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## MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS LIV

by

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### ON THE SUBSPECIES OF THE KNOT *CALIDRIS CANUTUS* (LINNAEUS) WINTERING IN AFRICA

In a short note in Suppl. No. 3 to my *Catalogue of Birds of the South African Sub-Region* in *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. xi, 2, 1976, p. 38, I drew attention to the fact that a single Knot *Calidris canutus* (Linnaeus), 1758: Sweden, from Durban Bay, Natal, in the Durban Museum collection taken in 1964 is both colder and greyer dorsally and rather longer billed than in the case of a series of nominate *C. canutus* from western Europe (Netherlands, the specimens taken between 1 February and 6 April).

In recent years the Knot has increased considerably as a non-breeding visitor to estuaries along the south-eastern African coast, and four specimens taken in Durban Bay on 23 January, 1979, by Mr. John Mendelsohn, Scientific Officer (Vertebrates), Durban Museum, and a juvenile in transitional dress obtained in the same place in October, 1975, by R. K. Brooke now make six skins of this wader available for study from Natal.

The four specimens collected with a single shot in 1979 stand apart from all European skins in being much greyer, less brownish, above, with the bills appreciably longer in series. The upper-parts of these four Durban-taken specimens correspond to the Light Grayish Olive of Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. xlvi, as against Drab (same pl.) in the Netherlands series of nominate *C. canutus*. The six Knot specimens from Durban have the

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AN OVERLOOKED SUBSPECIES OF  
THE WHITEBROWED SPARROW-WEAVER  
*PLOCEPASSER MAHALI* SMITH

A re-examination of material from the South-West Arid District shows that the subspecies *Plocepasser mahali stentor* Clancey, 1957: Kenhardt, north-western Cape, of my revision of the southern and eastern subspecies of this sparrow-weaver in *Bonner Zool.Beitr.*, vol. xix, heft 3/4, 1968, pp. 257 - 268, is composite and requires to be split by the recognition of an additional race under the name of

***Plocepasser mahali terricolor*, subsp.nov.**

*Type:* ♂, adult. Rundu, Okavango R., north-eastern South West Africa (Namibia). 30 September, 1978. Collected by M. O. E. Baddeley. In the collection of the Durban Museum, D.M.Reg.No. 31336.

*Diagnosis:* Differs from *P.m.stentor* in having the pileum jet black, not brownish black, and the dorsum buffish Drab (Ridgway (1912), pl. xlvi) as against the paler and more sandy Buffy Brown (pl. xl) of *stentor*. Below purer white, with little of the brownish marbling over the breast present in both *stentor* and nominate *mahali*. Topotypical birds are also more extensively black over the face.

Compared with *P.m.mahali* Smith, 1836: confluence of Modder and Riet Rivers, western O.F.S., the pileum is deeper black, and the dorsum more earthen brown or drab, *versus* saturated Olive-Brown (pl. xl). Below whiter, with little or no pectoral marbling.

*Material examined:* 12.

*Range:* Etosha Pan and eastern Ovamboland to the mid-Okavango R. drainage of northern South West Africa (Namibia), and adjacent southern Angola in the south of Cuando-Cubango, to north-western, northern and north-eastern Botswana, the western districts and southern Midlands of Rhodesia, and north-western Transvaal (south to about Thabazimbi), where intergrading with nominate *mahali*.

*Measurements of the Type:* Wing (flattened) 104,5, culmen from skull 20, tarsus 26,5, tail 65 mm.

*Remarks:* With the description of *P.m.terricolor* the range of *stentor* will now be from the north-western Cape, the northern Cape in Gordonia and northern Kuruman districts to south-western Botswana, and South West Africa north to the Damaraland highlands in the east and in the west to the Kaokoveld. With the sandy backed *stentor* of the xeric west replaced to the north-east, east to

western Rhodesia and the north-western Transvaal by the greyer or more vinaceous brown *terricolor*, and with the more olive-brown backed nominate race lying to the south-east of both these taxa, the pattern of variation in the *mahali* group in the South African Sub-Region now conforms to that of a wide range of other species with comparable range dispositions.

Traylor, *Check-list of Angolan Birds*, 1963, p. 192, recognises only *P.m.ansorgei* Hartert, 1907: Wawayella, Benguela, Angola, from Angola, but judging from the obtaining of *P.m.terricolor* on the south bank of the Okavango R. by Mr. M. O. E. Baddeley in 1978, this latter new race will also require to be admitted for Angola, as it assuredly occurs in southern Cuando-Cubango in the vicinity of Rundu. At the time Traylor wrote, Okavango birds would have been attributable to the more sandy coloured *P.m.stentor* had they been known to occur along that river in 1963.