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## An Account of the British Museum South West Africa Expedition.

Mr. J. D. MACDONALD gave an account of the British Museum Expedition to the western region of South Africa in which the collection and study of birds was the main object. The party, which included Mrs. Macdonald, Mrs. B. P. Hall, and Colonel F. O. Cave, left Cape Town on November 29th, 1949, in two re-conditioned army trucks and a Land Rover. They had with them two native skinners and a camp boy and, for the first month, a student from Cape Town University.

Their first area of exploration was Little Namaqualand and the lower reaches of the Orange River. Collecting began in earnest at Kamieskroon in the Kamiesberg Mts. just south of Springbok. Here topotypical specimens of the Cinnamon-breasted Warbler, *Euriptila subcinnamomea* (Smith), were obtained. They frequented the rocky slopes of the hills where the Cape Bunting, *Fringillaria capensis* (Linnæus), was common. They were readily distinguishable at a distance because the buntings usually alighted on top of rocks, whereas the warbler landed on the side and scrambled up, like a creeper. About fifty species were identified in this area.

Some collecting was done near Springbok, at Klipfontein, on the escarpment overlooking the coastal plains, and on the road to Port Nolloth. It was here that the Spike-heel Lark, *Certhilauda albofasciata* (Lafresnaye), was met with for the first time: it was met with frequently throughout the rest of the journey, and never twice seemed to have the same colour. A stay of about ten days near the mouth of the Orange River revealed a variety of new species; water-birds like the Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea* (Linnæus), Egyptian Goose, *Alopochen aegypticus* (Linnæus), two sand plovers, Kittlitz and the Treble-banded, *Charadrius pecuarius* (Temminck) and *Charadrius tricollaris* (Vieillot); and a number of species in the green belt of trees and bushes fringing the river, birds like the White-eye, *Zosterops pallida* (Swainson), Cape Robin, *Cossypha caffra* (Linnæus), and the Red-eyed Bulbul, *Pycnonotus nigricans* (Vieillot).

An expedition from here was made into the mountains of the Richtersveld, but it was found to be a dry barren place and birds were very scarce.

Two other localities higher up on the Orange River were investigated, one at Violl's Drift where entry was made into South-West Africa, and the other at Assenjker, an old German fort. Bird life was much the same as lower down. From the Orange the party went north-west to explore the lower reaches of the Great Fish River. An entry into the deep canyon in which the river bed lies—there is only a seasonal flow—was made at a place called Ai Ais where hot springs attract visitors in the cooler winter months. Here in the height of summer, with temperature soaring over 100°, a pair of Treble-banded

Sand Plovers were found nesting on an exposed rock. The parents must have had some difficulty in keeping the eggs cool enough for incubation to take place.

A short time was spent in the Little Karas Mts. where noisy parties of the Rosy-faced Parrot, *Agapornis roseicollis* (Vieillot), were seen for the first time, and the first specimens of Karoo Bustard, *Heterotetrax vigorsii* (Smith), were obtained. After a few days at Keetmanshoop overhauling trucks and equipment, the party explored the Fish River again at Seehelm, and then moved south into the Huns Mts., to a lonely police post called Witputs, a place little known ornithologically, and which yielded rich material, particularly of several species of larks.

At Aus, about 100 miles further north, an interesting problem connected with the Red-back Lark, *Certhilauda albescens* (Lafresnaye), was investigated. It was proved that one form inhabits the dunes of the Namib Desert, where it lives in association with clumps of spiky *Aristida* grass, and another form inhabits the scrub areas. Dr. Austin Roberts had made a new race of the Spike-heel Lark, *Certhilauda albofasciata*, from a locality in the heart of the Tiraz Mts. The type locality was visited and a series of topotypical specimens collected.

From the Tiraz Mts. the party went on to Maltahohe and then to the Voigtsgrund dam, an artificial lake of several miles in extent, and one of the few expanses of water in the whole of South-West Africa, where open water, except in seasonal-flowing rivers, is a great rarity. Although only in existence for about twenty years it was teeming with water-birds. Eleven species of herons, storks, and egrets were identified, and nine waders, as well as Red-bill Teal, *Anas erythrorhyncha* (Gmelin), African Pochard, *Aythya erythrophthalma* (Wied), large flotillas of Cape Wigeon, *Anas capensis* (Gmelin), Coot, *Fulica cristata* (Gmelin), Lake Tern, *Chlidonias leucoptera* (Temminck), Darter, *Anhinga rufa* (Lacépède and Daudin), and Reed and White-breasted Cormorants, *Phalacrocorax africanus* (Gmelin) and *Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus* (Lichtenstein).

From here the party moved quickly to Windhoek to arrange about permits to enter restricted areas and to refit. Government officials were courteous and helpful, and on March 1st, 1950, the expedition set off in a south-westerly direction for the Naukluft Mts. and the Namib Desert. The Naukluft Mts. form a picturesque and interesting group. Here topotypical specimens of the rare Shrike-flycatcher, *Lanioturdus torquatus* (Waterhouse), were collected. They were first obtained by Sir James Alexander in 1838. Mr. Macdonald gave an account of Alexander's experiences in this area during the progress of the latter through the Kuiseb River and Walvis Bay. After a visit to the mouth of the Tsondab River, which disappears in the desert about sixty miles from the coast, a visit for which permission had to be obtained, as it lies within the forbidden diamond zone, the expedition then negotiated a crossing of the desert north

of the Kuiseb River in order to reach Walvis Bay. In the most barren and desolate area of the desert specimens of the rare Gray's Lark, *Ammomanes grayi* (Wahlberg), were obtained.

For the first time in its progress the expedition was halted on the banks of the Swakop River, swollen with the exceptionally heavy rains in the mountains around Windhoek. The trucks had to be taken across by rail, and then the party moved inland to explore the region of the Spitzkopje and Brandberg Mts. The former is a range of sharp granite peaks rising up for about 2,000 feet. In the patches of bush and scrub round its base the rare Herero Flycatcher, *Bradornis herero* (Schaneusee), was found, and in open places acquaintance was made with the Monotonous Lark, *Mirafrapa passerina* (Gyldenstolpe). The Brandberg Mts. is an enormous granite boss rising up to the 8,000 foot level, and in its secluded isolation is picturesque and awe-inspiring. Around the base the Long-bill Lark, *Certhilauda curvirostris* (Hermann), was common, and its extraordinary diving flight accompanied by a loud piercing whistle were noted.

The most northerly part reached was Kamanjab, on the borders of the Kaokoveld. Here the country is undulating with numerous kopjes and is fairly heavily covered with tall bush, thick tree-growth being present only in the damp courses of stream and river. The kopjes are the home particularly of Hartlaub's Francolin, *Francolinus hartlaubi* (Bocage), and the Damara Rock-jumper, *Sphenæacus pycnopygius* (Sclater).

Time did not permit any further progress to be made into the Kaokoveld and return to Windhoek was made by the direct route. After several days refitting the expedition set off across the Kalahari Desert to Bulawayo, where contact was made with Mr. R. H. N. Smithers and to Pretoria where, by kind permission of Dr. V. FitzSimons, specimens were repacked for shipment, and many of them compared with the valuable collections in the Transvaal Museum.

The distance covered was about 5,000 miles, most of it on rough and ill-defined tracks, and about six months were spent in the field. The collections are now being worked out and much of the material fills gaps in the study collection at the Museum.

A series of slides were exhibited showing the country passed through.

### On the type of *Alauda Penicillata* Gould.

Miss R. L. M. WARREN, Zoology Department, British Museum (Natural History), sent the following note:---

In the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum', v. 13, p. 532, 1890, Sharpe records, under the name *Otocorys penicillata*, three Gould specimens from Erzerum, Persia, as "types of the species". This is an error which should be corrected.