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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS

LXI

by

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FURTHER ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN SUB-REGION RACES OF *COSSYPHA CAFFRA* (LINNAEUS)

The present small turdine ranges from the southern Sudan, Uganda, eastern Zaïre, and the Western Highlands of Kenya, south through East Africa to the Cape, Transkei, and Natal and Zululand. The species is unique in the genus *Cossypha* in that in the east and north of its extended and disjunct range the populations are stenotopic, being closely associated with the verges and interior of temperate evergreen, and largely montane, forest. In the xeric interior and west of South Africa and southern South West Africa (Namibia) the populations exhibit a much wider range of ecological adaptability, exploiting dry riparian thicket, dense scrub and the gardens of settlements in desertic country, far removed from regions supporting evergreen forest.

Variation in *C. caffra* affects general size, the relative brownness or greyness of the upper-parts, nuances in the orange plastron, the amount of grey exhibited over the mid- and lower venter, and the development of the white supercilia. Two broad ecologically based groupings are evident in the species. Eastern and northern evergreen forest associated birds are generally saturated over the upper-parts, with the pileum barely differentiated from the rest of the upper-parts and have the wings in ♂♂ 84 - 92, ♀♀ 77 - 85 mm. In the case of the birds occurring in the valley of the Orange R. — one of the more arid parts of the Sub-Region — the wings of ♂♂ range from 92 - 98 and in ♀♀ 85 - 91 mm. In other words, large size in *caffra* is directly correlated with aridity and small size with the presence of more mesic environmental conditions. Specimens of the xeric extreme also have broader and more posteriorly extended whiter supercilia, and are greyer over the pileum and lighter over the back. Variation in the colour of the throat panel or plastron is highly important from the subspecific point of view but does not, strangely enough, describe the
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same pattern as the size and upper-parts colouration parameters. The palest breasted birds occur in the south and south-east of the species' range, and the darkest on the plateau of the Transvaal and in eastern Zaïre (Kivu region) and adjacent equatorial regions of central Africa.

The southern African populations of the Cape Robin were reviewed by me nearly thirty years ago in *Ostrich*, vol. xxiii, 2, 1952, pp. 94 - 96, when four subspecific groupings of populations were recognised from the south of the range. The recommendations contained in this revision were adopted by Ripley in the continuation of Peters' *Check-List Birds of the World*, vol.x, 1964, pp. 56, 57, when five subspecies were recognised for the species as a whole.

A recent study of the species in regions lying to the south of the Zambesi R., using collections which did not exist when the variation was studied in Pretoria in 1951, shows that adjustments need to be made to the ranges of certain races, while an additional subspecies requires to be recognised and named. This latter is the red breasted population occurring over much of the open plateau of the Transvaal, which was considered to equal the *C.c. drakensbergi* of Roberts in my 1952 paper. Later the range of *drakensbergi* was enlarged to include the Zimbabwean elements previously treated as part of *C.c. iolaema* Reichenow. Still more recently, the name *drakensbergi* was transferred to the Drakensberg Mountains population, and the Transvaal and Zimbabwean representatives were grouped under *C.c. vespera* Clancey, described in 1972 from near Umtali in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. A re-examination of this latter complex of populations shows that two discrete groups are involved: one closely associated with montane evergreen forest in eastern and north-eastern Transvaal and eastern Zimbabwe and adjacent Mozambique, and the second inhabiting the open plateau country to the west. This latter population is currently undescribed. For further comments on this involved issue see *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. ix, 16, 1972, pp.244, 245, and *ibid.*, vol. x, 12, 1975, p. 168.

Much of the confusion in resolving the variation in the Transvaal in subspecific terms stems from Roberts' inept description of *C.c. drakensbergi*, based on a single specimen from a zone of contact between no less than three subspecies, on a size character which does not hold up, and in his overlooking of the main subspecifically important parameters in the entire species from the very outset.

Five subspecies are recognisable from the South African Sub-Region as opposed to the four admitted in my revision of 1952. *C.c. iolaema* is treated as extra-limital, and the species is considered to comprise seven races, the names, characters and ranges of which are as follows:

(a) ***Cossypha caffra caffra*** (Linnaeus)

Motacilla caffra Linnaeus, *Mantiss. Plantar.*, 1771, p. 527: Cape of Good Hope, Cape.

Pileum not appreciably darker or greyer than rest of upper-parts; mantle Raw Umber (Ridgway (1912), pl. iii). Venter with plastron ochraceous Clay Color (pl. xxix); below the plastron white, scaled and washed with light grey; flanks heavily overlaid olivaceous or brownish. *Measurements*: Wings (flattened) of 11 ♂♂ 83 - 91 (87,2), SD 2,28, tails 70 - 80 (75,3), SD 2,99, wings of 10 ♀♀ 78 - 84 (81,0), SD 2,01, tails 64 - 74 (64,4), SD 294 mm.

Material examined: 50.

Range: Winter Rainfall District of the south-western Cape, east south of the mountains to the south-eastern Cape, the Transkei, Natal (including East Griqualand), where sparse or absent on coast, and western Zululand. Recorded in the Lebombo Mts in the non-breeding season. The birds of the karoo-type country near Port Elizabeth approach the next subspecies rather than nominate *caffra*.

Remarks: Uniform dorsum, umber brown from frons to lower back, pale ventral grey, and the light ochraceous clay colour of the plastron are diagnostic.

(b) ***Cossypha caffra drakensbergi*** (Roberts)

Caffronis caffra drakensbergi Roberts, *Ostrich*, vol. vii, 2, 1936, p. 110: Wakkerstroom, south-eastern Transvaal.

Differs from nominate *C. caffra* in having the pileum darker or greyer than the back, which is also more greyish, less saturated, brown (pileum Chaetura Drab (pl. x1vi); mantle Brownish Olive (pl. xxx) or near Fuscous (pl. x1vi)). Plastron colour and superciliary stripes as in *C. c. caffra*. Size ranging a little larger.

Measurements: Wings of 10 ♂♂ 88 - 95,5 (90,0), SD 2,60, tails 79 - 92 (83,5), SD 4,28, wings of 10 ♀♀ 80 - 87 (83,8), SD 2,26, tails 70 - 76 (73,2), SD 2,41 mm.

Material examined: 40.

Range: Western Cape coast to the north of the nominate subspecies and south of *C. c. namaquensis* in the valley of the Orange R., eastwards through the Karoo and associated xeric regions of the interior to the north-eastern Cape, much of the eastern Orange Free State, the highlands of Lesotho and their outliers, high western Natal, and the south-eastern Transvaal at Wakkerstroom. Extends virtually to the coast in the south-eastern Cape in the karoid country near Port Elizabeth. In the high east of the range, many winter at lower elevations, then reaching the Natal and Zululand coast (April - September).

Remarks: Average larger size, earthen grey pileum and colder and greyer dorsum distinguish this subspecies from *C. c. caffra*.

Examination of the *Type* of *C. c. drakensbergi* from Wakkerstroom at 27° 21' S., 30° 10' E., plus two exact topotypes in the collection of the Durban Museum, indicates that this name correctly applies to the south-eastern montane Transvaal population with the plastron colouration ochraceous clay colour and not the deeper and redder Mars Yellow plastroned birds from the plateau further north with which it has on occasion been associated. The *Type* of *drakensbergi* is a worn ♂ taken personally by Roberts on 14 October, 1909, when he was

freelancing as a collector. The T. M. Reg. No. is 7168, and the wing measures 96 mm., which is on the large side for this population.

(c) **Cossypha caffra namaquensis** Sclater

Cossypha caffra namaquensis Sclater, *Ibis*, 1911, p. 415: Klipfontein, near Springbok, north-western Cape.

Similar to *C. c. drakensbergi* over the upper-parts, but with the mantle rather less cold and greyish. Superciliary stripes broader and extended far back to the caudad edge of the ear-coverts. Ventrally, with the plastron brighter and more vibrant orange, and rest of venter more greyed, the medioventral white reduced. Tail a little paler. Size ranging still larger and the largest race.

Measurements: Wings of 12 ♂♂ 92 - 98 (95,6), SD 1,71, tails 83 - 91,5 (87,4), SD 2,37, wings of 12 ♀♀ 85 - 91 (87,9), SD 1,39, tails 74 - 85 (79,3), SD 2,85 mm.

Material examined: 26.

Range: Southern Great Namaqualand, South West Africa, in the valley of the Great Fish R., and north-western Cape in the north of Little Namaqualand and Bushmanland, east to the northern Cape (north to the Kuruman district), and western parts of the O.F.S. (valleys of the Orange, Riet, Modder, Vaal and other rivers), the adjacent north-eastern Cape, and south-western Transvaal (valleys of the mid-Vaal west of 26° 30' E., the Harts and other rivers). Probably also on the upper Limpopo. No post-breeding movements.

Remarks: Pale greyish upper-parts, broad white supercilia extended back to above the ear-coverts (not always very well-marked in ♀♀), deeper orange plastron, more heavily greyed belly and average still larger size characterize this xeric subspecies.

Winterbottom, *Ann. S. Afr. Mus.*, vol. liii, 1, 1968, p. 224, gives the range of this subspecies as "the Karoo". The Karoo form is *C. c. drakensbergi* and not *C. c. namaquensis*. The range of *namaquensis* is entirely centred on the valley of the Orange R. and those of its major affluents.

(d) **Cossypha caffra ardens**, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Pienaar's River, Pretoria-Warmbaths road, Transvaal. 25 March, 1961. Collected by T.B. Oatley. Collector's No. 167. In the collection of the Durban Museum, D.M. Reg. No. 33 051.

Generally darker over the entire dorsum than in *C. c. caffra*, the pileum about Clove Brown (pl. xxx), merging into Sepia (pl. xxix) over the mantle; rump darker (Dresden Brown (pl. xv), *versus* Buckthorn Brown (pl. xv)). Central rectrices darker. Face and supercilia as nominate *caffra*. Differs sharply over the venter, the plastron much darker, redder and less ochraceous (near Mars Yellow (pl. iii), *versus* ochraceous Clay Color)). Below the plastron, more heavily scaled and marmorated with darker and bluer grey, the lower flanks, crissum and

under tail-coverts redder buff. Size ranging rather larger and about the same as *drakensbergi*.

Measurements: Wings of 9 ♂♂ 87 - 93 (90,8), SD 2,30, tails 77 - 87 (80,0), SD 3,76, wings of 7 ♀♀ 82 - 87,5 (84,4), SD 2,01, tails 70 - 77,5 (73,3), SD 3,17 mm.

Material examined: 16

Range: The plateau of the Transvaal from the mid- and upper reaches of the Vaal R., north to the western aspects of the Zoutpansberg. In the non-breeding season (April - September) some range to the east and south of the breeding grounds, descending to lower altitudes, then occurring in Natal (Ngome Forest, Qudeni Forest, Underberg, Pietermaritzburg), Zululand (Charter's Creek, L. St. Lucia), and, apparently, eastern Zimbabwe (Rocklands, Melsetter district, 17 May, 1950). A form which is not closely linked with montane evergreen forest, inhabiting plateau country, much of which is now altered through agricultural and industrial activity.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 92, culmen from base 20,5, tarsus 32, tail 92 mm.

Remarks: Saturated dorsal colouration and reddish, not ochraceous, plastron, as well as darker ventral grey separate *ardens* from *drakensbergi*. Much darker above than nominate *caffra*, breast redder, darker and more extensively grey below, and rather larger in size.

(e) ***Cossypha caffra vespera*** Clancey

Cossypha caffra vespera Clancey, *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. ix, 16, 1972, p. 244: Stapleford Forest Reserve, near Umtali, Zimbabwe, at 18° 41' S., 32° 51' E., at 1585 m. alt.

Differs from *ardens* in having the entire dorsum colder and greyer, the mantle without any underlay of warm brown (Dark Olive (pl. x1)). Supercilia not extended much behind eyes. Below, with the plastron paler, less red, and this, mid-venter and crissal surfaces about the same as in nominate *caffra*. Size ranging smaller than *ardens*, and as in *iolaema* and nominate *caffra*.

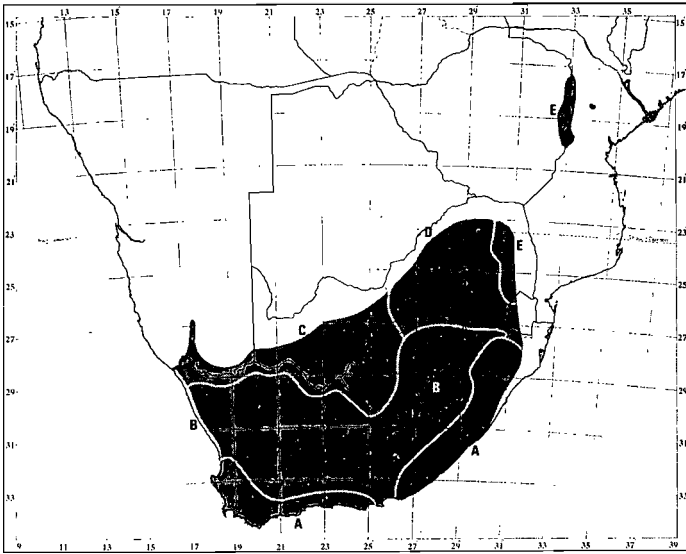
Measurements: Wings of 8 ♂♂ 84 - 92 (86,7), SD 2,71, tails 73 - 79 (74,7), SD 2,35, wings of 6 ♀♀ 77 - 83 (81,4), SD 2,22 tails 65 - 73,5 (69,9), SD 2,97 mm.

Material examined: 14.

Range: High level montane evergreen forests of the eastern Transvaal Drakensberg and the eastern Zoutpansberg, and northern Natal at Ngome Forest, north to the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe and adjacent highland Mozambique; Mt Gorongosa.

Remarks: Colder and greyer upper-parts, paler plastron, and absence of rusty buff over the crissal surfaces and under tail-coverts distinguish this montane forest subspecies.

MAP I

*COSSYPHA CAFFRA* (LINNAEUS)

Sketch-map showing the disposition of the five subspecies of the Cape Robin occurring in the South African Sub-Region

- A. *Cossypha caffra caffra* (Linnaeus)
- B. *Cossypha caffra drakensbergi* (Roberts)
- C. *Cossypha caffra namaquensis* Sclater
- D. *Cossypha caffra ardens* Clancey
- E. *Cossypha caffra vespera* Clancey

***Cossypha caffra iolaema* Reichenow**

Cossypha caffra iolaema Reichenow, *Ornith. Monatsber.*, vol. viii, 1900, p. 5: Mt Kilimanjaro, northern Tanzania.

Cossypha caffra mauensis Neumann, *Journ. f. Ornith.*, vol. xlviii, 1900, p. 30: Mau, West Highlands, Kenya.

Differs from *C. c. vespera* in having the pileum much darker, more blackish, than the back, the entire dorsum also less cold greyish and more brownish tinged. Ventrally, with the plastron lighter and more vibrant orange (Ochraceous-Orange (pl. xv)). Grey of underside paler, whiter medio-ventrally, flanks with little or no olivaceous wash, which present in *vespera*, and with lower flanks, crissum and under tail-coverts strongly suffused with orange-buff in freshly moulted dress. Size similar.

Measurements: Wings of 7 ♂♂ 84 - 90,5 (87,7) SD 2,58, tails 72 - 80,5 (77,3), SD 2,78, wings of 9 ♀♀ 77,5 - 85 (80,9), SD 2,02, tails 67 - 74,5 (71,0), SD 2,35 mm.

Material examined: 18.

Range: Highly disjunct. Highlands of Malawi and western northern Mozambique to Tanzania (north to Mt Kilimanjaro), south-eastern Zaïre, Kenya, Uganda and the southern Sudan (Equatoria).

Remarks: Dark pileum, less greyish upper-parts, warmer orange plastron, less strongly greyed under-parts and light orange-buff, not greyish-olive, flanks distinguish *iolaema* from *vespera*.

Cossypha caffra kivuensis Schouteden

Cossypha caffra kivuensis Schouteden, *Rev. Zool. Bot. Afric.*, vol. xxx, 1937, p. 165: Kivu Volcanoes, eastern Zaïre.

Described as resembling *C. c. iolaema* but with the ventral colouration darker and more saturated. Wings of ♂♀ 80 - 89 mm. Not examined.

Range: Eastern mountains of Zaïre from those at the northern end of L. Tanganyika, north to the Kivu Highlands, north-western Rwanda and south-western Uganda in Ankole.

Material in the Oatley collection of African robins recently presented to the Durban Museum by Mr T. B. Oatley added greatly to the specimen coverage available for this research. Dr A.C. Kemp, Ornithologist, Transvaal Museum, kindly assisted by lending the *Type* of *C. c. drakensbergi* for examination.

AN ADDITIONAL SUBSPECIES OF *COSSYPHA NATALENSIS* SMITH

Benson *et al.*, *Birds of Zambia*, 1971, pp. 228, 229, list *Cossypha natalensis egregior* Clancey, 1956: Manhiça, southern Sul do Save, Mozambique, from the Zambesi R. valley, placing the balance of the Zambian populations in *C. n. hylophona* Clancey, 1952: Chinteche, Malawi. An examination of Zambian material placed at my disposal by the National Museum of Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, shows that birds breeding in riparian thicket along the Zambesi are *hylophona* and not *egregior*, which is clearly extralimital to Zambia. The latter race was named on four non-breeding specimens taken in the far south of Mozambique in September, 1955, and the race concerned has not been taken in the said territory since then. Its precise breeding range is still far from clear and is currently under investigation. Two races of *C. natalensis* occur as breeders in Zambia, as correctly shown by Benson *et al.*, the elements occurring in the north-west and north apparently belonging to an undescribed subspecies, which may be known as

Cossypha natalensis seclusa, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, sub-adult. Lwiro (Katana), south-west of Lake Kivu, Zaïre, at 1645 m a.s.l. 10 June, 1959. Collected by K.W. Tinley. In the