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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS

IX

by

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DESCRIPTIONS OF SIX NEW RACES OF BIRDS FROM THE INTERIOR OF SOUTH AFRICA

Resulting from study of material collected on the recent (August–September, 1957) Durban Museum expedition to the northern Cape with specimens already in our collections, several well-defined new races of birds have been determined. Of these, I describe six hereunder.

I am particularly grateful to Dr. Douglas Hey, Director of Nature Conservation, Cape Provincial Administration, for the granting of the necessary permits to collect birds in the northern Cape.

I. *Certhilauda albofasciata baddeleyi*, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Rietfontein, Niekerkshoop–Griquatown road, Asbestos Mountains, northern Cape Province, South Africa. Altitude c. 4300' a.s.l. 30 August, 1957. Collected by M. O. E. Baddeley. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Differs from the vicinal forms *Certhilauda albofasciata albofasciata* Lafresnaye, 1836: Deelfontein, Karroo, eastern Cape, *Certhilauda albofasciata griquensis* Winterbottom (description in press): Langley, Riverton, near Kimberley, northern Cape, and *Certhilauda albofasciata meinertzhageni* Macdonald, 1953: Pofadder, Bushmanland, north-western Cape, in its markedly redder dorsal colouration. *C. a. albofasciata*, *C. a. griquensis* and *C. a. meinertzhageni* are brownish or greyish in comparison. Most closely allied

to the fourth contiguous race, *Certhilauda albofasciata bradfieldi* (Roberts), 1932: Langklip, Gordonia, northern Cape, from which it differs in being more richly coloured on the mantle and rump (about the Hazel of Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. xiv, as against Sayal Brown (pl. xxix)), and having the dorsal surface strongly striated, and the under-parts darker. *C. a. bradfieldi* is a less rich red on the upper-parts than *C. a. baddeleyi*, and the mantle and rump striae are suppressed. The under-parts are pale, as in *C. a. arenaria* Reichenow, 1904, of Great Namaqualand.

Measurements: 6 ♂♂: wings 89.5–94 (91.6), culmens 22.5–26 (24.1), tarsi 28–30 (28.9), tails 52–56.5 (54.4) mm. 3 ♀♀: wings 81–85 (83.3), culmens 19.5–20 (19.8), tarsi 15.5–17 (16.3), tails 46–50 (48.0) mm. Nine measured.

Paratypical material: 9 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 92, culmen 24+, tarsus 30, tail 54 mm.

Range: Known only from the uplands of the Asbestos Mountains, northern Cape Province.

Remarks: Named for Mr. M. O. E. Baddeley, taxidermist of the Durban Museum, by whose energy so much valuable lark material was obtained in the Asbestos Mountains during the recent Durban Museum Expedition.

This new race differs abruptly from the three major flanking forms, *C. a. albofasciata*, *C. a. griquensis* and *C. a. meinertzhageni*, in its very red upper-parts, and from *C. a. bradfieldi*, which occurs to the north-west of the range of *C. a. baddeleyi*, in its richer and more strongly striated upper surface and darker under-parts. *C. a. baddeleyi* is abundant in its *terra typica*, occurring alongside several other species of Alaudidae: *Certhilauda curvirostris* (Hermann), *Mirafra sabota* Smith, *Mirafra africanoides* Smith, *Calandrella magnirostris* (Stephens), etc. Like the other larks of the Asbestos Mountains, the Spike-heeled Lark was unaccountably shy, and most of our specimens had to be obtained with the 12-gauge shotgun.

Two specimens which appear to represent an intergrading population *C. a. baddeleyi* > < *C. a. meinertzhageni* were obtained by our party some twenty-five to thirty miles south-west of Prieska, on the Van Wyks Vlei road, on 14 September, 1957.

Material now in the Durban Museum collection tends to suggest that *C. a. meinertzhageni* and *C. a. bushmanensis* (Roberts), 1937: road from Goodhouse to Steinkopf, north-western Cape, represent arbitrary divisions of one and the same complex of greyish popula-

tions and should, perhaps, be united. *C. a. bushmanensis* is, I consider, actually based on intergrades between *C. a. arenaria* and *C. a. garrula* Smith, 1846: Van Rhynsdorp, western Cape.

2. *Erythropygia paena oriens*, subsp. nov.

Type: ♀ adult. Glen, on Modder River, north of Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa. 8 May, 1957. Collected by P. A. Clancey. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Darker and browner, less grey, on the head-top and nape, and wholly darker and redder on the mantle, rump, upper tail-coverts, wings and tail than *Erythropygia paena paena* Smith, 1836: North of Kuruman, Bechuanaland, northern Cape. On the under-parts slightly darker and browner on the sides of the body and flanks. Similar in size.

Paratypical material: 4 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 70.5, culmen 19.5, tarsus 27, tail 67 mm.

Range: Known at present only from the western half of the Orange Free State, and ranging westwards to the Vaal, where it intergrades with *E. p. paena*.

Remarks: The discovery of this dark race of what is essentially a scrub-loving species of the desert fringe is extremely interesting. It is noteworthy that in the western Orange Free State and adjacent parts of the Cape Province some species of our deserticolous birds are represented by dark races, in several instances recognized herein for the first time. This marked darkening of pigmentation is accounted for by the fact that in the region concerned the biota comes under the potent influence of the rain-shadow cast by the Drakensberg massif of the south-east African highlands.

A series of this scrub-robin from Riverton, twenty-five miles north of Kimberley, confirms that the Vaal is the meeting place of *E. p. paena* and *E. p. oriens*, the majority of specimens resembling the former race.

Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer, Director of the East London Museum, working independently on specimens in the museum collection, perceived that two well-marked races were included in her material of *E. paena* from the northern Cape and Orange Free State, one of which was certainly new. I am very grateful to her for kindly drawing my attention to the matter. Further material since assembled by the Durban Museum confirms the necessity for recognising

a third race of this scrub-robin from the south-eastern fringe of the species' range.

3. *Prinia flavicans nubilosa*, subsp. nov.

Type: ♀, 1st w. Kendal, near Witbank, Transvaal, South Africa. 7 July, 1956. Collected by H. J. Grace. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Differs from *Prinia flavicans flavicans* (Vieillot), 1820: Great Namaqualand, South-West Africa, in being darker brown (about Dresden Brown, Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. xxix) and more washed with rusty, less greyish, on the upper-parts, wings and tail in the freshly moulted non-breeding dress. On the under-parts much more deeply tinged with sulphurous yellow, the breast and flanks more strongly washed with rusty buff. Similar in size.

Paratypical material: 8 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 55, culmen 14, tarsus 21, tail 74 mm.

Range: Known at present from the western Orange Free State, and southern Transvaal.

Remarks: *Drymoeca ortleppi* Tristram, *Ibis*, 1869, p. 207: Colesberg, a name seldom mentioned in the synonymies of this species in standard works, though given by Stark and Sclater, *Birds of South Africa*, vol. ii, 1901, p. 136, requires to be considered in the light of this description. Unfortunately, no specimens of the Black-chested *Prinia* are currently available from Colesberg, but all material which I have studied from the Orange River is applicable to the nominate race. But I believe Colesberg may be in an area of intergradation between *P. f. flavicans* and *P. f. nubilosa*. I consider it preferable from the taxonomic point of view to leave *D. ortleppi* in the synonymy of *P. f. flavicans*, describing the dark eastern race under a new name with its type-locality on the extreme eastern fringe of the range.

None of the paratypical series is in a condition of moult into the rather greyer breeding dress, and the breast-band is indicated only by indistinct spotting in most instances. The paratypes were collected in the Orange Free State (May) and Transvaal (July), and my long series of the nominate race in the northern districts of the Cape in August and September.

4. *Plocepasser mahali stentor*, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂ adult. Kenhardt, north-western Cape Province, South Africa. 23 September, 1957. Collected by P. A. Clancey. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Considerably paler and more rusty or buffy, less dark earth-brown, on the upper-parts than *Plocepasser mahali mahali* Smith, 1836: Modder River, Orange Free State. On the under-parts buffish tinged, less whitish in series. Similar in size.

Paratypical material: 12 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 109, culmen 21, tarsus 26, tail 67 mm.

Range: North-western and northern Cape Province, South-West Africa, the Bechuanaland Protectorate, south-western Southern Rhodesia and western Transvaal. Intergrades in the south-east of its range with the nominate race.

Remarks: Working quite independently on the material preserved in the collection of the East London Museum, Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer, the Director, noted that the race *P. m. mahali* as at present accepted is actually a composite of two quite strongly marked forms, the one herein described being without a name. I am very grateful to Miss Courtenay-Latimer for kindly placing her important observations at my disposal, and for discussing the problem with me.

The Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser mahali* was first collected by Sir Andrew Smith during the course of his Expedition for Exploring Central Africa from the Cape of Good Hope, and is described in his report of 1836, p. 51. In the original description the type-locality is given as the "country between the Orange River and the Tropic." Macdonald and Hall, *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, vol. 23, 1, 1957, p. 35, restrict the type-locality to the Modder River, near Bloemfontein, Orange Free State. In this connection, I would submit that it is not clear on what basis the restriction is based, because judging by the map of Smith's travels in Kirby, *The Diary of Dr. Andrew Smith*, vol. ii, 1940, he never visited the area where Bloemfontein now stands, or the Modder River to the northward. However, Smith, *Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa*, Aves, 1841, pl. lxxv, records "first seeing this bird upon a tree on one of the tributary streams of the great northern branch of the Orange River." This could conceivably apply to either the Modder River or the Riet River, but as Macdonald and Hall have suggested the Modder River there seems no logical reason for not accepting this, though I would suggest, on the basis of Kirby's map, that the

type-locality of *Plocepasser mahali* Smith, 1836, should be moved downstream to nearer that river's confluence with the Riet. This general area was certainly visited by Sir Andrew Smith. The slight adjustment in the type-locality does not interfere with the use of the name *P. m. mahali* for the darker of the two races discussed herein, the range of which can be defined as the districts of the northern Cape to the east of the Vaal River, the northern districts of the eastern Cape, the western and central Orange Free State (east to Winburg), and parts of the southern Transvaal.

5. *Philetairus socius eremnus*, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂ adult. Kransfontein, north of Prieska, northern Cape Province, South Africa. 5 September, 1957. Collected by P. A. Clancey. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Similar to *Philetairus socius socius* (Latham), 1790: Great Namaqualand, South-West Africa, from which it differs in having the head-top darker brown (about the Olive Brown of Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. xl, as against Buffy Brown (pl. xl) in *Ph. s. socius*); centres of the squamose feathering on hind and sides of neck and mantle blacker, and edges often whiter; rump greyer and more squamated, less uniform buffish. Wings and tail darker; chin and throat deeper black, and rest of under-parts very slightly browner in series than in *Ph. s. socius*. Similar in size.

Paratypical material: 6 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 75, culmen 17.5, tarsus 21, tail 44 mm.

Range: The south-eastern periphery of the species' range, being known at present only from the southern Asbestos Mountains and the central Orange River valley in the neighbourhood of Prieska, in the northern Cape Province.

Remarks: This darkly coloured new race of the Sociable Weaver was found commonly in the southern Asbestos Mountains and near Prieska. It frequently constructs its interesting communal nests among the rigging of telephone poles, and from such a colony the *Type* was obtained in the rocky gorge, Kransfontein, some miles to the north of Prieska, on the road to Niekerkshoop and Griquatown.

At the May, 1956, Conference of the South African Museums Association, held in the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, Dr. G. Rudebeck demonstrated to delegates the characters of a new race

of *Ph. socius*, which he proposed to recognize from the thornveld districts of the western Transvaal, the series used being from Wolmaransstad. Dr. V. FitzSimons, Director of the Museum, informs me *in litt.*, October, 1957, that no specimen in their Wolmaransstad series has been designated as a *Type*, nor is there any indication on the labels as to the name which Rudebeck intended to use for the race. Also, to the best of my knowledge, the description of this projected race has not yet appeared, but I consider it to be quite different to my *Ph. s. eremnus* on account of the rather more reddish brown head-top, less blackish centres and more golden fringes to the squamose dorsal feathering. Its wings and tail are also less dark than in the taxon which I have here proposed. For the race occurring in Bechuanaland (northern Cape), the southern Bechuanaland Protectorate, the western Transvaal and adjacent parts of the Orange Free State (i.e. the form demonstrated by Rudebeck), the name *Philetaerus lepidus* Smith, 1837: districts around Latakoo, i.e. Kuruman, northern Cape, appears to be applicable.

6. *Sporopipes squamifrons fuligescens*, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Glen, on the Modder River, north of Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa. 11 May, 1957. Collected by P. A. Clancey. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Similar to *Sporopipes squamifrons squamifrons* (Smith), 1836: Kuruman, northern Cape (see "Remarks"), but differs in being considerably darker and rather more greyish on the upper-parts, less sandy (about the Drab of Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. xlvi, as against Avellaneous (pl. x1)). Fringes to the scaly feathers of the head-top, and those of wings and tail purer, less sandy, white, and under-parts generally whiter, with little or no sandy suffusion. Similar in size.

Paratypical material: 8 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 58, culmen 11.5, tarsus 16, tail 40 mm.

Range: From some northern districts of the eastern Cape Province, and of the western and central Orange Free State, northwards to the highveld regions of the Transvaal. Intergrades with the nominate race to the west of its stated range.

Remarks: The type-locality of the nominate race of the Scaly-fronted Finch is given in most recent standard works as Graaff-Reinet, Cape, though strangely enough the range usually given for the race does not embrace its type-locality! It is not clear why

Graaff-Reinet should ever have been chosen as the type-locality, except for the fact that Sir Andrew Smith started out from the place on his expedition in 1834 (August), returning in 1836 (January) (see Kirby, *The Diary of Dr. Andrew Smith*, vol. ii, 1940 (map)). In the original description of *Estrelida Squamifrons*, Smith, *Report of the Expedition for Exploring Central Africa from the Cape of Good Hope*, 1836, p. 49, gives simply "Inhabits South Africa," but in his *Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa*, Aves, 1844, pl. xcv (text), under *Amadina squamifrons*, he records that "This bird is frequently found to the northward of Latakoo (i.e. Kuruman), but rarely to the southward; and the only specimens I have seen from the latter were obtained towards the sources of the Great Fish River." As Latakoo, i.e. Kuruman, is the first definite locality to be mentioned by Smith in conjunction with his *Estrelida squamifrons*, it seems that this and not Graaff-Reinet should be accepted by workers as the type-locality of *S. s. squamifrons*. A study of the original description shows that by his reference to the neck and back being rusty grey, *S. s. squamifrons* is correctly applied to the paler and more sandy coloured of the two races of this little finch here discussed, and Kuruman would be completely acceptable as the type-locality. The relevant portion of the Latin diagnosis in his *Illustrations*, "*collo superne dorsoquè pallidè griseo-brunneis*," and the English portion, which reads "intermediate between broccoli (?) and woodbrown" (see Ridgway, *loc. cit.*, pl. xl), are both subspecifically diagnostic. It is worthwhile noting that Kuruman was mentioned in connection with this species by Layard as long ago as 1867 in his *Birds of South Africa*, p. 199.

I therefore formally propose that Kuruman and not Graaff-Reinet, as proposed by Vincent, *Bull. B.O.C.*, vol. lv, 1935, p. 98, should be the accepted type-locality of *S. s. squamifrons* (Smith), 1836.