

Kpelle Bird Names

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Introduction

In February, 2018, I spent a few days in the town¹ of Favey, in Zota District, Bong County looking at the use of small forest reserves (Manvell, 2019). During one of our forest walks, I asked about some local bird names and was a little surprised how similar some were to the Mano (Glottocode [mann1248](#)) bird names I had recorded a few years before (Manvell & Gweh forthcoming). In some down time that evening, I follow-up my piqued curiosity by playing a random selection of bird vocalisations from the same Chappuis (2000) collection that I had used with my Mano informants to my hosts and their neighbours and recorded the names elicited. These plus my jottings from the field form the basis of the original data in this note.

Gay *et al.* (1969) identified eight Liberian Kpelle (Glottocode [libe1247](#)) dialects and though their simple map suggests Favey is within their Kpai Kpelle zone, they admit to possible errors in placement and also point out (p.41) that “there are gradual shadings in boundary areas rather than abrupt shifts.” As Favey falls with Gwilapolu clan, whose name means ‘behind the forest’, reflecting its geographical separation from the rest of Zota District to the north-west by a long, forested ridge, there may indeed have been a cartographical error. My working assumption is that it is within the Zotaa dialect zone, but this requires verification.

Kpelle dialects are not only distinguished by vowel changes but also by the acquisition of some vocabulary from neighbouring languages with Mano, as I had detected, being the influence on the Zotaa dialect (*ibid.*). Curiously no influence of Guinea Kpelle, also known as Guerzé, on any of the neighbouring dialects is mentioned. At the time of Gay *et al.*'s article, the linguistic status of Guerzé is unknown. Today it is considered a separate language (Glottocode [guin1254](#)) despite high levels of mutual comprehension which incline some to think of Kpelle more as a continuum spanning the Liberian and Guinea dialects than two languages (Konoshenko 2008). Favey lies only 13 km from the Guinea border and the bird names recorded here show some cross-over with this dialect/language² and highlighting this I believe adds some utility to this note despite the paucity and provisional nature of the data presented. By way of a simple example using the most up to date dictionaries for these languages that we will consider shortly, whereas some Kpelle speakers in Liberia use the word **ɲɔni** to describes birds in general, in Guerzé they use **ɲwěni**.

In recent years Guerzé has been the subject of much linguistic work by Maria Konoshenko, including the production of an accessible bilingual Guerzé-French dictionary (2019). This dictionary has a genesis extending back to 1919 and updates two earlier versions by other authors, notably by the addition of tonal marks. Maria's work contains fewer natural history entries than the earlier versions for two reason: firstly it was focussed initially on roots rather than complex words and secondly, words unknown to her oldest consultant had to be excluded as they couldn't be represented correctly (pers. comm). Fortunately I have been able to consult the two earlier dictionaries and since these are both difficult to locate and in French, using them here I hope adds some value for Liberians researchers to build on in the future. A brief introduction to these earlier dictionaries is helpful and this draws on the introduction to the second one (Leger, 1975) by the noted West African linguist, Father André Prost, who also had a hand in it.

1 For those not familiar with Liberian English settlement terminology, a town is what elsewhere is often called a village and this term is reserved for hamlets. Note the town name is also spelt Fape and Farvey.

2 During the years of intermittent civil conflict (1989-2003), some of Favey's population went into exile across the border and some of the children born there or who learnt to speak in this period, acquired a notable Guerzé way of talking (James Mator, pers. comm 15th November, 2025).

The work started at the Gouecké³ mission with Father Garlantéze documenting as best he could, numerous Guerzé words and phrases from 1919 until his death in 1924. When Father Prost was posted there from 1929 to 1931, he set about improving the transcription of this material, but didn't quite complete the task. At some unclear later period, Father Jules Casthelain took over and 'corrected' the words according to Prost in a "façon très malencontreuse" but nevertheless managed to publish them as a dictionary in the respected mémoires de l'IFAN series (Casthelain, 1952).

Father Leger, who worked among the Guerzé from 1936 to 1946 and according to Prost had a remarkable mastery of the language, continued his linguistic interest long after his departure, examining translations and contacting Guerzés outside Guinea, all of which cumulated in his rich 1975 publication⁴. Prost describes this work as much superior to the 1952 version, not because it contains many new articles, but because they are more developed and the transcriptions far more exact. He also notes it concerns the most widely spoken Guerzé dialect, that from the central region around Nzérékoré - Samoé - Gouécké.

I have had the opportunity to consult Casthelain (1952) but unfortunately only up to the L-words and it shows that the process of ascribing bird names to species identified with their scientific names had been started. Despite Prost's criticism, Casthelain's work retains some utility in a few details given with his bird names that didn't make it through to Leger's version.

By way of comparison, the introduction to the most recent, and certainly most extensive Liberian Kpelle bilingual dictionary (Leidenfrost & McKay, 2007) recounts that serious work on the language started when the Lutheran Church in America invited Dr. Dietrich Westermann to analyse it in 1914. Unfortunately for non-German speakers, much of Westermann's subsequent work was published in this language. However, one joint publication (Westermann & Melzian, 1930) is in English and 1323 records from the vocabulary within are accessible via the wonderful RefLex website (Seegerer & Flavier, 2011-2025). The less accessible Leidenfrost & McKay dictionary incorporates a Kpelle-German word list of 2000 entries by Westermann, which presumably includes these.

The Leidenfrost and McKay dictionary is an impressive work of 5200 entries and though it is not stated, these are I believe based on the Totota dialect. According to Gay *et al.* (1969) this is the most central Kpelle dialect and the least influenced by other languages, which they concur was a wise choice to select in efforts to standardise the written language⁵. The authors humbly state in their acknowledgements (p. xi) that their work "is only an incomplete sample of the vast word treasure of the Kpelle people and their still largely unrecorded rich culture of oral tradition".

I likewise hope this miniscule contribution of bird names I recorded in Favey will encourage others to explore this rich vein of the Kpelle language which as we will see, is the portal to their deep, and especially acoustic, engagement with the rich birdlife many still live amidst. To aid further research, I have included in two appendices the bird names recorded by the pioneering lexicographers in the dictionaries of Theodore E. Leidenfrost and John S. McKay and Father Leger respectively. For the latter I have translated the French entries and include

3 Gouecké is about 30 km north of N'Zérékoré at the edge of Guerzé-speaking country, bordering the Kono.

4 Leger's work was published at N'Zérékoré, presumably by the Peres Blancs Mission in a limited run.

5 One of the co-authors of this article was William E. Welmers who had made a second analysis of Kpelle for the United Lutheran Church of America in 1948 (Leidenfrost & McKay, 2007: ix & xiv), and was presumably influential in this decision.

any updated transcriptions from Maria Konoshenko's dictionary and for both, I have added some annotations regarding the potential species they can be ascribed to. These works contain about 47 Liberian Kpelle and 73 Guerzé bird names and show a good deal of names in common. As my little exploration of the names used at Favey hopefully illustrates, there are many more still to be recorded.

For those inclined to take up the mantle of further research into Kpelle bird names, I would like to draw attention to two fantastic free resources on the ornithological side of things. The first is the Birds of Africa app which can be downloaded to a smart phone and set to display only those species found in the specific country of interest and gives access to an impressive pocket-guide containing photos, text and sound recordings that can be used off-line in the field. More details are available at: <https://www.africanbirdclub.org/apps/>

The second resource is an open-access initiative called the xeno-canto project which is a huge accessible database of bird vocalisations (<https://xeno-canto.org/>). Though the Birds of Africa app contains sound recordings for each species, these have their limitations because of its continent-wide scope. The same species of bird may not make identical songs and calls across its range and xeno-canto allows for a more tailored choice of recordings to be used with Kpelle informants. At the time of writing it hosted 183 recordings of 94 species from Liberia and 199 recordings of 127 species from Guinea. Neighbouring countries are also well endowed and can help make up any missing species.

Finally a little word is necessary about the equivalent English and scientific names I have adopted. In previous notes I have followed the standard regional reference, Borrow & Demey (2001). Though I have largely done so here, it is important to note that the Birds of Africa app uses a different naming convention, that of the IOC World Bird List, and this can cause some confusion when using it. I have therefore occasionally added the new root name used by the IOC after a slash to aid navigation: thus some of the francolins are written francolin/spurfowl. Where I have continued to follow Borrow & Demey and the root word remains the same, but the first part of the name cannot be found, please navigate via the scientific name.

I have also decided not to capitalise English bird names except where they refer to a person or place. This is contrary to the rule adopted by the IOC World Bird List⁶, but I ask why should I make them look more important than the Kpelle names? I believe strongly in the equality of knowledge, vernacular or scientific, and since I am ignorant on the conventions I would need to use to elevate the Kpelle names to an equal typography, which may well not exist, I have kept them all in small caps. For the scientific binomials, I follow however the convention of capitalising the name of the genus.

In the analysis of names, I use the following abbreviations to the works mentioned above: L&M for Leidenfrost & McKay (2007) and W&M for Westermann & Melzian (1930).

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6 <https://www.worldbirdnames.org/new/english-names/spelling-rules/capitalization/>

Kpelle Bird Names from Favey

N.B. Names in bold italics are my efforts at transcribing the names. The names that follow in square brackets are Maria Konoshenko's phonetic transcriptions—see her 2019 dictionary for an explanation of how the symbols represent sounds.

dyan and ***dyan gbebe*** [díɛŋ gbébé] cisticolas
(*Cisticola* spp.)

Playing the calls of the red-faced cisticola (*Cisticola erythrops*) elicited these two names in the evening and my informants said that they have two birds which resemble each other. Earlier in the day, I had been given the similar ***nya dedaye*** for the whistling cisticola (*Cisticola lateralis*) and was told that it meant rice bird nephew, because it calls these birds to eat rice. I think it is more likely that the first word is ***nân*** meaning father and paternal uncle in both Liberian Kpelle and Guerzé. Leger has a candidate for the second word ***dyëgbě***, described simply as a bird found in savannas and cisticolas are indeed denizens of grassy areas.

The Mano name I elicited for the whistling cisticola, **dié-dié**, is presumably onomatopoeic, especially for the red-faced species, but is also based around the word **dié** meaning to pass and hence the idea of it telling other birds to pass on the farm to eat rice. Perhaps the same idea is based here around another similar meaning word.

gba-lorlor broad-billed and blue-throated rollers
(*Eurystomus glaucurus* and *E. gularis*)

I am not sure how I elicited this name during the morning's walk, but it shares the Mano name I previously recorded for the similar blue-throated roller (*Eurystomus gularis*), **gbàd lǎ̌-lǎ̌**. Furthermore, Leger under the lemma **gbala-lǎ̌lǎ̌** gives a description that corresponds well to the behaviour of both species: an insectivorous bird, a little bigger than a pigeon—more specifically a green pigeon according to Casthelain—which will attack birds even bigger than itself that approach its nest, for which he gives the synonym **gba-lǎ̌lǎ̌**. It is tempting to relate this name to a reduplication of second part of the verb **gba lǎ̌** “to ambush, to assemble, to lay an ambush” given the well-known aggression of these birds, but this requires verification.

gba-wo-tah [gbàhútá] tawny-flanked prinia
(*Prinia subflava*)

No meaning was provided for this name but given that its distinctive song is embodied in a Mano name for this species that references the sound of knocking the edge of a cutlass, it may be worth exploring if this one is based around the word **wóo**, meaning word, voice, sound, language, speech, tone.

gbei tay gbay [gbɛ́ɛ téɛ gbɛ̀i] African emerald cuckoo
(*Chrysococcyx cupreus*)

The name derives from the words the bird is heard to be saying “who passing on the road?”. Leger has an entry for a bird saying the same thing, *gbè-tèè-belé* or *gbè-tèghè-belé* however his description of it does not fit the emerald cuckoo: “A pretty bird, big as a sparrow, body and tail red, rather long, with black on its head” No obvious alternate candidate fits this

description. Curiously for the lemma '*nyola-é-tuwo-kpèli* Leger says it is a foyotocol (sic. coucou foliotocol, i.e. this species), whose name means “mother-in-law, good evening” since this is what it is heard to be calling, which is a convincing rendition of the first part of the Chappuis recording of this species. Are there two names for this species based on different parts of it's call? Verification is required.

gbenah pok-pok [gbèna kpɔ́kpɔ́] woodpecker spp.

Though elicited from the calls and drumming of the fire-bellied woodpecker (*Dendropicos pyrrhogaster*), I suspect it applies more widely. The meaning of *benah* is unknown (dead wood?) but the second part of the name is clearly onomatopoeic (W&M have the lemma *kpɔ́kpɔ́* for knock-knock).

gblei to [gblée tōo] dove or pigeon spp.

This name was elicited from the recording of the blue-headed wood dove (*Turtur brehmeri*) but someone then corrected the speaker and said it was ***ton wineh***. The ascription of this name is thus uncertain but there are other candidate doves or pigeons with somewhat similar cooing songs. Clues to its identification may lie in the meaning of the first word and a reference to a specific type of vegetation⁷ or tree they are associated with would not be surprising given one of the Mano names I recorded. The second word ***to*** may be a contracted form of Leger's generic Guerzé term for dove/pigeon ***tonwonon*** or the Liberian Kpelle ***tòlon*** (L&M), or simply be onomatopoeic.

gblo [gblɔ́] great blue turaco
(*Corythaeola cristata*)

To my ears, this would not appear to be an onomatopoeic name and it requires further investigation.

heya/hey chestnut-breasted nigrita
(*Nigrita bicolor*)

Presumably onomatopoeic, though I have some doubts this is a real name.

kaye pai jorjor swamp palm bulbul
(*Thescelocichla leucopleura*)

This was instantly recognised and there was much amusement around its name and what it is saying when it talks. A lady even sung a song about it, imploring it not to forget the people in the town who are waiting for it. Its name is surprisingly absent from any of the dictionaries. Partly because of the fun associated with this name, I was unable to work out its meaning. My suspicion however is the *jorjor* is a reduplicated form of the verb to hit, knock or strike a blow (***hɔ́*** in Guerzé) which when used as ***lɔ́ hɔ́*** means to tap palm wine (Konoshenko).

A few days after recording this name, I mentioned it to a man at Kpelle village, Fomba (Grand

⁷ John Gay (1989: 31) reports that when in 1974 he spent several days with an 'astute' Kpelle farmer surveying forests, his informant identified 20 types of bush and forest, plus an additional six types of swamp land. Sadly he doesn't provide the names and only basic terms have made it into the various dictionaries.

Cape Mount County) who said you can't call *kaye pai jorjor* when tapping as it will spoil the wine. Further exploration of lexical avoidance regarding this name is required.

kpili kein & kpili kenen [kpíli kèn, kpíli gènen] blue-shouldered robin chat
(*Cossypha cyanocampter*)

There seems to be short and longer forms of the name. Though my informants in the evening couldn't help with a meaning, I had earlier in the day poorly noted another name (or a different pronunciation?) for this species (*kpe-to gimí*) that I was told meant “speak all” and which I suspect equates to L&R's *péeteegene* and Leger's *petegene*. This gives a helpful clue for the meaning of these names for this exceptional mimic which is also known to reply to human whistles. Leger gives *pélé* for conversation/chat, which could be relevant. More tenuously for the second word, could it be *kělēn*? He describes this as a musical instrument made from an old trough which is hit with sticks and depending where, the sound is different.

kor queh Ahanta francolin/spurfowl
(*Pternistis achantensis*)

I am not sure how I elicited this name for this species in the morning walk. It is however worth considering whether it is also used for its slightly larger and less obtrusive congener found in more open country, the double-spurred spurfowl (*Pternistis bicalcaratus*). Under the lemma, *kɔkwɛɛ*, L&M confusingly describe it as “guinea fowl (small variety); bush fowl”. Leger however describes *kokwè* as a francolin and Casthelain adds the detail that this is the name at Yomou (37 km north of Favey) for the francolin, which elsewhere is called *hadyali*. As Leger gives three binomials based around *hadyali* indicating whether it is the francolin of the forest, clearing or scrub, this should be explored for *kor queh*. Should the same construction be used, the forest one is likely used for the smaller and more secretive Latham's francolin (*Peliperdix lathamii*).

kur-kur jig-gaye nkulengu rail
(*Himantornis haematopus*)

The first part of the name (*kur-kur*) is clearly onomatopoeic, but the second part less so to my ears. This ascription resolves the following names: L&M's Fuma dialect: *kêikeigikee* [also written *kêikei-gikee*] which they describe as “bird species similar to chicken, has red legs like pigeons; its call has a scary tone.” They also give the variant: *kóli kó zikó*. Leger has *kélikédýiké* (written *kéli↓kéizikêi*, or *kélíkéijiké* by Konoshenko) which he describes as “size and colour of the partridge, sings at night”. It is worth noting that the English name is based on the onomatopoeic Bulu and Fang names from Cameroon (Sharpe, 1907: 421): putting this bird's strange calls to words clearly has different forms even within the same language.

kwen-wein [kwén wén] western nicator
(*Nicator chloris*)
[and probably the spotted greenbul
(*Ixonotus guttatus*)]

The name means “leopard bird” after its spotted plumage. Leger has the lemma *kwèli-wèni* with the same meaning for a bird whose size comparison suggests a slightly smaller species. The identical meaning is found within the Mano name which is also used for the smaller

spotted greenbul (*Ixonotus guttatus*). Both these common species should therefore be considered under this Kpelle name. It would be interesting to ask informants how they interpret the different vocalisations and sizes of these two birds that likely share a name.

peh too

African green pigeon
(*Treron calvus*)

The name may be onomatopoeic of the fluty, whistling trills of this species. However, given that I recorded another name for a Columbidae with the same second part, (**blei to**), which I speculate may be a contracted form of the Guerzé generic **tonwonon**, onomatopoeia may only partially apply. An alternate possibility is that **peh** relates to a noted association of the bird. As its Mano name translates as “corkwood seed pigeon”, referencing its fondness for this food, and though this doesn't pertain here, it could refer to another food source.

ponah [póna]

lyre-tailed honeyguide
(*Melichneutes robustus*)

The call was recognised instantly as the bird who high up in the sky, makes the announcement that the dry season is coming [more specifically following my Mano informants, that it is time for them to start making their farms]. Onomatopoeic after the extraordinary repeated honking sounds made during its display flights that are thought by ornithologists to be created by air passing through its tail feathers.

poopoo [bóbò]

red-eyed dove
(*Streptopelia semitorquata*)

Presumably onomatopoeic. Under **pôopoo**, L&M have “pigeon, brown ring-dove; turtle dove” and W&M have **pópô** with the entry “brown ring-dove”.

ton wineh [tòò ɲwíneɲ]

?

Though this was the second (corrected?) name elicited from the recording of the blue-headed wood dove, (*Turtur brehmeri*), I remain a little dubious as to whether it is indeed a dove or pigeon. The second word would seem to be a variation of the Guerzé generic term for bird, **wèni**. Though the first part could be another form of contraction of the Guerzé generic **tonwonon** for pigeons/doves, thus 'pigeon/dove bird' this seems odd and the name requires further investigation.

tow-hiya [tòò héya]

? black weaver species and/or malimbés

This name was elicited from playing the calls of the fork-tailed drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*). Though it was recognised as black, I believe that the second part of the recording which has this bird's more discordant shrills, squeaks and whistles led them to think of other all black birds, notably Maxwell's black weaver (*Ploceus albinucha*) and/or Vieillot's black weaver (*P. castaneofuscus*). My reasoning is that the first part of the name was explained as meaning the oil palm tree (**tow**) where apparently this bird can always be seen but the drongo is not known for this strict affinity, whereas these are popular sites for the nesting colonies of these weavers. Though Leger has a **tow-héê** which he describes as a black weaver that nests in the oil palm which supports this contention, Casthelain had a colour dimension in his description

of this bird (red throat) and also noted their pretty nests which instead implies the malimbos (*Malimbus* spp.) which are otherwise black, have harsh and rasping calls and also like oil palms. Further work is clearly required.

tron / zengbaye tron [tróŋ / zèngbé tróŋ] ? sunbirds

Though this name was elicited from a recording of the calls of the white-throated bee-eater, (*Merops albicollis*), I was not convinced my informants recognised it when pushed⁸ for a description. The similarity with L&M's lemma **tóŋŋ**, which has the synonym **zèngbe-tóŋŋ**, seems more relevant. Their entry reads "honey bird species; hummingbird. **Mua à tóŋ tóŋŋ kóŋ ma, da mó à yàle da dɔŋ ɲá**. If honey bird gets a boil on its leg, they bust it or joining the bones together.' When you do evil, you will be punished."

The alternative binomial name is interesting (cf. **zengbaye tutu** for the Senegal coucal). Leger offers a possible explanation to be explored under the lemma **dyenge** (scorpion, which in Liberian Kpelle L&M have: **zèŋkpé** syn. **zèŋgbé**), where he gives the saying, **dyenge-pili** said to a nervous and jumpy individual (like the scorpion). This could indeed describe the flighty behaviour of sunbirds [hummingbirds] and indeed the jumpy behaviour of the coucal.

tron [tróŋ] ?

The shortened form of the above name was also elicited from the vocalisations of the forest robin, (*Stiphrornis erythrothorax*), but I remain to be convinced of this ascription. More information is required and it is worth noting that I was told that they recognise a big **tron** and a small **tron**.

troonh / troow [tróŋ / trúù] dove spp?

The first name was first given when I asked after the meaning of **ton wineh**, and it was said that this is the "down one" which presumably refers to a terrestrial habit compared to the arboreal preference for the **wineh ni krou wineh**. The second name was then elicited from the recording of the blue-spotted wood dove, (*Turtur afer*), which is indeed often seen on the ground. Names presumably onomatopoeic but require further investigation.

wa [wà] yellow-billed turaco
(*Tauraco macrorhynchus*)
[and possibly green turaco (*T. persa*)]

Presumably onomatopoeic for the croaks of the second part of its call that progressively slows. The name could potentially also refer to its similar sounding congener.

wineh ni troow wineh [ɲwínéŋ nì trúù ɲwíneŋ] dove spp?

Said to be the 'up' (arboreal?) **troow**. Whether the last **wineh** (generic bird') is really part of

⁸ Part of my reason for pushing was that on the morning walk I had scribbled the name **pan-wun** for this bee-eater with the note "something you can f.... (word not clear) and "comes own time" which fits its status as mainly a dry season visitor. Unfortunately I didn't try any further to find the name for this delightful bird whose call I suspect may be the one L&M refer to in the name for the month October (**ɲweei**) "Named after the call of the bird **kpála ɲɔni** that returns at this time; the call says: "Wee-oo". Under the lemma **kpála ɲɔni**, it is simply described as "swallow" (bird).

the name is not certain. *Ni* is presumably a negation. More work is required to examine the validity of this name which could have been a neologism, born in the context of my questioning.

zengbaye tutu [zèngbé túutuu]

Senegal coucal

(*Centropus senegalensis*)

[and maybe two other *Centropus* spp.]

I suggest above (under ***traw /zengbaye traw***) that the first part of this binomial could reference its jumpy behaviour like the scorpion, ***zèngbé***. With no doubt, the second part is onomatopoeic and it would be interesting to check whether this name is also used for two congeners which also make *tu-tu* like calls but at different pitches and speeds and with distinct initial sounds, the black-throated coucal (*C. leucogaster*) and the blue-headed coucal (*C. monachus*). Leger has the lemma ***dyëgbě-tu-tu*** and notes the variant ***tuu-tuu*** described as resembling the 'coq des pagodes' which is a synonym for this coucal referencing its Asiatic cousins. For the lemma, ***zènkpe-tutu***, L&M are presumably erroneous with the entry "forest dove". It is interesting to note that the Vai use the same name for this species (Manvell, forthcoming) as do the Mende (Thompson *et al.* 2024).

Appendix 1: Liberian Kpelle Bird Names Recorded in Leidenfrost & McKay (2007)

Underlined header names indicate that analogous names were recorded at Favey. After the lemma, the words in italics are the original entry. I have trimmed this when it refers to similar words. The non-italicised words which follow are my thoughts on furthering the ascription to one species or several, and/or simple observations, but I don't always provide these.

Note the words follow a modified alphabetic order to that of English as Kpelle has some unique consonants: a b ɓ d e ɛ f g gb ɣ l k kp l m n ny ŋ o ɔ p -r s t u v w y z

The generic Kpelle name for bird is **ŋɔni**.

bàba

Duck. This could be a generic term that may also include the African pygmy goose (*Nettapus auritus*): more research needed.

bîliwoo

Blue-wing bird; blue plantain-eater. This description is a little confusing but if the name is onomatopoeic, a good candidate is the western plantain-eater (*Crinifer piscator*), which isn't blue, but does bear some resemblance to the turacos that have blue wings. The similarity of this word with the Guerzé name **bhili-koko** for one or two species of turaco is worth exploring—see Appendix 2.

bòbo

Bird species found in swamps. Given the confusing description of some of the bird names in this dictionary, it is perhaps worth noting that one Mende name for the palm-nut vulture (*Gypohierax angolensis*) is **boboe** (Thompson *et al.* 2024).

bɔ́bɔ

Woodpecker bird. It would be interesting to determine whether this name and **kóto** below are both generic names or somehow differentiated.

dêndɛŋ Syn: ***lîyɛŋ-toli***.

Bird species. I suspect this might be a species of cisticola because of its connection to the rice birds/weavers (***lîyɛŋ***) that it is said to call to come to eat rice and it may be onomatopoeic—see under the synonym and the Favey names. NB. The homonym of this name means epilepsy.

dɔŋ-těɛ Variant ***těɛtěɛ***

Humming bird. ***dɔŋ-těɛ a ŋálon wolo*** 'Humming bird has broken its egg'. Don't play in public with anything valuable. Presumably a species of sunbird, but requires verification.

fɔŋ Syn. ***kpîyakpiya***.

Yellow-casqued hornbill; 'palm bird' Ceratogymna elata. ***fɔŋ ñee bolôn káa ŋûa***. 'palm bird's mother's grave is on its head.' I would be surprised if this name is specific to this species, especially as the saying references the casket like box on its bill, which is most pronounced in all the larger hornbills. The saying may contain some errors as under the lemma **káma**, which means both grave and the hornbill bird's head and specifically the spongy growth on it,

the saying provided is *dílee káma káa díŋûa* 'Their mother's grave is on their head.'

gǔǔ

Bird species; pied crow bird; raven. *Péře-kɔŋ maa gǔǔ a seeni gé téé tēi kàa* 'Pied crow sitting at the house top sees the cutting of a chicken'. He who is watching the towns people how they treat one another, will learn how they would treat him. There is no reason to doubt this ascription to *Corvus albus*.

gbãagbãa

Bird species, hornbill, feeds on ripe fruit. *Fóŋ a lì, kéle gbãa fa lì.* 'Hornbill bird leaves, but the **gbãa** tree does not go'. Stranger leaves, but the family does not leave. Several hornbill species could be referred to under this name. No details are provided under the lemma **gbãa** which might help identify the tree it is associated with in the saying.

gbòo

Parrot. Whether this is specific to the Temneh parrot (*Psittacus timneh*), which has long been caught, tamed and traded in the region requires investigation. Whilst this name is distinct from the Guerzé name **kpan-kpan**—see Appendix 2—which likewise may not be specific, it is close to names for parrot in both Bandi, **fààbò** (Parsell 1966) and Vai, **pàábòó** (Manvell, forthcoming).

gberegbere

'Pepper bird' Presumably the common bulbul (*Pycnonotus barbatus*). Whether the Kpelle name for wild pepper references this bird, as the Guerzé name does, would be interesting to determine—see **kpèlèghèlè** in Appendix 2.

gbɔrɔtɔtɔ

Bird species. *gbɔrɔtɔtɔ ŋɔlá-kɔlɔ bé wɔlɔ nèe à kpolowa.* 'This bird's failure to keep secrets caused it to stay uninitiated'. No one will tell his secrets to a friend who cannot keep secrets.

kân

Kingfisher (bird). Presumably a generic term. In Guerzé there are some binomials using this as the primary name which may narrow down the species covered—**kan** in Appendix 2.

kêikeigikee (kêikei-gikee)

Bird species similar to chicken, has red legs like pigeons; its call has a scary tone. **kêikei-gikee wów su ŋilŋ-ŋilŋɔɔi.** **kêikei-gikee's** call is scary. Usage: Fuama dialect. Variant: **kóli kó zikóɔ.** This is the nkulengu rail (*Himantornis haematopus*)—see Favey names.

kelema niŋa

Bird species, also called *tuu-tuu bird*. Though the alternate name would suggest the three species of coucals that make this call, doubts are raised by the meaning of the lemma since **niŋa** means cow, but the meaning of **kelema** is unknown.

kelenkpɔ-mie

Woodpecker. Hard-billed bird species that drills a nest in a tree trunk. I suspect this could be more accurately written as a trinomial since **kéleŋ** seems to embody the idea of a tree trunk into meanings when used as a noun (canoe and silt drum). The full meaning awaits to be deciphered.

kóto

Woodpecker bird.

kebere

Bird species. It is perhaps worth exploring whether this is actually a binomial.

kɔɔ

Bird species, like a chicken. Another meaning given is 'spirit child' and there is a sub-entry below it for **kɔɔ-tee** "chicken named after this bird." Requires investigation. NB. The homonym of this word means "eggplant, large, sweet variety; bitter-ball (vegetable)"

kɔkwɛɛ

Guinea fowl (small variety); bush fowl. **kɔkwɛɛ koôŋ káa ma gé kɔ́ báre koli**. 'Even though guinea fowl has wings, it gets caught in a trap' No one can say he needs help from his fellow man. At Favey this name was used for the Ahanta francolin/spurfowl (*Pternistis ahantensis*), though I have suspicions it could also be used for a congener—see Favey names.

kwala kpo nɛɛɛ

Bird species; monkey bird, with a hooked beak, long-crested helmet shrike. The ascription to this species is very dubious in the light of the similar Guerzé name—see Appendix 2—which indicates hornbills that follow monkeys. Unfortunately this name is not translated, but **kwala** means monkey and the last word may be a reduplication of the noun for sweetness. Unless there is a polite allusion here, it is diverges from Casthelain who says the name refers to its habit of eating monkey excrements.

kpalo ŋɔni

Bird species, brings bad luck, war or death. **Kpalo** means woe or disaster and it would certainly be interesting to learn what species is or are referred to here and how and why they cause misfortune.

kpáaŋ

Hawk; chicken hawk. Presumably a generic term that covers several raptor species. Curiously there is a species of chicken called **kpáaŋ tɛɛ** described as "bardrock [sic?], grey and spotted like the hawk"

kpála ŋɔni

Swallow (bird). It is unfortunate that the name is not translated. My suspicion is that it means "drying-up bird" which is supported by the name for the month of October, **ŋweei**, which is described as "Named after the call of the bird **kpála ŋɔni** that returns at this time; the call says: "wee-oo". Though there are swallows which are dry season visitors, I am sceptical they could be described as making this call. More research is required.

kpelîŋ ŋɔni Variant: **kpelêŋ ŋɔni**

Bird species, yellow coloured. The entry refers the reader to the name **kpelêŋ** which is used for a soft, light wood whose bark is used to make yellow and brown dye and hence its use as an adjective for these colours. Several bird species fit this this description.

kpɛyakpɛya Variant **kpîyakpiya**

Hornbill bird. Though the entry adds "see **fɔŋ**" where this word as said to be a synonym, this

isn't repeated here. It likely refers to the smaller hornbills as opposed to the larger **fɔŋ**, which have more pronounced casques—see **kpèla-kpèla** in Appendix 2.

kpuri

Bird species; quail, black body, red wings. A strong candidate here is the blue quail (*Coturnix adansonii*), with its dark, slate blue body and chestnut wings. The similar harlequin quail (*Coturnix delegorguei*) should be borne in mind as there are some odd records in area. Curiously the entry refers this name to Westermann's work who had it down as **kpuyíri** 'quail' which may reflect some doubts about it. As the species has a preference for a habitat type that is unevenly distributed in the region, it is unlikely to be a widely known name. Where Westermann recorded it is unknown, but he did most (all?) of his fieldwork on Dobli Island in the St. Paul River (Gibbs, 1965: 237), which may have had suitable tall grassy areas.

kuɛ

Eagle, king of prey birds. **kuɛ a daa tɔ́ wúyɛ su.** *Eagle builds his nest on a cottonwood tree.* This name is transformed in Guerzé to **kuwo** Var. **kuo**—see this entry in Appendix 2.

kuɛ-kpáaŋ

Hawk. The name translates as eagle-hawk and may possibly refer to a species of hawk-eagle—see details under the Guerzé entry **kuwo-kpaan** in Appendix 2.

líyɛŋ

Rice bird; weaver bird. Though this may be a generic for several species of rice-eating birds, weavers included, it would be interesting to know if male and females are distinguished using **líyɛŋ** as the primary name as they are in Guerzé—see entry **liɛn** in Appendix 2.

líyɛŋ-toli Syn: **déŋ-dɛŋ**

Bird species; rice bird, calls líyɛŋ to come to eat rice. I suspect this might be a species of cisticola as they have this reputation—see the Favey names. The second part of the name is presumably derived from **tóli**, the verb to call.

manan-mansa

Bird species; pin-tailed whydah, it is the king's bird. Only the male has the long tail feathers. **manan-mansa fa bóŋ maa yíri, fɛ́ɛ nyaa kpíŋ.** *This bird does not decorate himself, only his wife.* The ascription to *Vidua macroura* appears solid.

mûu Variant **muû**

Owl.

niŋa pôlu lenkpɛ

Egret; cow bird, white, migrating long beaked bird, cattle bird. Though the cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) is clearly the bird described here, it is worth noting that over the border in Sierra Leone, Thompson *et al.* (2024) note that some of the Mende names for this species are also used for two other superficially similar white birds, the little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and the great white egret (*Ardea alba*). The name merits a literal translation: **niŋa** means cow, **pôlu** may have a sense of following and the third word is unclear, but could be compounded as **len** means fly (noun) and **kpé** to chase or drive away; to pursue; follow in pursuit.

pílinyan

Guinea fowl, bush/wild variety. In open country, this could perhaps refer to the helmeted guineafowl (*Numida meleagris*), which is the one typically domesticated, but there are also two species found in forests, the white-breasted guineafowl (*Agelastes meleagrides*) and the crested guineafowl (*Guttera pucherani*).

péeteegene

Bird species; mocking bird, its call is 'kolo kala'. As this is surely the same as Leger's *petegene* which he gives as a synonym in the Yomou Guerzé dialect, this is the blue-shouldered robin chat (*Cossypha cyanocampter*)—see *pele-wo-tée-tée* in Appendix 2. As the bird is such a wonderful mimic, it is however hard to reconcile this species with this alleged call: other informants may describe its call differently.

póopoo

Pigeon, brown ring-dove; turtle dove. This would seem to be the red-eyed dove (*Streptopelia semitorquata*), but it is nonetheless worth verifying if the name really is used only specifically.

sánsalo

Guinea fowl, wild variety, short-legged bird species, with red feet. The Ahanta francolin/spurfowl (*Pternistis achantensis*) fits the bill with its red legs but this requires verification as it seems a little odd that it has a distinct name. At Favey I recorded *kəkwɛɛ* for this species which in Guerzé at least is modified into binomials describing the particular habitat each type of francolin is found in—see the Favey names and Appendix 2.

sě̃rɛ

Two meanings: 1. warbler, bird species. It has two different calls. 2. call of the warbler bird, bird is named after its call. *sě̃rɛ maa-nuu káa ma. A faa "sě̃rɛ", gé fàa "fíyɛŋ fíyɛŋ"* There are people like the warbler. It calls "*sě̃rɛ*". It also calls "*fíyɛŋ fíyɛŋ*". I believe this is the green hylia (*Hylia prasina*) on the basis of descriptions I heard of its different calls (including something akin to *fíyɛŋ fíyɛŋ*), whilst enquiring about the bird called *bòwò-fíyò* in Vai (see Manvell, forthcoming) which led me to ask my informant if he knew a bird called *sele*. I asked this because the renowned Liberia historian and writer Dr. S. Jangaba M. Johnson had once written "The nightingale, known as *sele* in Vai, is a small bird which sings four distinct notes, each signifying coming events" (Johnson, 1954: 67). Someone in the background on my recording from that discussion says that *sele* is the Kpelle name for the bird we were talking about. I am most grateful to Andrew Gweh for identifying this bird.

soyon

1) swallow; palm swift; sparrow. 2) sparrow. Whether this name really covers both sparrows and the often conflated swallows and swifts, requires examination.

tırɔŋ Syn zɛŋgbe-tırɔŋ

Honey bird species; hummingbird. *Mua à tóɔ tırɔŋ kóɔ ma, da mó à yàle da dɔɔ ná.* If honey bird gets a boil on its leg, they bust it or joining the bones together.' When you do evil, you will be punished. The description suggest the various sunbirds—see the Favey names for discussion.

tòlon

1) pigeon. 2) red-eyed turtle dove. The description indicates that this is both a generic and specific name: there is work to be done on the names for the various pigeons and doves, which

may be ascribed differently depending on the context in which they are used.

tòlɔŋ kéneŋ

Bird species; red-billed wood dove. Presumably the blue-spotted wood-dove (*Turtur afer*), which has a red bill unlike its congener *T. abyssinicus*, which has a black one. Unfortunately there is no lemma for ***kéneŋ*** and it will be interesting to work out what this name means.

toŋo

Guinea fowl (large variety), the large, common variety, often called 'guinea', in distinction from a smaller variety called kɔkwɛɛ. Presumably the helmeted guineafowl (*Numida meleagris*), but the crested guineafowl (*Guttera pucherani*) is almost as large.

tuutuu

Bird species, Senegal coucal bird, makes loud calls. Whilst the name may indeed refer to the Senegal coucal (*Centropus senegalensis*) it may cover two other *Centropus* species with similar calls—see the Favey names.

tɛ̃-ŋɔni

Stork. If this name does indeed refer to a stork, the most likely candidate is the commonest species, the distinctive woolly-necked stork (*Ciconia episcopus*). I have doubts however due to the meaning of this name which is unclear. The dictionary has no entry for ***tɛ̃*** but ***tɛ̂*** is described as the black deer/duiker/antelope and ***tɛɛ*** as chicken. In Mano, the name I elicited for the square-tailed drongo (*Dicrurus ludwigii*), which may apply equally to its similar all black congeners, translates as "black duiker bird". Further investigations are required here.

vũɛ* Variant *vũŋkpɛ

Hawk species.

zɛŋkpe-tutu

Forest dove. Despite this ascription, this is surely a synonym for ***tuutuu*** referring to the coucals (see entry above) as it is in Guerzé—see ***dyɛgbɛ-tu-tu*** in Appendix 2 as well as the Favey names.

zɛŋgbe-tɔrɔŋ* Variant *zɛŋgbe-tɔrɔŋ

Sun bird; humming bird, its call is tɛ̃- tɛ̃. See above and the Favey names for discussion.

Appendix 2: Guinea Kpelle (Guerzé) Bird Names Recorded in Leger (1975)

Squared bracket names indicate transcription in Konshenko (2019). Underlined header names indicate that analogous names were recorded at Favey.

The following abbreviations used by Leger are retained: **Var.** for an analogous reference, which was used in his work as a learning tool to encroach readers to recall or learn words with approximately similar meanings. **Syn.** is used for supposedly true synonyms. **V.** indicates use in dialects other than the adopted N'Zérékoré standard (also spoken at Gouécké and Samoé). Finally **Dér** indicates derivatives.

After the lemma, words in italics are my translation of the original entry. The non-italicised words which follow are my thoughts on furthering the ascription to one species or several, and/or simple observations, but I don't always provide these.

Note the words follow a modified alphabetic order to that of English as Guéré has some unique consonants: bh, d, dy, g, gb, gw, h, hv, k, kp, kw, l, m, n, ng, ny, p, (s), t, u, v, w, nw, y

The generic Guéré name for bird is *wèni* [ɲwěni] (and variants *wani* and *wōni*) and *ya-wèni* for water birds in general.

bhaman-nyê-wèni

Very small bird, with a jolly, brilliant plumage, that likes to suck the flowers of the balisier' (bhaman-gbölu) and hence its name. A balisier is plant in the family *Cannaceae*. Clearly refers to sunbirds of various species.

bhili-koko

Green turaco (Tauraco persa): bird of medium size with a very piercing call. Assuming the second part of the name is onomatopoeic, the ascription is apt, though as the yellow-billed turaco (*Tauraco macrorhynchus*) has a somewhat similar call, it should also be borne in mind.

bhomo [bòmo]

Insectivorous bird with long yellow legs, small body and black feet. In the bird wordlist at the end of Leger's dictionary, this is entered as an 'echassier' or wading bird, a term which covers herons, egrets, ibis, shorebirds, snipe and rails. More information is required to determine what species is referred to here.

bola-pon

Species of small, very fast eagle which can take a fish from the water. Syn: bölö-pon. V. kuwo, kuwo-kpaan. The description is confusing as the only eagles in the region that regularly take fish, the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) and African fish eagle (*Haliaeetus vocifer*), are distinctive

large birds that wouldn't be described as rapid. Under the entry for the synonym **bölö-pon**, its fishing capacity is dropped. More investigations are required on this name.

dyëgbë

A small bird found in the savanna. Cisticolas (*Cisticola* spp.) seem good candidates—see Favey names.

dyëgbë-lolo

Name of an insectivorous bird with a crest in its head. With few crested candidates in the area, the most likely is probably the black-and-white shrike flycatcher (*Bias musicus*). Given the name is a binomial based on a primary name likely used for the cisticolas, this species has in common with members of that genus conspicuous aerial display flights by the calling male, making a sound which could perhaps be rendered *lolo*. Leger has a lemma for **lolo** described as a place with only small trees, which may or not be relevant to this name.

dyëgbë-tu-tu [jëgbetùútüu → zëgbetùútùú]

Name of a bird that resembles the cock of the pagodas. V. **tuu-tuu**. Senegal coucal (*Centropus senegalensis*) and maybe two other *Centropus* spp.]—see Favey names.

dyo-gbili-gbili [jògbíli → zògbíligbili → zòzogbíligbili]

Species of small bird that attacks other birds bigger than itself, such as crows, which pass in front of its nest. Syn. **dyolo-gbili**. Andrew Gweh indicates that the drongo species (*Dicrurus* spp.) are likely candidates here.

dyöghö

*Abyssinian Roller (*Coracias abyssinicus*); small yellow and red bird, short beak, very fast, eats millet and rice; unlike the weaver (**héê**), it doesn't nest in village trees, always find in flocks.* This is a most misleading description as the striking, large azure-blue Abyssinian roller doesn't flock or damage crops. The description mostly fits the orange-cheeked waxbill (*Estrilda melpoda*), a known pest of rice in Liberia, especially at the milky stage (Bashir, 1983), though it is more greenish-grey than yellow. The name could also be applied to other waxbill species.

géélé

*Sparrowhawk or black kite (*Mibous* [sic] *migrans parsitus*).* Similar names are found in Mano and Vai for sparrowhawks of which there are several candidate species, some of which may be referred to specifically with binomials based on this primary name. Whether the yellow-billed kite (*Milvus aegypticus*), which has a different appearance and hunting strategy is consistently captured in this term requires investigation: it may well be, given it can similarly descend and strike young chickens which gives it a certain notoriety.

googo [gòogô]

Name of a small savanna bird, beautiful plumage, long tail, eats rice in the fields. The yellow-

mantled widowbird (*Euplectes macroura*) is a good candidate and a known rice pest in Liberia at both the milky and dough stages (Bashir, 1983).

gbala-lölö [gbàálòlò]

An insectivorous bird, a little bigger than a pigeon; it attacks birds bigger than itself that approach its nest. Syn. gba-lölö. Two rollers, the broad-billed (*Eurystomus glaucurus*) and blue-throated (*E. gularis*) fit the bill—see Favey names.

gbala-wo-néénée

Wagtail. Three wagtail species are obvious candidates depending on what habitat or time of year they are found: the visiting yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) can be abundant in the dry season in rice fields, open clearings, football pitches etc. whereas the mountain wagtail (*Motacilla clara*) prefers quite running streams, not necessarily in the mountains and the African pied wagtail (*Motacilla aguimp*) spans the habitats of the other two. Working out the full meaning of the names could be useful (or simply amusing). Other common species of birds which pump or wag their tails, such as the common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) or Fraser's forest flycatcher (*Fraseria ocreata*) should also be considered.

gbedeli [gbèdelí]

A species of small black bird, eats palm fruits. Syn. towi-wèni. A preference for presumably oil palm fruits would suggest the forest chestnut-winged starling (*Onychognathus fulgidus*), but this is more of a medium-sized bird, though worth exploring nonetheless as a candidate.

gbè-tèè-belé, gbè-tèghè-belé [gbèéteɛbèléi]

A pretty bird, big as a sparrow, body and tail red, rather long, with black on its head; its name comes from the interpretation of its call (who is passing on the road?). Though the description doesn't fit, I elicited this name for the African emerald cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx cupreus*), whose call is apt for these words—see Favey names. The appearance of the bird described here suggests perhaps the red-bellied paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone rufiventer*) or the rufous forms of its congener the African paradise-flycatcher (*T. viridis*) and though to my ears their vocalisations don't match this name, they are nonetheless worth considering.

gbo-hvolo-hvolo [gbòhwóloḽhwólò, gbòhwólòhwólò]

Green pigeon, very fast; it is said that it never lands, and if it falls, it dies because it can't take off. V. tonwonon. No doubt the African green pigeon (*Treron calvus*). It will be interesting to investigate this myth further: what are people's thoughts on how it eats or nests given this landing constraint?

gbolo-yolon [gbòlóiɔ̀lòŋ]

Species of insectivorous bird, a little bigger than a weaver, plumage black.

gbonin [gbóoniŋ syn.gbélin]

A brown plumaged bird, size of the millet-eater (liën): eats rice in the fields. Var. ponin. In terms of

more uniformly brown candidates, the bronze mannikin (*Spermestes cucullatus*) is a well-known rice pest in Liberia at the milky stage (Bashir, 1983), but juveniles of the black-and-white mannikin (*Spermestes bicolor*), another known rice pest, could be included. However, female and out-of-breeding plumage males of a variety of other rice birds are streaky brown e.g. the yellow-mantled widowbird (*Euplectes macroura*), Vieillot's black weaver (*Ploceus castaneofuscus*) and the pin-tailed whydah (*Vidua macroura*). Several species are likely to be captured under this name.

gwâ-gwâ

Pied crow (Corvus albus); eats palm fruits and lets a lot fall to the ground; the woman who doesn't have a husband, collects them. Syn. gô, gôgô. There is doubting this ascription and the sociological note is very interesting.

hadyali

Francolin (African partridge) V. kpomô-nyê-hadyali, löghö-hadyali. This is the generic name for the francolin—see discussion under the southern dialect name **kokwè**.

héê [hɛan]

Weaver or gendarme (Ploceus cucullatus): bird with a yellow plumage which nests in village trees. Dér: tighi-héê, tow-héê, loghô-héê Saying: *Héêgha di hva gè dyaalon ma, di tègha li* the weavers don't want green grasshoppers, it's their totem (Even though we're poor, we have our pride). The ascription sounds solid, though the name may possibly in some circumstances embrace other weaver species. Note this is the primary name for several binomials used for other weavers.

hèlèè-wèni [hɛlɛɛnwɛni]

A bird smaller than a weaver which announces the arrival of a stranger: one then sees it very agitated crying "hèlèè, hèlèè" as if in greeting. Andrew Gweh informs me that this is another name for the green hylia (*Hylia prasina*)—see **sêɛ** in Appendix 1.

highi-highi-nobon [hígɛhiɣɛnɔ̀bɔ̀ŋ, Var. nɔ̀bɔ̀ŋ]

Woodpecker, small bird that makes holes in trees. V. nobon, kwi-nobon. Syn. highi-highi-nogbon. Several woodpecker species likely to be covered by this name.

hön [hɔ̀ŋ]

Hornbill: bird with a big de-curved bill and a crest on its head; its cry is unpleasant, makes a noise when it flies. Curiously Konshenko deviates from Leger's description noting that this is simply a small bird. I believe however it does refer to hornbills given the Liberian Kpelle names (see Appendix 1) and furthermore it is convincingly onomatopoeic to my ears, of the sound that the wings of the larger species make in flight. The Mano have a similar name for these larger hornbills. Whether it is specific, requires investigation.

hongô (honwô) [hɔ̀ŋɔ, hɔ̀ŋɔ̀]

Guineafowl. Whether this is used uniquely for the distinctive helmeted guineafowl (*Numida*

meleagris), which is found wild in open country and is also commonly domesticated, requires examination, as there are two wild, more forest-dwelling species to also bear in mind.

kan

Kingfisher (non-fish eating). In French a distinction is made between martin-chasseurs and martin-pecheurs, with the fish not normally part of the diet of the former. Despite this helpful precision that English lacks, there are still at least five candidate species that fit this bill, several of which are common with distinctive calls. As **kan** is a primary name for several binomials, it would be helpful to determine whether it refers to one kingfisher in particular, which may or may not catch fish. This requires careful investigation, as the name may be used in some circumstances to refer to other species with the modifiers dropped.

kan-nyingê, kan-nyingê-nyingê

Small species of kingfisher (fish eating). V. **kan, ya-kan**. The meaning of the name requires investigation. Curiously in his bird wordlist, Leger has this name under martin-chasseur, unlike the entry given here.

kan-nyinin

Small species of kingfisher (fish eating). V. **ya-kan ; kan, kan-nyingê**. The second word appears to mean termite: if this is the case and why requires examination.

kelen (kelen-golo) [kèlɛŋ]

Bird smaller than the weaver (gendarme): ravages the rice in the fields. Manninkins, waxbills and bishops are rice pests that are smaller than weavers and the name may refer to all of them, and perhaps others. What the binomial form means, and when it is used, would be interesting to determine.

kélénga-té-kpawo

Name of a bird with very beautiful colours which sings very well. The name is quite complex and will be interesting to decode.

kélikédyiké [kéli↓kéizìkêi, kélîkéijîkê]

Species of bird, size and colour of a partridge which sings at night. An onomatopoeic name for the nkulengu rail (*Himantornis haematopus*)—see Favey names.

könön [kɔ̀nɔ̀ŋ]

Sparrow, passerine. If the name is indeed used for sparrows only the grey-headed sparrow (*Passer griseus*) was the only candidate originally, but non-native house sparrows (*P. domesticus*) are now spreading inland.

kokwè

Francolin (African partridge) V. hadyali. Casthelain adds the detail that this name is used at Yomou and is certainly used more widely—see Favey names. As a primary name for several binomials, it would be helpful to determine whether it refers to one francolin in particular. As with other binomial bird names, care needs to be taken as the name may be used in some circumstances to refer to other species with the modifiers dropped.

kunwunun-gala-hu-kulo-kulo

Species of bird that resembles an eagle; found especially on palm trees; feeds on insects and worm, and also eats small birds; it also look for worms under the bark of dead trees (from where his name). Var. ***konwonon-gala-hu-kulo-kulo***. There is little doubt that this name refers to the distinctive and fairly common African harrier-hawk (*Polyboroides typus*), whose rather unique inter-tarsal joints allow its legs to flex both forwards and backwards and aid its search for prey in cavities and under tree bark.

***kuwo* Var. *kuo* [kũwo]**

Eagle (it is the big eagle). The largest eagle in the Kpelle-speaking lands is the crowned eagle (*Stephanoaetus coronatus*), but whether it is used uniquely for this species needs to be explored. The monkey-eating habits of this species are generally well known and it is a little curious they don't form part of Leger's description if it is indeed uniquely used for it.

Apart from the binomial bird name below, it also features as the primary name in two other interesting binomials given by Leger. The first is ***kuwo-hé-ulu*** (“eagle tree”), described as a species of very hard wood, which is not worked and is often a sacred tree; the eagle perches on it and remedies for several ailments are taken from it. The second is ***kuwo-kwèni*** (“eagle stone”), described as a precious stone, a diamond, which is found, so it is said, in the eagle's nest. Leger also adds that this binomial is used for arms or other relicts left by the ancestors upon which sacrifices are offered. Curiously I was told by some of my Mano informants that ***kɔ̌a***, the similar name that I elicited for the crowned eagle, which also means conqueror, always keeps a diamond in its nest, so when it flies far up, it will direct it to come back. There are I suspect various legends around the eagle and its diamonds in the region.

kuwo-kpaan

The small species of eagle: it climbs very high in the sky and swoops down very fast on its prey. A good candidate is Ayres's hawk-eagle (*Hieraaetus ayresii*) which is known to soar high and stoop fast on prey. If this is the case, there is a nice agreement between the English and Kpelle names since the latter word is used for hawks and falcons—see below where it is also the primary name for several binomial names.

kpala-wèni

Small insectivorous bird with a red throat; lives in the savannas, captured with birdlime and made into skewered meat (brochettes). In my research on birdlime in West Africa (Manvell, 2025), I tentatively suggested that the best candidate with red near the throat and living in savannas is the black-winged red bishop (*Euplectes hordeaceus*). That identification however requires ignoring Leger's description of it as an insectivore, but since it a known rice pest that

forms small flocks this may enhance the reason and ease of targetting it with birdlime. Field confirmation is required.

kpan-kpan

*Parrot, parakeet. Its nickname is **towi-ulo**. This name is rather curious as though there are no records for any parakeets in the Kpelle-speaking lands, the name is, to my ears, only potentially onomatopoeic of the distinctive contact call of the rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), and not to the vocalisations of the three local parrot species. The nickname—see separate entry below—perhaps suggests domestication, which would align it with the Timneh parrot (*Psittacus timneh*), which has long been caught, tamed and traded in the region. More research is required.*

kpaan [kpáaŋ, kpâaŋ]

*Diurnal raptor (generic name); falcon, small, even attacks chickens which it eats in-situ if it can't carry them off in flight. Species of “**kpaan**”: **kuwo**, **kuwo-kpaan**, **kpaan-dèghi**, **bölö-pon**, **kpaan-gbèlè**.*

kpaan-dèghi

*Black eagle, average size (bigger than **kpaan**) Syn. **Kpaan-dèy**.*

kpaan-gbèlè

*Species of eagle that eats mice, lizards etc. and also takes chicks. V: **kpaan**, **kuwo**, **bölö-pon**. Whilst the lizard buzzard (*Kaupifalco monogrammicus*) is one candidate here others small raptors need to be considered. Working out the meaning of the second part of the name may be helpful.*

kpèla-kpèla [kpélâkpélâ, kpélèkpélè]

*Magpie (bird) (Family Bucerotidae); white chest, black back, flies badly and slowly. Despite the Eurocentric first name, this is a small black and white hornbill of which the common and vocal African pied hornbill (*Tockus fasciatus*) is the most obvious candidate, but the piping hornbill (*Ceratogymna fistulator*) is another. I elicited a very similar Mano name (**kpála-kpála**) from recordings of both the former hornbill but also the red-billed dwarf hornbill (*Tockus camurus*), which is brown and white. It would be interesting to work out the meaning of the name. Though perhaps onomatopoeic, I was told the Mano name reduplicates the word meaning something light or dry in reference to its clumsy flight which looks like the birds flight direction is at the whim of the prevailing wind.*

kpèlèghèlè [kpèlégèlè, kpèlégèlén]

*Bird that eats pepper; it sows their seeds in its droppings; it is very timid. Saying: **E nyōwaa yè kpèlèghèlè** You are rotten like a **kpèlèghèlè**. Without doubt this is the common bulbul (*Pycnonotus barbatus*), known widely in Liberian English as the pepper-bird and it is curious to wonder if the settlers first learnt this name from its translation. Under the lemma **kpèlèghèlè-kiyèn** Leger description is a wild pepper, which is sown by **kpèlèghèlè**.*

kpën

Black magpie; small insectivorous bird, nests in a hole which it makes in a tree trunk; has no feathers on its head; the female alone incubates the eggs and the male brings her food. V. kpo-kpo-ulu-bha, highi-highi-nobon. Ignoring the Eurocentric bird name, this nesting habitat is common of all hornbills, but as this is described as small and black, most likely the black dwarf hornbill (*Tockus hartlaubii*), which has a distinctive call like this name.

kpomô-nyê-hadyali

Species of partridge. V. löghö-hadyali. This is the francolin of the **kpomô**, which at the back, Leger describes as the one of the bushes (buissons), whereas the lemma for this word describes it as a generic term for lianas (i.e. climbing plants) and woody roots on the ground, which is a little more detailed. The Ahanta francolin/spurfowl (*Pternistis achantensis*) with its preference for tangled scrub is the most likely candidate.

kpu-gê-gê

Type of partridge. V. hadyali, kélikédyiké. The cry of the female is analogous to that of the turtle: it is said to be the female of this tortoise. Above this entry for the identical word, Leger describes the name as referring to a big (water) turtle adding “when the river level rises, it cries and you should avoid crossing the river as it is capable of knocking you over and drowning you.” I suspect the animal in question is the biggest freshwater species on the continent, the African softshell turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*), which can grow up to 120 cm long and weigh 60 kg and is well-known for its “caractère irascible” (Trape *et al.* 2012). It is not however known to have any vocalisations except a hiss when captured (Luca Luiselli *pers comm*, email 28th October, 2025). Potentially these cries may refer to the long haunting calls of the buff-spotted flufftail (*Sarothrura elegans*), which can often, but not always, be heard by streams. These have been associated with the mythical crowing crested cobra in East Africa (see Jacobs, 2016: 153-155), as well as the vocalisations of mourning chameleons and giant snails.⁹

kwala-kpo-néé-néé

Unfortunately the pages with the lemma for this name are missing from my copy of Leger. Fortunately the wordlist at the back describes it as a rhinoceros bird, presumably referring to the Asian hornbill of this name.

Under the lemma, **koala kpo nēnē**, Casthelain (1952) has “rhinoceros bird (*Ortholophus leucolophus*). According to the Guerzés, it eats monkey excrements, hence its name”. Though I cannot decipher this scientific name, the calls of the distinctive sounding (and looking) white-crested hornbill (*Tockus albocristatus*) elicited the Mano name **wèi bhelé mɔ̃**, “monkey faeces bird”. As other hornbills follow monkeys, they also need to be considered.

kwèli-mûû

Big crested owl; loud double call. V. mûû. There are several large, eared owl candidates, but

⁹ For the last two associated creatures see <https://abookofcreatures.com/2021/06/25/crowing-crested-cobra/> though it isn't elaborated where these beliefs pertain, though the references provided may help.

none that stand out particularly with a double call. It may not be used specifically and it will be interesting to determine what **kwèli** means: presumably, like the following name, after the leopard, and thus referencing its spots.

kwèli-wèni

Insectivorous bird the size of a weaver (gendarme); its wings are spotted like the coat of a leopard, (hence its name); grey belly, wings yellow with white and yellowish spots. Though the spotted greenbul (*Ixonotus guttatus*) is the best candidate on the given size comparison, the calls of the slightly larger western nicator (*Nicator chloris*) have elicited this name—see Favey names.

kwi-nobon

*Woodpecker; bird which pecks trees, small, very pretty, black and yellow. V. **kpën, kpo-kpo-ulu-bha, highi-highi-nobon.*** The hairy-breasted barbet (*Tricholaema hirsuta*) is a possible candidate.

liën

*Millet-eater (bird); in Guérzé country, it eats rice in the fields. **liën-dèli-tèli** is the female is and **liën-madya** the male, which loses its beautiful tail feathers after the mating period and puts them in the nest.* Though the name on its own may be generic for rice-eating birds, the two constructions based on it undoubtedly refer to the pin-tailed whydah (*Vidua macroura*), a known rice pest in Liberia (Bashir, 1983). Given the spectacular mating displays of this species, in which the long-tailed male seemingly dances around the female, it has been given a lot of names freighted with interpretations of this act across its range, so there are surely interesting meanings to be unravelled here—see for example the Kpelle saying provided with the name for this species in Appendix 1.

lôghö-héê

*Foyotocol: species of weaver (gendarme) nesting in the forest. V. **Nyöla-é-tuwo-kpèli.*** I think Leger is using a miss or old spelling of foliotocol as in coucou foliotocol, the African emerald cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx cupreus*). The binomial is base around the primary name for weaver and translates as forest weaver. Though the ascription requires verification, the name is a potentially interesting nod to this cuckoos brood parasitic behaviour. Weavers are a known host and though these cuckoos look (especially the males) and behave differently to them, their name may derive from seeing them around weaver nests.

lôghö-hadyali

*Partridge of the forest. Latham's francolin (*Peliperdix lathamii*) would seem a good candidate.*

mini-wolo

Species of small bird, entirely black. The village indigo bird (*Vidua chalybeata*) is an obvious candidate but its abundance in south-east Guinea is unknown and there are few records in Liberia. The not entirely black, grey-headed nigrita (*Nigrita canicapillus*) is therefore perhaps

a more likely candidate.

mûû

Brown owl (lit. hooting cat) (Stryx [sic] flammea); simple call, no tufts. Syn. mumu. V. kèwli-mûû. The description is confusing as *Strix flammea* is the old scientific name for the barn owl (*Tyto alba*), which doesn't hoot. There are several non-eared/tufted owl candidates to consider and it is likely the name is not used specifically.

'nyola-é-tuwo-kpèli

Foyotocol (gendarme of the forest). Syn. loghë-héé. The name given to this bird means “mother-in-law, good evening” which is onomatopoeic of its song. Leger's miss or old spelling of foliotocol as in *coucou foliotocol*, the African emerald cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx cupreus*), seems a good candidate as part of its song could indeed be rendered like this name. Curiously, I elicited another name when playing a recording of this species in Favey (**gbè-tèè-belé**), which references another part of its call, that is heard to mean who passing on the road? See entry of this name above and in the Favey names section.

pele-wèni [pèlɛwɛni]

Nightjar (Macrodipteryx [sic] longipennis); bird that alights on paths, especially at night. The name literally means “path bird” and though Leger ascribes this name to the standard-winged nightjar (*Macrodipteryx longipennis*), for which the male in breeding plumage with its long tail 'standards' is unmistakable, it is likely also used for various *Caprimulgus* nightjar species that can also be seen alighting on paths at night.

pele-wo-tée-tée

Mocking bird; it imitates the songs of other birds. The Guerzés say that you can find in its stomach the feathers of all bird species. Syn. petegene (Y). As the blue-shouldered robin chat (*Cossypha cyanocamptus*) is a supreme mimic, it is a strong candidate and furthermore, the southern (Yomou) synonym given here is not too far from the name I scribbled in the field at Favey (*kpe-to gimì*)—see under the names **kpili kein** and **kpili kenen** in that section, which may be variants of **petegene**.

pilén [pílɛn]

Insectivorous bird, bigger than a guinea fowl; species of pheasant. The forest dwelling white-breasted guineafowl (*Agelastes meleagrides*) with its long tail is more pheasant like than the crested guineafowl (*Guttera pucherani*)

pono-nyê-hadyali

Partridge of the clearings. V. löghö-hadyal (partridge of the forest). The name means “in full-light francolin” and though this might explain Leger's choice of words, the fact he doesn't indicate it is a synonym of **kpomô-nyê-hadyali**, the francolin of the **kpomô** (lianes, tangled scrub), which are typical of forest clearings, and the preferred habitat of the Ahanta francolin/spurfowl (*Pternistis achantensis*) is interesting. Could it refer to the more open-

country double-spurred spurfowl (*Pternistis bicalcaratus*)? This underlines the importance of determining which species the primary name **hadyali** is used for.

poopiën [pòopíeŋ]

Small insectivorous bird (an onomatopoeia of its call); eats driver ants (manyans sic. magnan: black ants); when it sings, one insults it, because it signifies that one is going to receive guests (strangers), and if one doesn't have what it is needed to receive them, tell him: "Kolo e pua é kpogholé" (your backside is full of worms, the worms have invaded your backside). Andrew Gweh has indicated that this is the white-tailed alethe (Alethe diademata).

pulu [pùluu]

*Small omnivorous bird of a brown colour; same size as the "kpèlèghèlè" (pepper eater); doesn't ravage rice fields, eats especially the fruits of the thorny tree called "kuu". Under the lemma **kuu**, Leger notes again that the bird called "**pulun**" eats its fruits but adds no further details that could aid the tree's identification. Whilst a Guerzé/Kpelle plant lexicon is sorely missing, there aren't many candidate thorny trees in the high forest and I hazard a guess that it may be *Fagara tessmannii* which Voorhoeve (1965: 338) says fruits in Liberia from January to March and its seeds are spread by birds. Undoubtedly several species eat the fruit of the tree in question and **pulu/pulun** may turn out to cover more than one: it will certainly be interesting to better understand their perceived association with this tree.*

tighi-héê

*Weaver (gendarme) with a black plumage. V. **héê**, **tow-héê**. See below under **tow-héê** whose entry describes **tighi-héê** as a synonym, but under this name, **tow-héê** is noted only as analogous. **Tighi** means charcoal.*

tighi-hön

*Hornbill (toucan) of black plumage. V. **hön**. This is a curious name requiring further research as the only totally black candidate, the black dwarf hornbill (*Tockus hartlaubi*), seems to have (also?) the name **kpën**—see above.*

tonwonon Var. tonwonën [tɔŋ wɔŋɔŋ]

Turtle-dove, dove, pigeon.

tonwonon-gélën

*Species of turtle-dove. Unfortunately there is no lemma for **gélën** which could help with an ascription to one or possibly more species.*

tonwanon-gboo-kpoo

*Green pigeon V. **gbo-hvolo-hvolo**. See **gbo-hvolo-hvolo** above.*

tonwanon-gbolü

Red pigeon. The meaning of the second part of the name is unknown and may be helpful to understand the species referred to. The colour description suggests the bronze-naped pigeon (*Columba iriditorques*), but the Afep pigeon (*Columba uncinata*) should also be considered.

gbèa-köw-tonwonon

Turtle-dove with a collar, collared pigeon, with red around the eyes. The red-eyed dove (*Streptopelia semitorquata*) is the obvious candidate, but it would be interesting to decipher this name.

tow-héê

Black weaver (gendarme), which nests in oil palms. Syn. tighi-héê. I encountered this name at Favey and though I proposed two candidates, the all black Maxwell's black weaver (*Ploceus albinucha*) and/or the black and brown or brownish, Vieillot's black weaver (*P. castaneofuscus*), Casthelain adds a colour dimension which annuls them. Under the lemma *heê*, he notes that *tow heê* or *tiji heê* refers to a species of weaver with a black body and a red throat, which makes its nests in oil palms, hence its name, and its nest it much nicer than the ordinary weaver. This then suggests the name could only refer to three or four malimbe species (*Malimbus*), one of which makes an especially pretty inverted sock-shaped nest. The blue-billed malimbe (*M. nitens*) and the female red-vented malimbe (*M. scutatus*), which is the species with the striking nest, are the only ones which have red just on the throat. Whether any species of malimbe has a stand out affinity for the oil palm is unclear. Further work is clearly required and it would certainly be worth questioning whether *tighi-héê* is indeed a synonym.

towi-ulo

Nickname for the parakeet (kpan-kpan) which one asks "towi-ulo, towi é ulo?". What is being asked is uncertain but I will hazard a guess that it is based around the verb *ulo* [*yóla*] to get fat, and if *towi* is a variant of *tow*, the oil palm, as in the name below, it is maybe a play on words, perhaps first imitating its call, then asking are you getting fat on oil palm (fruit)?

tow-wèni (towi-wèni)

A species of small black bird, eats palm fruits. V. gbedeli. Under the dialect variant *gbedeli*, I have suggested the forest chestnut-winged starling (*Onychognathus fulgidus*), but this needs checking as it is a more medium-sized bird.

wölö-wèni

Crying bird: plain call

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