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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS

XI

by

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1. ON THE STATUS OF *GEOCOLAPTES OLIVACEUS THERESAE* MEINERTZHAGEN, 1949

Ever since the description of the form in 1949, *Geocolaptes olivaceus theresæ* Meinertzhagen, *Bull.B.O.C.*, vol. lxxix, 1949, p. 105, described from 10 miles north of Springbok, Little Namaqualand, north-western Cape Province, has been an enigma, no specimens being available in South African museums. However, in May, 1958, I had an opportunity to examine the material from the western and north-western Cape collected by the British Museum (Natural History) South West Africa Expedition, 1949-1950, and listed by Macdonald in his recent *Contribution to the Ornithology of Western South Africa*, 1957, p. 89. This series contains two specimens (1 ♂, 1 ♀) from Springbok, which are exact topotypes of *G.o.theresæ*. In my original paper on geographical variation in the Ground Woodpecker (*vide Journal of the Scientific Society of the University of Natal*, vol. viii, 1952, pp. 3-7), I tentatively admitted *G.o.theresæ* on the basis of the characters given in the original description, but in my more recent study (*The Ostrich*, vol. xxviii, 3, 1957, pp. 138-140), I stated that I believed it to be the same as the race I proposed to call *G.o.terrestris* (Burchell), 1822: interior of Cape Province. I now find, on the basis of the entire British Museum (Nat. Hist.) series,

1956, p. 41, accept Roberts' observations, but unite the populations formerly covered by the *O.a.polyzona* of South African authors along with the paler and greyer ones from north-eastern Bechuanaland Protectorate described as *O.a.pallida* Roberts, 1932: N'kate. This fusing of two such perfectly discrete subspecific taxa is unacceptable, and the introduction of a name for the dark south-east African populations of the Quail Finch appears to be necessary. I propose

***Ortygospiza atricollis digressa*, subsp. nov.**

Type: ♂, adult. Whitson, Umhlongo Nek, Richmond, Natal. 13 September, 1927. Collected by Jack Vincent. In the collection of the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), South Kensington, London. Brit. Mus. Reg. No. 1933.7.14.477.

Diagnosis: Darker and browner on the upper-parts, less grey, than *O.a.pallida* Roberts, described from the north-eastern Bechuanaland Protectorate, and darker and browner on the ear-coverts and sides of neck. On the ventral surface, deeper, more chestnut, buff on the lower breast and over the abdominal surface, this character being especially clearly marked in the male. Similar in size.

Paratypical material: 30 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 56, exposed culmen 8.5, tarsus 15, tail 26.5 mm.

Range: From the grasslands of the southern and eastern Cape Province, Orange Free State, Basutoland, Natal, Zululand and western Swaziland north to the Transvaal, most of Southern Rhodesia (*O.a.pallida* in extreme west) and parts of Northern Rhodesia (mainly western).

Note: I have discussed the question of the name of the dark south-east African populations of the Quail Finch with Mr. C. W. Mackworth-Praed, of the British Museum, and he is in agreement with me that a new name must be proposed, and that the populations now called *O.a.digressa* mihi are not the same as the greyer and paler *O.a.pallida*.

9. A NEW RACE OF RED-HEADED FINCH *AMADINA ERYTHROCEPHALA* (LINNÆUS) FROM THE HIGHLANDS OF SOUTH-EASTERN AFRICA.

Two specimens of the endemic Red-headed Finch *Amadina erythrocephala* (Linnæus) of the high country below the Drakensberg Escarpment in the eastern Cape Province and Natal in the Durban Museum collection are now found to differ subspecifically from the populations breeding in the dry western and central regions of

southern Africa. I have been unable to study material from Angola, there being no specimens from that territory in the collections of southern African museums, nor are there any in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), London, but material from just south of the Angola border (Kaokoveld) has been available for comparative purposes through the kindness of the Director of the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria. Of the western and central populations I have also had material from other parts of South-West Africa, north-western Cape Province and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. I find the birds of these populations generally paler and less densely squamated ventrally than those of the small resident population of the south-eastern highlands. Despite the limited material at present available, I consider that the latter birds deserve a name of their own, and I propose to designate them

***Amadina erythrocephala dissita*, subsp. nov.**

Type: ♂, adult. Bergville, Natal. Altitude c.5000' a.s.l. 28 July, 1957. Presented by J. G. Muller. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Adult ♂. Similar to *A.e.erythrocephala*, of southern Angola and western and central southern Africa, from which it differs in having the red of the head about Nopal Red (Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. i) as against Brazil Red (same pl.); upper-parts slightly darker (about Drab, pl. xlvi). Ventrally darker, the ground colour being about Russet (pl. xv) as against Tawny (same pl.), and with more dense and sharply contrasted scale-shaped spotting (the result of deeper black bars to each feather), the abdomen less white. Adult ♀. Showing characters rather similar to those exhibited by the ♂, being distinctly more heavily squamated below than *A.e.erythrocephala*. No difference in size, but bill slightly heavier.

Material: *A.e.erythrocephala*, a long series from South-West Africa, north-western Cape Province and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. *A.e.dissita*, 2.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 72, culmen from base 13.5, tarsus 16.5, tail 50 mm.

Range: Known at present only from the high country below the Drakensberg Escarpment in East Griqualand, eastern Cape Province (Kokstad), and in the adjacent high areas of Natal. Perhaps also in Basutoland.

Note: Non-breeding specimens taken from large flocks in the thorn country of Estcourt, Weenen and Colenso, central Natal, are all wintering *A.e.erythrocephala* and not *A.e.dissita*.