



DURBAN MUSEUM NOVITATES

Issued by the Durban Museum, Durban, South Africa

Vol. VI

ISSUED 20TH MARCH, 1961

PART 6

MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS XVI

by

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1. ON THE VALIDITY AND RANGE OF *RHINOPOMASTUS CYANOMELAS INTERMEDIUS* ROBERTS, 1914.

The south-eastern African populations of the Scimitar-bill are currently placed as *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas schalowi* Neumann, 1900: Usandawe, Tanganyika Territory (see Sclater, *Systema Avium Aethiopicarum*, part i, 1924 (appendix), p. 855; Vincent, *Check List of the Birds of South Africa*, 1952, p. 45; and McLachlan and Liversidge, *Roberts' Birds of South Africa*, 1957, p. 224). In the *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, vol. iv, 1914, p. 171, Roberts separated the populations of the south-eastern parts of South Africa from *R.c.schalowi* on the basis of alleged differences in the amount of white in the tail and the length of the rectrices, introducing for such populations the name *R.c.intermedius* Roberts, 1914: Koedoes River, Zoutspansberg district, northern Transvaal. In the *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 172, the same author gives the range of his *R.c.intermedius* as "Natal to the eastern Transvaal, thence north-westwards through Matabeleland and Northern Rhodesia."

Study of the material of this species in the collection of the Durban Museum shows that *R.c.intermedius* is a perfectly valid race, distinguishable from *R.c.schalowi* on the basis of rather smaller size and markedly shorter tail-length. In fully adult ♂♂ of *R.c.schalowi* the tails measure 172-188.5 (181.2) (7 measured) as against 146.5-

white from the chin to the under tail-coverts, but new feathers which are appearing as a result of moult on the throat and over the body appear to be coloured as in the norm of *P.c.dryas*, with which race I provisionally place it.

3. A NEW RACE OF ANT CHAT *MYRMECOCICHLA FORMICIVORA* (VIEILLOT) FROM THE SOUTH-EAST AFRICAN HIGHLANDS.

During the course of a study of the geographical variation exhibited by the Ant Chat *Myrmecocichla formicivora* (Vieillot), 1818: Sundays River, eastern Cape Province, it became apparent that the populations of the highlands of south-eastern Africa differed sufficiently from both *M.f.formicivora* and *M.f.minor* Roberts, 1932: Gemsbok Pan, western Bechuanaland Protectorate, as to warrant their characterization as an additional subspecies. Roberts, *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 240, appreciated that such populations were rather different to the two taxa he admitted in his treatment of the variation in *M.formicivora*, but left the question of their classification open, dismissing them as "somewhat intermediate" between *M.f.formicivora* and *M.f.minor*. Samples of the Ant Chat from the high interior of Natal, eastern Orange Free State and the Transvaal highveld stand apart from those taken from the topotypical populations of the nominate race and of *M.f.minor* on account of the slightly greyer upper-parts (particularly marked on head-top and nape) and markedly paler and greyer fringes to the feathers of the entire ventral surface.

***Myrmecocichla formicivora orestes*, subsp.nov.**

Type: ♀, adult. Wakkerstroom, south-eastern Transvaal/Natal boundary. Altitude c. 6,500 ft. a.s.l. 9 July, 1960. Collected by M. O. E. Baddeley. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Differs from *M.f.formicivora* of the Cape Province in having the upper-parts slightly paler and greyer, the pallor most marked over the head and nape, which appear distinctly greyer, less brown, than in Cape birds. Distinctions better marked on the under-parts. Pale scale-shaped fringes to the feathers of the ventral surfaces markedly paler, less reddish tinged (about Vinaceous Buff (*vide* Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, p. xl), as against Buffy Brown in newly moulted *M.f.formicivora*). Abdomen paler and less dark chocolate brown. Averaging slightly smaller, but not as small as *M.f.minor*.

Compared with *M.f.minor* of South-West Africa, the Bechuanaland Protectorate and adjacent arid areas, rather similar on the upper-parts. On under-parts appearing paler, the fringes to the feathers Vinaceous Buff as against Wood Brown (pl.xl), and with the abdomen less blackish. Averaging rather larger in size.

Measurements: Wings of 6 ♂♂ 98.5-105.5 (100.8), 7 ♀♀ 92-98 (95.3) mm.

Material examined: *M.f.orestes*, 17; *M.f.formicivora*, 36; *M.f.minor*, 7.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 98, culmen from base 21.5, tarsus 33.5, tail 60.5 mm.

Range: Eastern Cape Province in the high interior districts of the north-east, and in East Griqualand, Basutoland, most of the Orange Free State, the Transvaal highveld, western Swaziland and the high interior of Natal. Intergrades to the south-west of its stated range with *M.f.formicivora* and in the western Orange Free State and western Transvaal with *M.f.minor*.

Remarks: Our current appreciation of the geographical variation of the Ant Chat is conditioned by the fact that the more important demonstrable chromatic characters are lost through feather erosion in a remarkably short space of time, while the species, breeding and roosting as it does in antbear holes and the like, becomes seriously soil-stained in some districts. I have based the characters of *M.f.orestes* on the basis of a study of skins collected in all parts of the species' range between the months of April and July.

The range of *M.f.formicivora* appears to be restricted to the Cape Province to the west of the range of *M.f.orestes* as defined above. It is characterized by having the under-parts with the feathering edged with warm Buffy Brown in newly moulted dress and its relatively robust proportions. The wings of ♂♂ measure 100-107, ♀♀ 94-98 mm.

The range of *M.f.minor* is from South-West Africa (from Great Namaqualand in the south, north to Ovamboland (Ondonga)) through the northern Cape Province (not Griqualand West, where the nominate race occurs) and the Bechuanaland Protectorate to extreme western Matabeleland, Southern Rhodesia (Wankie), the western Transvaal, and, perhaps, parts of the western Orange Free State. This race is smaller than *M.f.formicivora*, and in freshly moulted dress lacks the warm buffy brown tones to the ventral surfaces, having the feather edges over the throat, breast and sides of the body about Wood Brown, while the abdomen is blacker. The colour distinctions are not apparent in worn dress. Wings of

♂♂ of *M.f.minor* measure 94-100.5, ♀♀ 91, 93 mm. Northern Little Namaqualand birds may be *M.f.minor*, but no freshly moulted material from that region has been available for critical study. A ♂ from Steinkopf has a wing of 98, and a ♀ from Wallekraal a wing of 91 mm., but a ♂ from Nababeep, Springbok Division, is large, as in the nominotypical race (wing 102). All these specimens are in very worn dress.

I am grateful to Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer, Director of the East London Museum, for the loan of the useful series preserved in the collection of that institution.

4. THE SOUTH AFRICAN RACES OF THE STONECHAT *SAXICOLA TORQUATA* (LINNAEUS).

Vincent, *Check List of the Birds of South Africa*, 1952, p. 73, McLachlan and Liversidge, *Roberts' Birds of South Africa*, 1957, p. 307, and other recent workers admit two races of the Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* (Linnaeus) as occurring within South African limits. This subspecific arrangement of the populations is based on the original work of Sclater, *Ibis*, 1911, pp. 409-410, who demonstrated that in the males of the populations occurring in the western Cape Province the russet of the under-parts is more restricted to the breast than in the case of males of the populations of the eastern Cape Province, Natal and Zululand, etc., while the females of the two groups of populations were also shown to exhibit well-marked racial characters. Later revisers of the races of this species, notably Meinertzhagen, *Ibis*, 1922, p. 20-29, and Bowen, *Proc.Acad.Nat. Sci.Philad.*, vol.lxxxiii, 1931 (1932), pp. 7-9, have followed Sclater closely in their treatment of the South African populations. The two subspecies currently admitted as being found within South African sub-continental limits are *S.t.torquata* (Linnaeus), 1766: Cape of Good Hope, and *S.t.caffra* (Keyserling and Blasius), 1840: Uitenhage, eastern Cape Province.

A study of material preserved in the collections of the Durban and East London Museums revealed that many specimens from the south-western Cape (topotypical of *S.t.torquata*) were in no way distinguishable from others from the eastern Cape Province, Natal, Zululand, Swaziland and the Transvaal, and that the distinctive western populations to which the name *S.t.torquata* had been attached by Sclater occurred on the coastal dunes of the western coast of the Cape Province well to the north of the Cape of Good Hope. This preliminary study suggested that the *S.t.torquata* of Sclater and subsequent authors was probably an undescribed race, and that *S.t.torquata* (Linnaeus), 1766, described from the Cape of Good