

ETHNO-ORNITHOLOGY OF THE TEMBO IN EASTERN DRC (FORMER ZAIRE): PART ONE, KALEHE ZONE

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ABSTRACT Ethno-ornithology of the Tembo people, agriculturalists of Eastern DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo; former Zaïre) was studied to understand man-bird interrelations in the tropical rain forest. On 76 birds species, vernaculars, scientific names, ornithological observations, usages and etymology were described and analyzed.

Key Words: Bird name; Tembo; Ethno-ornithology; Tropical rain forest; Democratic Republic of Congo.

INTRODUCTION

This paper studies the man-bird interrelations among the Tembo people living in the tropical rain forest of Eastern DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo; former Zaïre) by analyzing bird names.

Among the Tembo, bird names are closely related to the following utilizations:

As medicine and food.

As instruments of ritual and magical practices.

Help divine phenomena such as the fertility of the soil, the death of someone, and bad events.

As reference to oral tradition or proverb.

Thus, bird names are an important part of the social and mental life of people. Understanding the man-bird relationship will provide some keys in understanding the Tembo culture.

The research was conducted in two regions, Zones of Kalehe and Kabare, in the Tembo land (Fig. 1). The Tembo geographical situation, economy, way of living, social and political organization have been already well described by Suehara (1983). Vegetation of the two zones consists of savannas, meadows and forest, favorable to the diversity of birds. Ornithological studies have been conducted from the colonial period in these zones. Tembo and Shi peoples are the main inhabitants of this area.

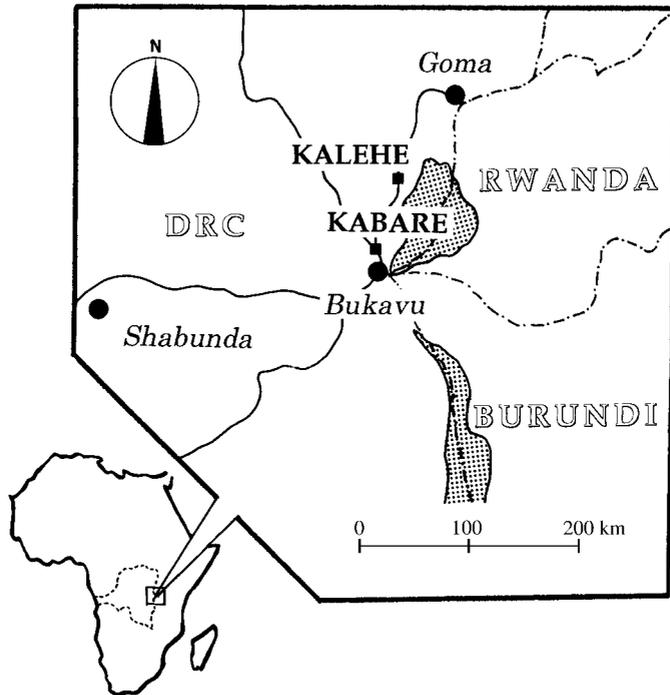


Fig. 1. Research Area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology for the survey was as follows:

1. From March to May 1995, field research were conducted in Bunyakiri and Irangi areas in Kalehe Zone. The bird inventory was made in primary and secondary forests, fallows, and cultivated fields, using binoculars.
2. For each bird species, the scientific name was indentified, using two kinds of sources.
 - Check lists by Serle & Morel (1988), Williams & Arlott (1988) and by Perlo (1995).
 - Specimens kept in the Ornithological Laboratory of the Center for Research in Natural Sciences at Lwiro.
3. Vernacular names for each species were also recorded. A questionnaire with the following items was submitted to about 500 Tembo people in Bunyakiri and Irangi areas from June to July 1995:
 - Life form of the birds.
 - Meaning of the bird song.
 - Role of the birds in Tembo social and cultural activities.
 - Usage as food or medicine.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Ornithological Classification

Collected 76 birds species were grouped into 33 families (see Appendix). Estrildidae (7 species [9.2%]) and Pycnonotidae (6 species [7.9%]) were predominant. Minor families were: Tronidae, Zosteropidae, Sturnidae, Corvidae, Strigidae, Picidae, Fringillidae, Caprimulgidae, Coraciidae, Coliidae, Charadiidae, Ardeidae and Acedinidae.

II. Vernacular Names

1. Etymology of vernacular names

We could collect the vernacular names for all recorded species. (see Appendix). It is noteworthy that these names bore reference to their behavior, song, color, feature, role in the social activities and culture of the Tembo (Table 1).

Because most birds studied here feed on agricultural products, they are regarded as pests. This is one Tembo concern on birds (Kizungu, 1996).

2. Linguistic analysis of vernaculars names

It is important that most bird names are derived from verbs. This means that the Tembo people principally recognize the bird species through their behavior. Some other names are from color, size, or other nouns related to the bird feature. These etymologies show the sharp Tembo observation of the birds.

The following names are compounds of plural parts.

Noun - noun sequence (2, 29, 33, 34, 44, 52, 53, 54, 57, 71, 73)

Noun - particle "a" - noun sequence (39, 45, 49).

The particle "a" is a preposition indicating a state, possession, origin or place.

This particle is always preceded by a consonant depending on the noun that commands the concordance.

III. Utilization of Birds

It is noteworthy that 67 (87%) out of 76 recorded species are edible. Of 67 species, 64 are eaten by everybody, whereas 3 species are consumed only by old people. Because of the increasing population of this area, the people have begun to consume birds as a major source of animal protein. Consequently, the birds face eminent extinction. Some protective measures must be adopted urgently.

Table 1. Etymology of vernacular names. Some species are multiply counted.

Classification of etymology	Reference No. of species in Appendix	Total of species
Behavioral Characteristics	1 2 3 7 9 17 21 22 23 25 30 31 34 37 39 42 43 47 48 52 53 54 56 57 58 59 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 76	35
Song	14 15 19 40 41 48 49 51 60 65 66 68 69 71 72 74 75	17
Color	20 32 45 63	4
Feature	4 5 6 8 11 12 13 18 27 28 29 33 38 44 46 50 54	17
Role in the Tembo culture	5 9 19 24 26 33	6

There are 10 species (13%) of recorded birds used to conduct witchcraft as totems for some clans (some birds are considered as kingly), and for initiation ceremonies.

There are 9 species (11.7%) used in traditional medicine to heal some diseases.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

This paper is a preliminary report of the ethno-ornithology of the Tembo showing the close man-bird interrelations in this area.

To clarify the more detailed feature of such relations, we are planning to continue the research with the following schedule.

1. Research in Tembo-land (Irangi - Bunyakiri - Kahuzi - Biega National Park).
2. Research in Shi-land (Kanare - Walungu) and publication of the results obtained.
3. A comparative study of results of obtained in both Tembo-land and Shi-land.

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Appendix: List of bird names, scientific names, vernacular, etymology and usage.

ACCIPITRIDAE

1. *Accipiter badius*: *Katsuli* or *Karhuki*

The name is derived from the verb *kutsula* (*ba*) *ndambala* (= to challenge to a fight), because the bird is carnivorous, and hunts small birds. Only old people can eat it.

2. *Accipiter refofuscus*: *Karemba uzo* (*u*)

The name is derived from the verb *kurebma* (= not abide by one's promise). This bird is also called *Ndugu tai*, because it acts like an eagle. Its feathers are used in the enthroning ceremonies of a Tembo *Mwami* (chief). Only old people can eat it.

3. *Erathopius ecaudatus*: *Enzo*

The name is derived from the verb *kuusa* (= to make noise [*nzumbo*]). This bird makes noise while flying, like the wind. It sometimes carries away two- to three-year-old infants of goat, monkey, or hare. Its feathers and claws are used to cure benign epilepsy. For the medical treatment, feathers and claws of this bird are burnt and inhaled by the patient. Only old people can eat it.

4. *Lophaetus occipitalis*: *Chiminu*

The name is derived from the verb *kuminuka* (= to be ejected backwards), because of the tuft of hair on the back of its head. The bird is used by unmarried women to foretell where they will marry. Edible.

ALCEDINIDAE

5. *Halcyon leucocephala*: *Ngulanga*

The name is derived from the verb *kukulanga* (= to uproot). It is believed that this bird pried out the nails which were used to crucify Jesus Christ to the cross, because this bird has a long red bill. Edible.

ARDEIDAE

6. *Ardea melancephala*: *Lubondo*

The name is derived from the verb *kuonda* (= to bend, to lean), because it has a leaning form. Only old people can eat it. If young men do it they will have children with bodies like this bird.

BCEROTIDAE

7. *Bycanistes subcylindricus*: *Kalaata*

The name is derived from the verb *kukalaata* (= to slink away). This bird flies high and travels quite a distance. Edible.

8. *Ceratogyma atrata*: *Mufuo*

The name is derived from the verb *kufua* (= to knead). This bird has a wide bill like a kneader. During the Tembo initiatory rites in the forest, its head is used as a mask. It is also used in the dance called *Britnga* among the Betende clan during the initiation ceremonies. It is thought that it flies singing "Fuo, fuo, fuoo (Who lives there?)." Its head is used in the treatment of headaches. One puts it on the head. It is believed that this bird is also among the witch's belongings. Not edible.

9. *Tropicranus albocristatus*: *Kasemboro*

The name is derived from the verb *kushemberera* or *kusembelea* (= to walk along with or

to follow). It is used in the following saying “Wakasemboro achirembo ngima mwa buso bw’engina,” meaning that “The Kasemboro pretends to be a monkey while walking with the monkeys.”

CAPITONIDAE

10. *Gymnobucco bonapartei*: *Chinde*

It is considered mature and large just as *Chiumbuku* (see 11) and *Mungululu* are. It is praised in this way: “Siwe, siwe: Uli chinde, kutali mukasi ala ungakuuta etswe lyau (you are *Chinde* and no women dare crush your head).” Edible.

11. *Lybius torquatus*: *Chiumbuku*

The name is derived from the adjective *nguluula* (= mature and very big). /*Chi*/ is the augmentative prefix of /*Ka*/ (see 12). Not edible.

12. *Pogoniulus bilineatus*: *Kaumbuku*

It is often referred to in the following way: “Kaumbuku, the defector of sticky matters (feces) was finally caught,” which means “To act badly towards someone who deserves a reward.” Edible.

CHARADRIIDAE

13. *Vanellus lugrurus*: *Lingongo*

The name is derived from the noun *ngongo* (= between two knots) because the bird has long toe-joints between two articulations.

CUCULIDAE

14. *Centropus monachus*: *Chibilibili*

The name is derived from its song, “Bili-Bili-Bilibili-Bilibili.” When it sings, people think that it will rain. The Tembo people also consider that this bird feels ill at ease under the sun and that its rump gets rotten when it has not rained. Its well-dried head serves as medicine for a woman who has just given birth so that she can give much milk. For this, its head is suspended over the woman’s chest with a rope called *Lubiku*. The bird used in the following saying: “Emungunwa eri emuekulu ende aeta mbu: nalya Bilibili birinda, si echa munani chanamwita (Whoever eats seven Bilibili, the eighth will kill him).” The nest and the young *Chibilibili* are believed to be used for magic or the sorcerers. Not edible.

15. *Ceuthmochares aureus*: *Mufefe*

The name is given because of its song, “Fefe, fefe, fefe.” Not edible.

16. *Clamator levaillanti*: *Hamahure*

The name is derived from the noun *hure* (= tuft). The name denotes a long-tailed bird with a tuft of feathers on the head. Edible.

17. *Cuculus canorus*: *Handoyo*

The name is derived from the noun *ndoyo* (= Caterpillar), and breed on the tree called *Mushebere* (*Albizia gumifera*). In a Tembo tale, this bird has been personified: One day *Handoyo*’s children refused to fetch water from the river. So, he went there by himself. On his return, he ordered that his children would not eat the cassava bread kneaded and baked with the water he brought. But his wife secretly gave a kneader to her younger unruly behind so that he could make his own bread. When *Handoyo* become aware of this situation he became angry and left for an unknown destination. Even now, his wife

still calls out: *handoyo ngae waika ee, ee* (= *Handoyo*, where are you?), but in vain. Edible.

COLIIDAE

18. *Colius striatus*: *Hure*

The name is derived from the verb *kurea* (= to lengthen) because of its long tail. It is compared to a sly person. Edible.

19. *Columba arquatrix*: *Ngirima* or *Chringa*

The name is derived from the verb *kuima* (= to utter a wailing cry). Because of its song “Ngiuu, Ngiuu,” the Tembo people think that it is ill and about to die. It is also called “Chitinga” (= crown) because it has a crown on the head. It is a kingly bird. Edible.

20. *Streptopelia semitorquata*: *Chifufu*

The name is given because of its color (= *chifufu*). Edible.

21. *Treron australis*: *Mumamba*

The name is derived from the verb *kubamba* (= to be light, supple and quick to fly). It is very difficult to hunt it because of its high speed. Edible.

22. *Turtur after*: *Kareng*

The name is derived from the verb *kurenguka* or from the noun *karengu* (= fainting). This bird has soft meat and is much hunted. It is also fragile when caught in trap. Edible.

CORACIIDAE

23. *Eurystomus gularis*: *Mbakisi*

The name is derived from the verb *kubakira* (= to seize an object in the air). This bird always catches its prey while flying. Edible.

CORVIDAE

24. *Corvus albus*: *Chikona*

The name is derived from the verb *kukona* (= to atrophy). It is not edible because eating it is believed to cause madness. Its head is used by sorcerers to bewitch people. This bird is not edible for people of Kabare, Kalehe and Walungu because its brain and meat are considered to be poison (Chifundera, *et al.* 1994).

CAPRIMULGIDAE

25. *Cosmetornis vexillarius*: *Lufure*

The name is derived from the verb *kuofula* (= to creep). This bird is only seen in the evening. The Tembo people think it carries evil spirit with it. Not edible.

ESTRILDIDAE

26. *Cryptospiza salvadorii*: *Chiarafunzi*

The name is derived from the noun *ciana-funzi*. It is believed that if this bird gets into a house, the dwellers are compelled to abandon it, or they die. People think that this bird is sent into houses by an evil spirit. Edible.

27. *Estrilda astrild*: *Kaongera*

The name is derived from the verb *koungera* (= to diminish). It is thought that it was formerly bulky but later diminished in size. Edible.

28. *Estrilda stricapilla*: *Kafunzi*

The name is derived from the noun *funbzi* (= small nest). This bird is characterized by its smallness. If people of Beshi clan eats it, all skin will be covered with measles and may suffer from some diseases of malnutrition. If this bird gets into a house, the spouses are forbidden to have sexual intercourse before the arrival of the traditional doctor to conduct purification. Edible.

29. *Lonchura cuculata*: *Manjoro* or *Kaponda-manjoliro*

It is called so because of its smallness. It is also used in a proverb as follows: “Kutali mulume ungamala ekaponda-majoliro (Sometimes a man is unable to finish easy tasks or work that he has minimized).”

30. *Lonchura poensis*: *Lureke*

The name is derived from the verb *kureka* (= to flock). This bird flies in groups. The flock form a line when they settle on the same branch of a tree. Edible.

31. *Nesocharis ansorgei*: *Kapolola*

The name is derived from the verb *kapolola* (= to shell). This bird eats grains such as rice. Edible.

32. *Nigritta canicapilla*: *Chisimya*

The name is derived from noun *musimya* (= darkness). Edible.

33. *Spermophaga ruficapilla*: *Chiana-funzi* or *Chirifu*

The name *Chiana-funzi* means “*Kafunzi*’s uncle.” Because it is purple, the Tembo people think that it should not be killed when it gets into a house. Otherwise, there will death among the dwellers.

FRANGILLIDAE

34. *Serinius sulphuratus*: *Kalya-bwasso*

The name is derived from the verb *kulya* and the noun *bwasso* (= to eat flowers). The name is also used to indicate a debauched person.

HIRUNDINIDAE

35. *Hirundo angolensis*: *Katambira*

36. *Hirundo smithii*: *Katambira*

37. *Psalidoprocne nitens*: *Katambira*

The name is derived from the verb *kutambira* (= to work). This bird is migratory. The three species (No. 35, 36 and 37) differ only in their size and skin color.

MOTACILLIDAE

38. *Motachilla anguimp*: *Kasekase*

It is so called because of its thin legs. It is said that someone who eats it must die. Its nest it used to heal asthma after tattoos are made on the ailer’s chest. In the Tembo tales, this bird was good at singing and the dog was good at dancing. Then one day it danced badly because the dog scratched it while dancing.

39. *Motachilla campensis*: *Karubi ka lwishi*

Tha name is derived from the verb *kuruba* (= to be plunged into water [*lwishi*]). This bird lives near the river and its tail seems to be dipped into water. The name is also given to the drunkards. Edible for some people.

MUSCICAPIDAE

40. *Platysteria castanea*: *Ngure*

The name is derived from its song, “Ngure, ngure.” In the Tembo language, the word *Ngure* or *Ngulu* also means adult or big. So despite its smallness, this bird is considered as a “big” bird. Edible.

41. *Terpsiphone rufiventer*: *Namesiwesiwe*

The name is derived from its song, “Masiwe, masiwe” and “Siwe, siwe.” Edible.

MUSOPHAGIDAE

42. *Corythaeola cristata*: *Muaha*43. *Musophaga rossae*: *Muaha*

Both names above (No. 42, 43) are derived from the verb *kuaha* (= to wake up with a startle). The tail feathers are used as adornment of hats and bags of the traditional chiefs. They are kingly birds. Because their song resemble human voice, it is believed that the birds can reveal the presence of human beings hidden in bushes. Likewise, they tell the time of the day.

NECTARINIDAE

44. *Nectarinia cuprea*: *Kaponda-kanene*

Kanene means bulky.

45. *Nectarinia kilimensis*: *Kaponda ka chisimya*

Chisimya means black color.

46. *Nectarinis verticalis*: *Kaponda-munanga* or *Chimanga*

For No. 44, 45 and 46, *Kaponda* is a name derived from the verb *kupota* (= to be tight). It has a close-set bill that is elongated and flat.

ORIOOLIDAE

47. *Oriolus larvatus*: *Lunka*

The name is derived from the verb *kuuka* (= to hop). This bird often hops from branch to branch. Edible.

48. *Oriolus percivali*: *Kumbua*

The name is derived from its song, “Kumbua, kumbua.” It also comes from the verb *kombua* or *kombola* (= to eat meat or food that makes one uneasy). It is called so because it feeds on insects, even those barely visible. Edible.

PHASIANIDAE

49. *Afropavo congensis*: *Hoko*

The name is derived from its song, “Hokoe, hokoe, hokoe,” sung around 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. It is believed that this bird tells people to wake up or to return home from fields. Its meat is preferred by the Tembo people.

50. *Guttera plumifera*: *Kanga*

Kanga means the hole of a game called *sombi*, because its feathers are spotted with black color which looks like the hole.

51. *Francolinus afer*: *Ndai*

The name is derived from its song, “Krayi, Krayi,” uttered in the evening. When it cries,

the shepherds know that it is time they led the cattle to home.

PICIDAE

52. *Dendropicos rufescens*: *Ngongotera* or *Ngongota-muchi*

The name is derived from the verb *kukungotera* (= to hit, to peck at something). This bird looks for its prey insects by striking the tree with its bill. Its head and feathers are used to heal headaches. Edible.

PLOCEIDAE

53. *Ambliospiza albifrons*: *Fundasi* or *Nguzi-buluma*

The name is derived from the verb *kufundaasa* (= to be tight). Because of its yellow-purple color on the neck, it can be taken for another species. Another name is from the noun *nguzi* (*Sorghum vulgare*) and the verb *kuluma* (= to sting), because it eats mainly *Sorghum vulgare*.

54. *Ploceus baglafecht*: *Kakunzikunzi* or *Nguzi-ike*

The former name means *bikunzi* (= *Sorghum vulgare*) waste. The latter name means the small *Nguzi* (No. 56).

55. *Ploceus nigricollis*: *Fundasi*

56. *Ploceus xanthops*: *Nguzi*

It is so called because it eats *Sorghum vulgare* (see 54). It is used in the saying, “Enguzi ili mcho ilya emarondo.” (“A shrewd *Nguzi* is the one that eats corn.”) Edible.

57. *Passer griseus*: *Chitali-mbwa*

The name is derived from the verb *kutala* (= to settle) and the noun *mbwa* (= playground). This bird comes to settle on the ground in search for food when the villagers have husked the corn.

LANIIDAE

58. *Tchagra australis*: *Mutonda-haka wa muluhu*

The name is derived from the verb *kutonda* (= to begin) from the nouns *haka* (= place) and *luhuhu* (= steppe) joined together by the preposition */wa/* indicating origin. It means that this bird lives in the savanna.

59. *Laniarius ferrigineus*: *Mutonda-haka*

The name is derived from the verb *kutonda* or *kutondera* (= to begin) and from the noun *haka* (= the clump of the trees). This bird flies in a bosk at down. Edible.

PSITTACIDAE

60. *Psittachus erithacus*: *Nguhu*

The name is derived from the noun *Huunda* (= whistle). This bird is a whistler, and whistling is considered in the Tembo culture as an insult. A lazy or bad person who spends the day whistling is also called “*Nguhu*.”

PYCNONOTIDAE

61. *Andropadus latirostris*: *Chiota*

62. *Andropadus tephrolaemus*: *Kaotaota*

63. *Bleda syndactyla*: *Chiota-chibumbu*

Chibumbu means “red.”

64. *Chlocichla flavicollis*: *Chiota*

65. *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus*: *Mbiye* or *Chiota-mbiye*

Mbiye comes from its song, “Mbiye, mbiye.” *Chiota* is derived from the verb *koota* (= to warm oneself). They are considered as birds of ill person. It is believed that if this bird gets into a house, the dwellers are compelled to abandon it, or they die. However, it is edible.

66. *Pycnonotus barbatus*: *Hore*

The name is derived from verb *kuhola* (= to count). “Hore” names countable thing. When it sings, people think that it is counting. Edible.

STRIGIDAE

67. *Budo africanus*: *Chikumba*

The name is derived from the verb *kuchikumba* (= to bend). This bird cocks its head on one side on the branch of a tree or in a tuft of branches and stays there all day long. It is not edible because people think that sorcerers use it as a telephone.

STURNIDAE

68. *Onchognatus tervirostris*: *Muhwa*

The name is derived from the verb *kuuha* (= to cry while hunting). When it sings, people think it is hunting. Edible.

SYLVIDAE

69. *Apalis porphylaema*: *Njehe* (I)

The name is derived from the noun *ndechi* (= speaker). It is believed to be a loquacious bird. A talkative man is also called *Njele*.

70. *Camaroptera brevicaudata*: *Namuna*

The name is derived from the noun *muuna* (= roots). This small bird flies close to the ground investigating the tree stumps of the tree in search for prey insects. Edible.

71. *Cisticola erythrops*: *Shekera-bisinde* or *Chiyechinye*

The name is derived from the verb *kushekera* (= to laugh at) and the noun *bisinde* (= reeds). It is said that this bird laughs at reeds it lives in. It is also called *Chinyechinya* because of its song, “Chinye, chinye.” Edible.

72. *Prinia bairdi*: *Njeche* (II)

See 69.

73. *Sylvietta leucophrys*: *Kalya-bisaba*

The name is derived from the verb *kulya* (= to eat) and from the noun *bisasa* (= insects). This bird feeds on insects. Edible.

TROGONIDAE

74. *Apaloderma narina*: *Kuuku*

The name is derived from its song, “Kuuku, kuuku.” Edible.

75. *Zoosterops senegalensis*: *Mbwirire*

The name is derived from its song, “Bwirire, Bwirire.” Edible.

MEROPIDAE

76. *Merops oreobates*: *Muchima-Chitaka*

The name is derived from the verb *kuchima* (= to dig) and from noun *chitaka* (= soil).