



DURBAN MUSEUM NOVITATES

Issued by the Durban Museum, Durban, South Africa

Vol. V

ISSUED 15TH JULY, 1958

Part 8

MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS X

by

P. A. CLANCEY

(Director, Durban Museum, South Africa)

1. Four New Races of Passerine Birds from South Africa

Collections of birds being amassed by the major southern African museums continue to reveal a succession of previously undetermined races for which names appear to be required. Among many recently discovered novelties are the following four new races:

Miraфра africanoides quæsitа, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Breeding. Rietfontein, Griquatown–Niekerkshoop road, Asbestos Mountains, northern Cape Province. Altitude 4,300 ft. a.s.l. 2 September, 1957. Durban Museum Expedition. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Differs from *Miraфра africanoides africanoides* Smith, 1836: Eastern Province of the Colony and Latakoo (see "Remarks"), in being less heavily streaked and lighter coloured on the upper-parts—about Cinnamon, *vide* Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. xxix, as against Sayal Brown/Tawny Olive (same pl.) in *M. a. africanoides*. Wings and tail paler. Similar on the under-parts. Compared with *Miraфра africanoides harei* Roberts, 1917: Windhoek, South-West Africa, darker, more reddish and heavily streaked on the upper-parts, and with the lower throat and upper breast copiously freckled. In *M. a. harei* the upper-parts

[Price 2/6 Nett]

99

are about Ochraceous-Tawny (pl. xv), the feathers broadly edged with whitish, and on the lower throat and upper breast the spotting is vestigial, often absent.

Range: In the northern Cape Province occurs to the west of the range of *M. a. africanoides*, (which subspecies reaches to the valley of the Vaal), parts of the north-western Cape Province, and perhaps extreme southern Great Namaqualand, northwards between the ranges of *M. a. africanoides* and *M. a. harei* to the southern Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Paratypical material: 18 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing (flattened) 96.5, culmen from base 15, tarsus 25, tail 63.5 mm.

Remarks: *M. a. quæsita* is the race *M. a. africanoides* Smith as understood by Roberts, who restricted the type-locality of the latter to Litakun, near Kuruman, in the northern Cape Province. Macdonald, in White, *Bull. B. O. C.*, vol. 76, 4, 1956, p. 54, has shown that Smith's *Types* of his *M. a. africanoides* in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), London, "do not agree with birds from Griqualand West but are darker and agree with specimens from Colesberg, which he (Macdonald) would regard as the type-locality of the nominate race." This finding should be accepted. With the application of *M. a. africanoides* to all the dark-coloured and heavily streaked eastern populations ranging from the northern districts of the eastern Cape (Colesberg), northwards through the extreme eastern districts of the northern Cape (Vaal and Hartz valleys), and the western Orange Free State to the southern and western Transvaal, I believe that *M. a. austin-robertsi* White, 1947 (nom. nov. pro *M. a. transvaalensis* (Roberts), 1936: Nylstroom, Transvaal) will require to be sunk into synonymy.

In the eastern districts of the northern Cape, *M. a. africanoides* and *M. a. quæsita* meet along the line of the valleys of the Vaal and Hartz rivers. Good series from Riverton, to the north of Kimberley, and from near Schmidtsdrift show the transition clearly. There is no patchwork distribution of light and dark populations as suggested by White, *loc. cit.* Of two specimens from Prieska, one resembles *M. a. africanoides*, the other *M. a. quæsita*, thereby showing that the two forms meet also along the line of the middle Orange River valley, below that river's confluence with the Vaal. The location of the zone of contact between *M. a. quæsita* and *M. a. harei* is not

yet known, but it is suggested that the two races fade into one another gradually in the southern half of Great Namaqualand.

I am grateful to Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer, Director of the East London Museum, for the loan of important material from the northern Cape Province.

Mirafra sabota suffusca, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Lubuli Police Camp, Nsoko, south-eastern Swaziland. Altitude 300 ft. a.s.l. 27 August, 1955. Durban Museum Expedition. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Close to *Mirafra sabota sabota* Smith, 1836: between Latakoo (Kuruman) and the Tropic, *i.e.*, south-eastern Bechuanaland, from which it differs in being darker and redder and more heavily streaked with umber brown on the upper-parts, especially the rump. Similar in size to *M. s. sabota*, and with a bill of comparable proportions.

Range: The lowlands of south-eastern Africa, ranging from northern Zululand and eastern Swaziland to the eastern Transvaal and southern Portuguese East Africa. Apparently ranges westwards into parts of Southern Rhodesia, in which territory the populations appear to be generally unstable.

Paratypical material: 20 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 82.5, culmen 16, tarsus 23, tail 48.5 m.m.

Remarks: In his revisionary notes on the races of this lark in *Bull. B. O. C.*, vol. 76, 1, 1956, pp. 4–6, White states that “adequate material from the whole area now included under the nominate form may justify subdivision.” Nominotypical *M. sabota*, as understood on the basis of specimens from south-eastern Bechuanaland (55 miles W. of Kanye; Kikomu di Kai), and from the eastern districts of the Protectorate (near Francistown), is a lighter and brighter bird on the upper-parts than *M. s. suffusca*. It is often distinctly greyish or whitish on the hind neck, which results in the dorsal surface being relatively less uniform when compared with the new race. Most Southern Rhodesian birds resemble the nominate race, but the populations appear to be unstable and some birds are darker than *M. s. sabota* and not separable from *M. s. suffusca*, while others again are paler than either.

Specimens from the Orange Free State and the high interior of Natal (Colenso) agree fairly well in colour with topotypical *M. s. sabota*, but they appear to range somewhat longer in wing-length—87.5–89 mm. Wings of topotypes of *M. s. sabota* measure 82–84.5, and Southern Rhodesian males 81.5–87.5 mm. The material at present available is insufficient to decide if the populations of the Sabota Lark of the south-east African highlands can be separated from *M. s. sabota* on size grounds, and they are best left with that race for the present.

11 adult ♂♂ of *M. s. suffusca* have wings 81–84.5 (83.4) mm.

I am grateful to the Directors of the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo, and the East London Museum for the loan of material.

***Cercomela sinuata ensifera*, subsp. nov.**

Type: ♀, adult. Breeding. Rietfontein, Griquatown–Niekerkshoop road, Asbestos Mountains, northern Cape Province. Altitude 4,300 ft. a.s.l. 2 September, 1957. Collected by M. O. E. Baddeley. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: Differs from *Cercomela sinuata sinuata* (Sundevall), 1850: Saldanha Bay, south-western Cape Province, in being paler and warmer brown (about Saccardo's Umber, Ridgway, *op. cit.*, pl. xxix, as against Olive-Brown or Clove Brown (pl. xl.)) on the upper-parts. Rump paler, more yellowish, cinnamon. On the under-parts, throat and breast rather less dark grey, and with the flanks paler brown. Distinguishable from *Cercomela sinuata hypernephela* Clancey, 1956: 40 miles E. of Maseru, Basutoland, on account of its paler and warmer, less earthen brown, upper-parts. Ventrally similar, but with a shorter tail.

Range: Little Namaqualand and the Calvinia district eastwards through the Karroo to the eastern Cape, Griqualand West, the Orange Free State and the southern Transvaal. Intergrades to the south-west of its ascertained range with the nominate race.

Paratypical material: 44 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 78, culmen 15, tarsus 26, tail 53 mm.

Remarks: *C. s. ensifera* has the wing-length in 18 ♂♀ 73.5–80 (76.9), culmens 15–18 (16.6), tails 46–54 (50.3) mm. Eight south-western Cape examples of *C. s. sinuata* have wings 78.5–82.5 (80.1), culmens

16.5–18 (17.3), tails 49–55 (51.7) mm. Two freshly moulted ♂♂ of *C. s. hypernephela* have wings of 81.5, culmens 16 and 16.5, tails 57 and 58+ mm. The long tail seems to be a valid subspecific criterion of this highland race, but two very worn ♀♀ from the Sanqubetu Valley of eastern Basutoland in the Transvaal Museum collection have tails of only 51 and 51.5 mm.

The three races of the Sicklewing Chat can now stand as follows:

- (a) ***Cercomela sinuata sinuata*** (Sundevall), 1850: Saldanha Bay, south-western Cape Province.

Upper-parts in fresh plumage Olive-Brown or between Olive-Brown and Clove Brown. Rump pinkish cinnamon. Throat and breast pale grey, the sides of the body and flanks with light brown wash. Tail-length 49–55 (51.7) mm.

Range: The winter rainfall areas of the south-western and southern Cape Province.

- (b) ***Cercomela sinuata ensifera*** Clancey, 1958: Rietfontein, Niekerkshoop–Griquatown road, Asbestos Mts., northern Cape Province.

Paler and warmer above than *C. s. sinuata*, the colour being about Saccardo's Umber. Rump lighter, more yellowish cinnamon. Rather whiter over the throat and breast, and with paler brown flanks. Averaging rather smaller in size. Tail-length 46–54 (50.3) mm.

Range: As given in the above description.

- (c) ***Cercomela sinuata hypernephela*** Clancey, 1956: 40 miles E. of Maseru, Basutoland.

Similar to the nominate race on the upper-parts but a somewhat more greyish earthen, less olive, brown. Rump more pinkish. On under-parts like *C. s. ensifera*. Tail-length greater than in the other two races: 57 and 58+ mm. in two freshly moulted examples.

Range: The highlands of Basutoland.

As the Sicklewing Chat is subject to considerable change through abrasion and in some areas as a result of serious and insidious soil-staining, I have based the characters of the races on freshly moulted specimens only.

Material for this study has been kindly loaned by the Directors of the South African Museum, Cape Town (through Dr. J. M. Winterbottom), East London Museum, and the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria. Much of this has been collected during the past three or four years.

***Serinus flaviventris aurescens*, subsp. nov.**

Type: ♂, adult. Breeding. 10 miles on the Kenhardt–Brandvlei road, north-western Cape Province. 20 September, 1957. Collected by M. O. E. Baddeley. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Diagnosis: ♂, adult. Most closely resembles *Serinus flaviventris marshalli* Shelley, 1902: Potchefstroom, Transvaal, from which it differs in being rather more yellowish, less green, and not so distinctly streaked on the crown, nape and mantle; supercilia and cheeks richer yellow. On the under-parts a much richer and deeper yellow, being about Lemon Chrome (*vide* Ridgway, *op. cit.*, pl. iv) as against Lemon Yellow (same pl.). From *Serinus flaviventris damarensis* (Roberts), 1922: Windhoek, South-West Africa, distinguishable on account of the duller and darker upper-parts, the yellow rump less sharply demarcated, and in exhibiting much less yellow on the frons and supercilia. Averaging slightly smaller in size, wings of 12 ♂♂ 71–75 (73.3) mm. ♀, adult. Purer grey on the upperparts and whiter below, and with virtually no yellowish admixture to the plumage as in *S. f. marshalli* and *S. f. damarensis*.

Range: North-western Cape Province in Bushmanland and the Kenhardt districts south-east to Prieska, and in extreme southern Great Namaqualand eastwards to Griqualand West, northern Cape Province. Intergrades with *S. f. marshalli* along the line of the valleys of the Vaal and Hartz Rivers.

Paratypical material: 22 specimens.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 74, culmen 14, tarsus 18, tail 56 mm.

Remarks: Miss M. Courtenay-Latimer, *Ostrich*, vol. xxviii, 3, 1957, p. 173, was the first worker to show that a lightly coloured race of the Yellow Canary *S. flaviventris* (Stephens) occurs in the north-western Cape Province immediately to the north of the range of the dark nominate subspecies, when she ascribed three males collected on the road between Kakamas and Kenhardt to *S. f. mar-*

shalli. New material from the north-western and northern Cape and Orange Free State recently assembled (1957) by the Durban and East London Museums shows that the race *S. f. marshalli* as at present accepted is a composite of two nomenclaturally recognisable races, the males of the south-western populations being a deeper and richer yellow than those of the east, while the females show perhaps even better characteristics. Females of *S. f. aurescens* are interesting in largely lacking the yellow admixture to the dorsal and ventral colouration, which feature is well developed in both *S. f. marshalli* and *S. f. damarensis*, as well as in *S. f. flaviventris* and *S. f. guillarmodi* (Roberts).

An adult ♂ of this canary obtained on 29 October, 1957, in the Kalahari Game Reserve, northern Cape Province, by a party from the East London Museum is very similar to Damaraland topotypes of *S. f. damarensis*, and suggests that this very brilliant race ranges south into the north-western corner of the northern Cape. *S. f. damarensis* is somewhat longer-winged than *S. f. aurescens*, viz., 76–76.5 mm. in Durban Museum specimens.

2. The South African Races of the Sombre Bulbul *Andropadus importunus* (Vieillot)

The Sombre Bulbul *Andropadus importunus* (Vieillot) is a generally common species of bushed and forested country, ranging from the south-western and southern Cape Province north-eastwards to East Africa. Within the confines of the South African sub-continent three and sometimes four races are admitted by workers. Sclater, *Systema Avium Æthiopicarum*, part ii, 1930, pp. 392–393, admits three, Roberts, *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 230, four, Vincent, *Check List of the Birds of South Africa*, 1952, pp. 65–66, three, and McLachlan and Liversidge, *Roberts' Birds of South Africa*, 1957, p. 293, three. The indecision surrounding the precise number of nomenclaturally recognisable races in South Africa, is exceeded only by the utter confusion regarding the names to be applied to the different forms and their respective geographical ranges. Material which I have studied closely during recent years in the collections of the Transvaal, Natal, Durban and East London Museums shows that four races of this bulbul can be recognised from within South African limits, and a precisely similar finding has been adopted by Dr. Austin L. Rand, Chicago Natural History Museum, U.S.A., in his revision of the Ethiopian Pycnonotidæ for the continuation of Peters' *Check List of Birds of the World*.

A. i. importunus (Vieillot), 1818: Auteniquoi Forest, *i.e.*, Knysna, southern Cape Province, is characterized by its very drab colouration. The upper-parts are dull brownish olive, slightly paler on the rump, while ventrally it is greyish olive-buff, the feathers of the abdomen and under tail-coverts fringed with pale primrose yellow. Populations agreeing with the toptotypical ones range from the south-western Cape winter rainfall districts eastwards to about the valley of the Great Kei River. Still further east, in forested Pondoland and East Griqualand, rather different birds are to be found, the upper-parts darker and more saturated, and the ventral surfaces less greyish, the breast, sides of the body and flanks strongly washed with olive-brown. The yellow tipping to the feathers of the abdomen and under tail-coverts is usually slightly more accentuated. Comparable populations range throughout Natal, the southern half of Zululand, the eastern Orange Free State, and the eastern and northern Transvaal highlands. For this race the name *A. i. noomei* Roberts, 1917: Haenertsburg, north-eastern Transvaal, is available. Roberts considered *A. i. noomei* to be restricted to the forests of the eastern and northern Transvaal, while yet other workers have used it to cover the rather smaller and yellower eastern lowland populations. As I have shown in the *Annals of the Natal Museum*, vol. xii, 2, 1952, p. 251, paratypes of *A. i. noomei* in the collection of the Transvaal Museum could not be differentiated from Natal specimens of what I believed in 1951 to constitute *A. i. importunus*. With the restriction of the nominotypical race to south-western, southern and eastern Cape districts, *A. i. noomei* can be conveniently applied to the whole complex of populations ranging from coastal Pondoland, Natal and southern Zululand inland to the northern Transvaal. It is true that where *A. i. noomei* approaches the range of the more yellowish *A. i. mentor*, a percentage of birds with slightly more yellowish abdominal surfaces is to be found in the populations, but it is not possible to recognise such intergrading populations as an eastern and northern Transvaal highland race as Roberts has suggested.

In the south-east African lowlands, *i.e.*, from the northern half of Zululand, eastern Swaziland, the eastern Transvaal "lowveld," Sul do Save, southern Portuguese East Africa, and extreme south-eastern Southern Rhodesia (Haroni-Lusitu confluence), rather smaller and more yellowish birds than *A. i. noomei* are to be found. Compared with *A. i. noomei* such birds are a lighter and yellower olive-brown above, and on the under-parts they are wholly more

yellow over the throat, breast, body-sides and flanks, and the abdomen and under tail-coverts are clear primrose yellow. They also range a trifle smaller in the critical measurements. In the older literature this race is usually called *A. i. oleaginus* Peters, 1868: Lourenço Marques, southern Portuguese East Africa (*vide Journal für Ornithologie*, 1868, p. 133), but as has been shown by Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Bull. B. O. C.*, vol. lxxviii, 2, 1947, p. 59 Peters' *A. oleaginus* is indeterminate and should not be used for this form, as the so-called *Type* in the Berlin Museum is an example of the nominate race, and could not have been collected by Peters, and the description is that of a young (?) *Chlorophoneus* shrike. Vincent, *loc. cit.*, and McLachlan and Liversidge, in their recent work, follow the out-dated opinion of Scater, *loc. cit.*, in the recognition of a single race from northern Zululand to the Zambesi and beyond under the name *A. i. hypoxanthus* Sharpe. Now, this latter view is inadmissible, because long ago Roberts showed that Zambesi birds (*A. i. hypoxanthus*) are much deeper yellow below than those from further south in southern Portuguese East Africa (*A. i. oleaginus*), and this finding has been confirmed by the present writer, *loc. cit.*, and by Pinto and Lamm, *Memórias do Museu Dr. Alvaro de Castro*, No. 3, 1955, p. 134. The correct name for the race under discussion is *A. i. mentor* Clancey, 1952: Shimula's Pont, Pongola River, north-eastern Zululand, introduced as a new subspecies to fill the void created by the declared indeterminacy of Peters' *A. oleaginus*. Dr. Austin Rand informs me *in litt.*, that if the arguments advanced by Mackworth-Praed and Grant are followed many old names could be declared indeterminate, and he proposes to call the race in question *A. i. oleaginus* in his revision for Peters' *Check List*. On this point I prefer to differ, and I consider the case propounded by Mackworth-Praed and Grant to be perfectly reasonable and sound.

North of the range of *A. i. mentor* occur populations the birds of which differ in being richer above and deeper yellow on the underparts, the abdomen and under tail-coverts being about amber yellow as against primrose yellow in *A. i. mentor*. This race, *A. i. hypoxantha* Sharpe, 1876: Tette, Zambesi country, apparently ranges from the Save River northwards to the lower and middle Zambesi, Nyasaland, northern Portuguese East Africa, south-eastern Tanganyika Territory and Mafia Island. *A. i. hypoxantha* and *A. i. mentor* (= *A. i. oleaginus*) are frequently considered to be synonymous by workers, but the salient differences in the ventral colouration of the two groups of populations are sufficient to justify the nomenclatural recognition of the two races.

Three or four other races of *A. importunus* extend the range of the species to the highlands of Kenya Colony and the coastal regions of southern Italian Somaliland. In some of these subspecific distinction is tenuous, and there is a considerable measure of uncertainty in the literature as to the precise number of forms which should be recognised.

Four races of the Sombre Bulbul can be admitted in our formal arrangement of the South African subcontinental populations, and the names, characters and ranges of these are as follows:

(a) ***Andropadus importunus importunus*** (Vieillot)

Turdus importunus Vieillot, *Nouveau Dictionnaire d'Histoire Naturelle*, vol. xx, 1818, p. 266: Auteniquoi Forest, *i.e.*, Knysna, southern Cape Province, South Africa.

Upper-parts dull brownish olive, slightly paler on the rump; below pale greyish olive-buff (about OY-11-3°, C. and J. Villalobos, *Colour Atlas*, Buenos Aires, 1947), the feathers of the abdomen and under tail-coverts fringed with pale primrose yellow.

Wings 87-93.5 (90.2), tails 86-93 (89.6), culmens 19-20.5 (19.2) mm. 8 ♂♀ specimens measured.

Type: None. Based on L'Importun of Levaillant, *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Afrique*, vol. iii, 1802, p. 41, pl. 106 (fig 2).

Range: South-western and southern Cape Province east to the Great Kei River, east of which it merges into *A. i. noomei*.

(b) ***Andropadus importunus noomei*** Roberts

Andropadus importunus noomei Roberts, *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, vol. v, 4, 1917, p. 259: Haenertsburg, north-eastern Transvaal, South Africa.

Darker and more saturated olive-brown on the upper-parts than *A. i. importunus*. On the underside less greyish and more strongly olive tinged, this especially marked on the breast, sides of the body and flanks (breast feathers YYO-9-4°). Wings and tail slightly darker. Yellow tipping to feathers of abdomen and under tail-coverts similar, but often more prominent.

Wings 86-94 (96.5) (89.9), tails 85-91.5 (96) (87.9), culmens 18-20.5 (19.6) mm. 10 ♂♀ specimens measured.

Type: In the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria. T.M. No. 7804.

Range: The extreme eastern districts of the Cape Province in the forested parts of the Transkeian Territories and East Griqualand, Natal and southern Zululand, eastern Orange Free State, western Swaziland, and the eastern and northern Transvaal highlands. Intergrades with the following race on the eastern periphery of its range.

(c) *Andropadus importunus mentor* Clancey

Andropadus importunus mentor Clancey, *Annals of the Natal Museum*, vol. xii, 2, 1952, p. 251: Shinula's Pont, Pongola River, north-eastern Zululand, South Africa.

Rather lighter and more yellowish olive on the upper-parts than *A. i. noomei*. On the underside lighter and more yellow, less greyish olive; breast with a slight greyish wash, but on a yellow ground, and the abdomen and under tail-coverts uniform primrose yellow (about YYO-15-7°). Axillaries slightly deeper yellow. Wings and tail paler, more yellowish olive. Ranging slightly smaller in size.

Wings 85-92 (87.9), tails (75) 84-89 (85.5), culmens 18-19.5 (18.6) mm. 8 ♂♀ specimens measured.

Type: In the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg.

Range: The northern half of Zululand from the northern shores of Lake St. Lucia, the Lebombo Mountains, and eastern Swaziland to the eastern Transvaal "lowveld" (*i.e.*, Kruger National Park), Sul do Save, southern Portuguese East Africa, and extreme south-eastern Southern Rhodesia (Haroni-Lusitu confluence, *vide* Smithers, Irwin and Paterson, *Check List of the Birds of Southern Rhodesia*, 1957, p. 102).

(d) *Andropadus importunus hypoxanthus* Sharpe

Andropadus hypoxanthus Sharpe, in Layard's *Birds of South Africa*, part i, 1876 p. 205: Tette, in the Zambesi country-Tete, Rivi River, southern Nyasaland, *vide* Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa*, vol. ii, 1955, p. 146.

Similar to *A. i. mentor* but slightly darker and richer on the upper-parts. Ventrally richer yellow, the abdomen and peripheral surfaces and under tail-coverts being about amber yellow (near

YYO-15-10°) as against primrose yellow in *A. i. mentor*. Axillaries and inner webs of primaries and secondaries deeper yellow. Wings and tail richer. Slightly larger in size.

Wings 86.5-95 (90.5), tails 83.5-90.5 (86.3), culmens 18-20.5 (19.2) mm. 12 ♂♀ specimens measured.

Type: In the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), South Kensington, London. Brit. Mus. Reg. No. 60.12.31.75 Obtained by Kirk on Livingstone's Expedition.

Range: Southern Portuguese East Africa to the north of the River Save, Southern and Northern Rhodesia on the middle Zambesi, Nyasaland, northern Portuguese East Africa, south-eastern Tanganyika Territory and Mafia Island.