

BOOK REVIEWS

Critical sites for biodiversity conservation in Nigeria

Ed. A.U. Ezealor

Published by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation

This directory of critical sites for biodiversity conservation in Nigeria is based on an inventory of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of the country. The IBA programme is a global biodiversity conservation initiative of Birdlife International and its partner organizations worldwide, including the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), which uses birds as a common index for identifying sites that are crucial for the long-term maintenance of total biodiversity. The rationale is that birds, which are by nature diverse, ubiquitous, conspicuous and readily identifiable, and which enjoy a ready popular appeal, are good indicators of the health of the environment. Conservation of important bird areas, by implication, leads to the conservation of total biodiversity. Bird enthusiasts are, however, likely to miss the important value of the book for birds, since they do not feature in the title. Published by NCF and edited by A. U. Ezealor of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the book is also a contribution towards the development and execution of a national biodiversity action plan, required of Nigeria as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity. It is organized in 16 sections, ranging from a Foreword by the Honourable Federal Minister of Environment (Section 1) to an Index of terms (Section 16). A Preface forms Section 2, while in Section 3, M. Aminu-Kano, the Executive Director of NCF, and L. B. Marguba, the Conservator-General of the Federation, give a detailed history of the development of conservation in Nigeria. They also give effective briefs on the National Park Service, with its eight constituent parks (Kainji Lake National Park, Yankari National Park, Chad Basin National Park, Cross River National Park, Gashaka-Gumti National Park, Old Oyo National Park, Kamuku National Park and Okomu National Park). The authors of Section 3 refer to their account as that of "organized conservation", dating this from Nigeria's colonial experience, implying by this that all the indigenous practices by which nature was effectively conserved before the colonial experience were not organized! This implication is questionable. Perhaps the authors should have used the word "formal" in place of "organized" in this context.

Sections 4 and 9 are overviews of the Directory and Inventory, stating the objectives of the IBA Programme and the Directory, outlining the criteria, process and method for the selection and location of 30 IBA sites, out of 52 initially identified, in Nigeria, and demonstrating the practicality of the process, by reference to an ongoing biodiversity conservation project being implemented by NCF, and its partners, at IBA sites in Taraba and Plateau States. The potentials of the sites for enhancing ecotourism and biological research are also highlighted in this section. A map of the location of the IBA sites is given in Section 5, which also contains the context of physical features, climate, vegetation and major environmental problems of the country in which the sites exist. Based on data for the 30 IBA sites, details of bird biodiversity for the country as a whole are given in Section 6,

in terms of total number of species recorded (905), and numbers of breeding residents (436 confirmed, 165 suspected), Palearctic (150) and intra-African (90) migrants, vagrants and others, and in terms of endemism, biome restriction, conservation status, and global conservation concern. Sections 7 and 8 deal, respectively, with conservation infrastructure in terms of national laws, administrative institutions and categories of protected areas (national parks, game reserves, forest reserves and sacred groves), on the one hand, and international conventions and programmes, on the other; while 10 and 11 provide a Glossary and Acknowledgements, respectively. Exactly half of the book (55 out of 110 pages) is devoted to brief accounts, with maps and copious nature sketches of each of the 30 IBA sites (Section 12, pages 55-81) and other significant sites (Section 13, pages 82-84). Sections 14 (Bibliography), 15 (Appendices) and 16 (Index) conclude the book. Although the title is omitted in the text (just as Appendix 3 is omitted in the Table of Contents), Appendix 1, "A Revised Checklist of the Birds of Nigeria", is perhaps one of the most useful contents of this book, listing 910 birds by common and scientific names arranged in families.

The book is written in a highly readable style, helped by copious illustrations with attractive colour plates of Nigerian vegetation types (although the vegetation type in Plate 4 is not given), maps and sketches. It is largely free of errors of facts or typing. Other than the omissions referred to above with regard to the appendices, minor errors or defects detected include "Maloney" for "Moloney" on p. 3; the inconsistency in using both "savannah" and "savanna" on p.8, and "km²" and "sq.km". on p.9. As there are also state Ministries of Environment, presumably the reference to "Ministry of Environment" on p. 23 is to the "Federal Ministry of Environment". The statement that Cross River National Park "is mainly conceived around the moist tropical primary rain forest... and mangrove swamp on the coast," can mislead the unwary reader. There is no mangrove vegetation within the boundaries of Cross River National Park, although protection of the forest vegetation in the Park could conceivably influence the coastal vegetation, including mangrove, by the estuary of the Cross River.

Altogether, *Critical Sites For Biodiversity Conservation in Nigeria* is a well-written and highly informative book on bird biodiversity and conservation in Nigeria. It concentrates so much useful information on the subject in its small volume that it can readily form a useful companion for a field trip. No price is indicated on the book. It is the hope that the price will be made readily affordable to undergraduates, researchers, policy makers, practising conservationists and nature lovers, so that one can confidently recommend it as essential reading to all the above.

— David Okali

Folayegbe M. Akintunde-Ighodalo: a public life**LaRay Denzer****Ibadan: Sam Bookman Publishers, 2001****C/o Book Builders, 2, Awosika Avenue, Bodija, Ibadan****ISBN 978-048005****Pages: 329 + xv + index +b/w photos****Price: ₦1,200 or £10 + £5 air postage**

Folayegbe M. Akintunde Ighodalo tells the story of a young girl who grew up in a small provincial Yoruba town and, armed with unusual intelligence and strength of character, rose to the rank of Permanent Secretary in the Public Service of the old Western State. In the words of her biographer, she thus "broke the glass ceiling" that had for so long frustrated the struggle of educated Nigerian women for equal rights.

This simplified summary of the life of Akintunde Ighodalo is well-known. So, in setting out to present a full-fledged history, LaRay Denzer tries to account for the popularity of biography in the Nigerian culture in which her own biography might be received, by focussing on the pedigree of the form. In one of her refreshing insights, she identifies in the Yoruba *oriki* an indigenous model for biography. In the *oriki* the individual is often presented as an extension and fulfilment of the destiny of the lineage, or the *oriki* is sometimes the parents' optimistic map of their child's destiny.

However, while Denzer acknowledges the inspirational role of ancestral history in Folayegbe's development, her sensitive characterization gives due credit to other social and psychological factors, like the strict paternal upbringing as well as the tough mind and innate resourcefulness that have helped Mrs. Fola Ighodalo to succeed. The traditional model turns out to be, in fact, inadequate, given the recent impact of social change on traditional forms. Folayegbe herself does not fit into the usual traditional stereotype of Yoruba girls. Her upbringing "went against the usual socialisation experienced by most Yoruba girl children." She was taught to be assertive rather than deferential. As an influence on characterization, the *oriki* model was modified by the new moralistic culture of colonial education, with its promise of social success in the rags-to-riches biographies of a new African élite whose cultural ancestors include Aggrey and Crowther. This colonial model has itself given way to the kind of biography that Denzer has now produced, with its concern for women's rights and self-fulfilment.

Since the biographical form is so deeply rooted in the character of the individual, the biographer's social assumptions are crucial in shaping her historical narrative. Denzer's method is designed to advance the project for the transformation of Nigeria's patriarchal society. She focuses on the history of the women's struggle, for which she is adequately prepared by her earlier work in this area. For her, the biography of Akintunde-Ighodalo is inseparable from the history of the women's movement in Nigeria, as well as that of the development projects with which her subject was involved. The need to cover the field adequately makes her cast her net very wide indeed, and her text is overflowing with mini-biographies of Nigerian women pioneers and achievers. One negative effect of this method

is the interruption of the flow of narrative. The digressiveness can be a distraction to a non-academic reader who is not at home with the surfeit of information that footnotes usually contain.

On the other hand, so thoroughly has she raked the undergrowth of national and provincial history that even the incidental bits of information that she digs up are full of surprises: like the revelation that the first Nigerian female medical practitioner was not Dr. Abimbola Awoliyi (1936), but Dr. Agnes Yewande Savage (1929), or when, by chance, we find confirmation of that human side of Fagunwa that we already glimpse in the wedding interludes of his terrifying tales. For it was her relative, Fagunwa, who brought her the set of woven Yoruba cloth that she wore at her wedding in London.

Such a thorough and wide-ranging researcher cannot avoid that occasional slip. These are surprisingly few. One of those rare slips occurs in the reference to the term, "ghommid", as a Yoruba word. The double consonants, as well as the terminal consonant, indicate that it is not. It is rather Soyinka's collective word for that class of forest-dwelling spirits that includes ghosts and gnomes.

The latter part of the text gets increasingly less concerned with the personal affairs of Mrs. Akintunde-Ighodalo, and more with her public life. This reaches its high point in the chapter on action towards social reform. The action groups with which Akintunde-Ighodalo got involved were committed not just to social reform, but were also engaged in resistance to military tyranny. Denzer points out the influence of South American liberation theology on their ideas of education and social reform.

Although her involvement in reformist activities has led Chief Akintunde-Ighodalo to the international stage, she remains rooted in her traditional customs and institutions. She finds fulfilment as a matriarch. It is the matriarch's face that smiles at us in the colour photograph on the handsome cover of the volume. The centre pages are taken up by an album of black and white photographs ranging from the deceptively shy five-year old village girl and the self-assured member of the Queen's College Debating Society, to the London bride and graduate-to-be; there are also photographs of the Civil Servant, and again photographs of the matriarch and mother-in-law with that ever-ready smile.

— Dan Izevbaye

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