana and other partners organised a film/video presentation for club members of the Faith Evangelical School in Accra to commemorate World Environment Day. The purpose of the presentation was to raise awareness among the members on easy ways to reduce air pollution in their schools and at home. 88 club members participated in the event. The theme for the celebration was “Beat air pollution”.

WORLD EARTH DAY 2019

The day was commemorated with a debate competition held at the Museum of Science and Technology between the Achimota School and Kinbu Senior High School in Accra. The partners were GWS, Kali Kteh, WABiCC and the Wildlife Division. Achimota School emerged as winners on the topic, “Human interference in protected areas is significant”. They took home a trophy, medals and educational materials. Club members from the Sakumono School Complex were also in attendance to support the event.
Just for laughs

A hunter went into the bush to hunt for an antelope. Upon reaching the bush, he noticed a lion chasing him. With fear and trembling, he hid himself among the bushes to pray for God's direction in order to escape the lion unhurt. After praying, he opened his eyes to notice the lion also praying. In shock and fear, he asked the lion "Why are you praying". The lion answered, "Don't you know when lions are ready to eat, they also pray?" Hearing this, after the lion said amen! The hunter fainted.

Riddles

1. I am an animal when my first letter is removed, I become one of the basic particles of matter, who am I?

2. I am an animal, I have the biggest ears, who am I?

3. I am an animal, I am the king of the birds and the strongest of them all, who am I?

4. I am an animal, I have a black body with a white underside, a tall and a triangular dorsal fin, who am I?

5. I am an animal, I also give out light in the night, who am I?

6. I am an animal, I have the deadliest flatulence, who am I?

7. I am an animal, my middle letter is an E and my last letter is also an E, who am I?

8. I am an animal, and a country, who am I?

9. I am an animal, I look like an octopus, but I have ten arms, who am I?

10. I am an animal, I am very intelligent, and I like to mimic people's actions, who am I?

Answers to Riddles

1. LION
2. ELEPHANT
3. EAGLE
4. ORCA
5. FIRE FLY
6. SKANK
7. ANTELOPE
8. TURKEY
9. SQUID
10. PARROT

The Tree's Prayer

You who pass by and raise your hand against me, Why are you torturing me? I am the heat of your heart on a cold winter's night. The friendly shade screening you from the summer's sun, And my fruits are refreshing droughts, quenching your thirst as you journey on. I am the beam that holds up your house, the board of your table, the bed on which you lie. I am the handle of your home stool, the wood of your cradle, and the shell of your coffin. I am your friend of man. You can pass by to listen to my prayers, HARM ME NOT!
Plant trees and shrubs that flower and fruit on your school compound to attract birds, insects, bats and other wild animals.

Encourage non-club members to participate.

COMMON BIRDS OF ACCRA

Yellow-billed Kite
(Mvus migrans parasites)

Though this is a forest species, they can be found in the wooded areas of Accra. They have white eyes and are relatively large. There is a broad black band on the wings and tail.

IUCN STATUS: Least Concern

Common Bulbul
(Pycnonotus barbatus)

The Common Bulbul is a very common and conspicuous bird. It is primarily brown in colour with the head region being dark brown.

IUCN STATUS: Least Concern

Laughing Dove
(Streptopelia senegalensis)

The Laughing Dove is a smallish dove with the head and back being pinkish (Rufous brown), the wings blue-grey and the belly whitish. It has a small white patch on the chin and long white tips on the outer tail feathers. The key distinguishing feature of the Laughing Dove is the blue-grey wings and a brown band across the lower fore-neck that is spotted with black.

IUCN STATUS: Least Concern

Western Grey Plantain-eater
(Chiriser piscator)

It is mainly found in the wooded areas of Accra it is mainly grey and white in colour with a pale yellow bill. It has a conspicuous white wing patch which is best seen during flight.

IUCN STATUS: Least Concern

Illustration by - Nik Borrow and Ron Demey: Birds of Ghana
*Illustrations are not to scale.

Uncle David’s Corner

Uncle David solves your bird identification problems ...

Action Galore!

We need your personal work to be published in the NKO magazine. Of course, it must have a wildlife or environmental theme, and we will try to publish all good works that are sent. We will even award special prizes for the best story, the best poem and the best drawing. Uncle David is also waiting for your bird identification letters and will answer each one personally. So let your creative juices flow and start writing, drawing or bird watching NOW!