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## MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS XLVII

by

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### THE CHARACTERS AND RANGE LIMITS OF THE NOMINATE SUBSPECIES OF *INDICATOR MINOR* STEPHENS

The northern limits of range and the diagnostic characters of the nominate subspecies of the Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor* Stephens, 1815: Swartkops R., near Uitenhage, southern Cape, seem never to have been accurately determined. Most authors, including the world expert on the Indicatoridae, Dr. H. Friedmann, of the United States, in *U.S.Natn.Mus.Bull.*, No. 208, 1955, pp. 219-222, take the range of *I.m.minor* as far north as northern Angola, southern Zaïre, Kenya and Somalia, in so doing placing *I.m.erlangeri* Zedlitz, 1913: Afgoi, south-western Somalia, *I.m.teitensis* Neumann, 1900: Teita, south-eastern Kenya, and *I.m.albigularis* (Roberts), 1922: Woodbush Forest Reserve, Tzaneen, Transvaal, in the synonymy of the nominate subspecies. In my *Catalogue Birds South African Sub-Region*, 1965, p. 377, I showed that birds with clearer grey breasts and whiter throats and bellies than in *I.m.minor* occur as far south as the lower Zambesi R. valley and Sofala district in Mozambique. In Suppl. No. 2 to my *Catalogue (Durban Mus.Novit.*, vol. ix, 12, 1972, p. 182), I took this matter

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*Measurements of the Type:* Wing (flattened) 85,5, culmen from base 22, tarsus 22,5, tail 56mm.

*Remarks:* In the colder and greyer mantle, freshly moulted *P.b. sylvanus* reveals an incipient trend towards the purer grey backed interior and western races of the species.

#### CONTIGUOUS BLACK-BACKED SUBSPECIES

##### ***Ploceus bicolor kersteni*** (Finsch and Hartlaub)

*Sycobrotus kersteni* Finsch and Hartlaub, *Vög.Ost.Afr.*, 1870, p. 404: Zanzibar, Tanzania.

Differs from *P.b.stictifrons*, which replaces it immediately to the southward, in the absence of grey frontal scaling and in being velvety jet black over the entire dorsum, face and fore-throat. Brighter and more fiery orange below. Wings and tail blacker than in *stictifrons*, the remiges without light edging to the outer vanes. Larger in size, the sexes virtually alike in dimensions.

*Measurements:* Wings of 5 ♂♂ 89,5 - 94 (92,4), SD 1,85, tails 55 - 57,5 (56,6), SD 1,08, wings of 5 ♀♀ 89 - 94 (90,5), SD 2,00, tails 54 - 60,5 (57,2), SD 2,84mm.

*Material examined:* 10 (*Kenya:* Sokoke Forest (Kilifi), Rabai (Mombasa); *Tanzania:* Isaka (Mahenge)).

*Range:* South-western Somalia, coastal Kenya, and Tanzania on coast to the Rufiji R., and inland, south to Njombe; also the island of Zanzibar.

*Remarks:* This subspecies is extremely well differentiated from the *stictifrons*, *sylvanus*, *sclateri*, *lebomboensis*, *bicolor* assemblage on the plain velvety black upper-parts, face and fore-throat and deeper orange underside.

#### FURTHER ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN SUBSPECIES OF THE QUAIL FINCH

The austral African subspecies of the Quail Finch *Ortygospiza atricollis* (Vieillot) were last dealt with by me in *Arnoldia* Rhod., vol. ii, 7, 1965, pp. 1 - 6, when certain conclusions reached by Major Melvin A. Traylor in his earlier report in *Bull.Brit.Orn.Club*, vol. lxxxiii, 8, 1963, pp. 141 - 146, were modified in the light of a study of the material then available in southern African museums. Recently, Immelmann *et al.*, *Prachtfinken*, vol. ii, 1976, pp. 565, 566, briefly considered the status of the southern African subspecies, agreeing with

Traylor that neither *O.a.bradfieldi* Roberts, 1929: Okahandja district, South West Africa, nor *O.a.digressa* Clancey, 1958: Richmond, Natal, is separable from *O.a.muelleri* Zedlitz, 1911: Simbiti, Wembere Steppe, northern Tanzania. Since 1970 the Durban Museum has been in receipt of a large series of over seventy specimens of this small terrestrial finch from the Transvaal and Natal, study of which shows quite incontrovertibly that *O.a.digressa* is a well-marked race, especially in the adult female, that *O.a.bradfieldi* has a wider range than laid down in my 1965 report, and, while perhaps not quite so sharply differentiated as *digressa*, is taxonomically distinguishable from *muelleri*, which last taxon should, I believe, be deleted from the South African list and treated as East and central African in range. In adopting this arrangement I revert to the more conservative recognition of only three South African races, along the lines of the findings of Roberts, *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 360.

Variation of subspecific relevance in *O.a.tricollis* affects the colour of the upper-parts, the extent of the black bib in adult males, and the coarseness or fineness of the transverse barring of the upper breast and levels of saturation over the mid-venter in either sex. General size as established on the basis of wing-length is of little moment in arranging the populations into acceptable subspecies. Being a grassland species, the Quail Finch is subject to rapid abrasion and colour modification by coarse grass stalks and blades, solar bleaching and soil contamination. In addition, many populations are locally migratory in sympathy with seasonal and weather patterns, while vigorous populations may disappear for a time from regions affected temporarily by drought, to re-appear when conditions return to normal.

The subspecific pattern presented by the Quail Finch in southern Africa accords with that of most small polytypic passerines: a relatively pale, greyish group of populations in the xeric interior and west, the trend to greyness of the upper-parts reaching its maximum expression in association with the desiccating and glaring environment of the saline pans of the Kalahari, with darker elements replacing them over the moist (mesic) south-eastern grasslands. As indicated above, it seems sufficient to cover the range of geographical variation by admitting three subspecies only from the South African Sub-Region, placing the populations associated with *O.a.muelleri* in my 1965 review with *O.a.bradfieldi*.

East African specimens of *O.a.muelleri* differ in freshly moulted condition in being warmer, more olive-brown, less slaty or blackish

over the dorsum than either of the two main southern African subspecies (*O.a.bradfieldi* and *O.a.digressa*). In adult males the black bib is reduced in extent in skins made up in precisely the same manner, while the ground to the breast-band is more invaded with buff, being less cold and grey, the transverse barring finer and the pale interstices less starkly white. In the case of females, *O.a.muelleri* and *O.a.bradfieldi* are virtually identical ventrally but differ over the upper-parts, the former warmer and browner, less greyish. *O.a.muelleri* ranges from the highlands of Kenya, south through the interior of Tanzania to northern Malawi and north-eastern and north-western Zambia, as well as adjacent southern Zaïre. Traylor, in Peters' *Check-List*, vol. xiv, 1968, pp. 350, 351, takes its range still further west into Angola, but this requires to be revised, as most Angolan populations appear attributable to *O.a.bradfieldi*. In connection with *O.a.minuscula* White, 1946: Balovale, north-western Zambia, material from Balovale in the Durban Museum suggests that this is a synonym of *muelleri* and not a discrete taxon as suggested in my 1965 report. However, without access to the original series and *Type I* cannot be sure that it is not rather a synonym of *O.a.bradfieldi*, as both *bradfieldi* and *muelleri* are subject to wide-ranging post-breeding dispersal.

*O.a.muelleri* appears to be isolated from the southern African races (*bradfieldi*, *pallida* and *digressa*) by the dark *O.a.smithersi* Benson, 1955: Mpsa, Bangweulu, north-eastern Zambia, of much of eastern Zambia, by elements of the sibling *O.gabonensis* Lynes (subspecies: *O.g.fuscata* Sclater), and by large tracts of unsuitable terrain.

The revised characters and ranges of the three subspecies of the Quail Finch worthy of admission to the South African list will now stand as follows:

***Ortygospiza atricollis digressa*** Clancey, 1958: Richmond, Natal.

Male with the upper-parts close to Hair Brown (pl. xlvii), the feather centres darker. Below, with chin white; fore-throat broadly deep black; upper breast narrowly transversely barred blackish grey and off-white; lower breast deep Clay Color (pl. xxix), merging posteriorly into Pinkish Buff.

Female with upper-parts as male, but perhaps not quite so greyish in series. Below, chin off-white; fore-throat broadly Drab (pl. xlvii); upper breast coarsely transversely barred off-white on drab; rest of venter as in male.

Wings of 22 ♂♂ 53,5 - 58 (55,6), SD 1,20, SE 0,26, of 25 ♀♀ 52,5 - 58 (55,3), SD 1,32, SE 0,26mm.

*Range:* Cape (mainly in east and north), Orange Free State, Lesotho, Natal and Zululand, southern Mozambique, Swaziland, Transvaal (except dry west), and eastern Rhodesian plateau.

***Ortyospiza atricollis bradfieldi*** Roberts, 1929: Okahandja district, South West Africa.

As *digressa* above in adult male, but greyer in series. Below, with ground to transversely barred upper breast paler and purer grey, the pale interstices whiter. Lower breast paler clay colour, and belly and under tail-coverts lighter.

Female more sharply differentiated than male. Upper-parts paler and greyer in series. Below, with fore-throat paler (Mouse Gray (pl. li)); ground to barred breast-band invaded with buff, and band more diffuse than in *digressa*. Lower breast Cinnamon-Buff (pl. xxix), rather than Clay Color, and rest of venter lighter. Barring over sides and flanks also less intense.

Wings of 20 ♂♂ 52 - 57,5 (54,9), SD 1,22, SE 0,27, of 20 ♀♀ 52,5 - 57 (54,7), SD 1,58, SE 0,35mm.

*Range:* Southern Angola, northern and north-eastern South West Africa, the Caprivi Strip, south-western Zambia in Barotseland, northern, north-eastern and eastern Botswana, the dry western Transvaal and western Rhodesia.

***Ortyospiza atricollis pallida*** Roberts, 1932: Nkate, north-eastern Botswana.

Not well-differentiated from *O.a.bradfieldi*, but averaging paler and greyer over the upper-parts, the facies more uniform. Below, with rather more starkly white pale interstices over the breast-band; lower breast paler cinnamon-buff, and belly, crissum and under tail-coverts more whitish.

Adult female paler and more uniformly greyish above that in *bradfieldi*. Below, with paler grey over the fore-throat, whiter barring to the breast-band, and rest of venter paler as in the male.

Size similar to *O.a.bradfieldi*.

*Range:* An ecological race of the Makgadikgadi Salt Pan complex in north-eastern Botswana. Probably also on other large saline pans elsewhere in Botswana. Recorded as a non-breeding visitor to western Rhodesia (Matopos and Wankie Game Reserve).

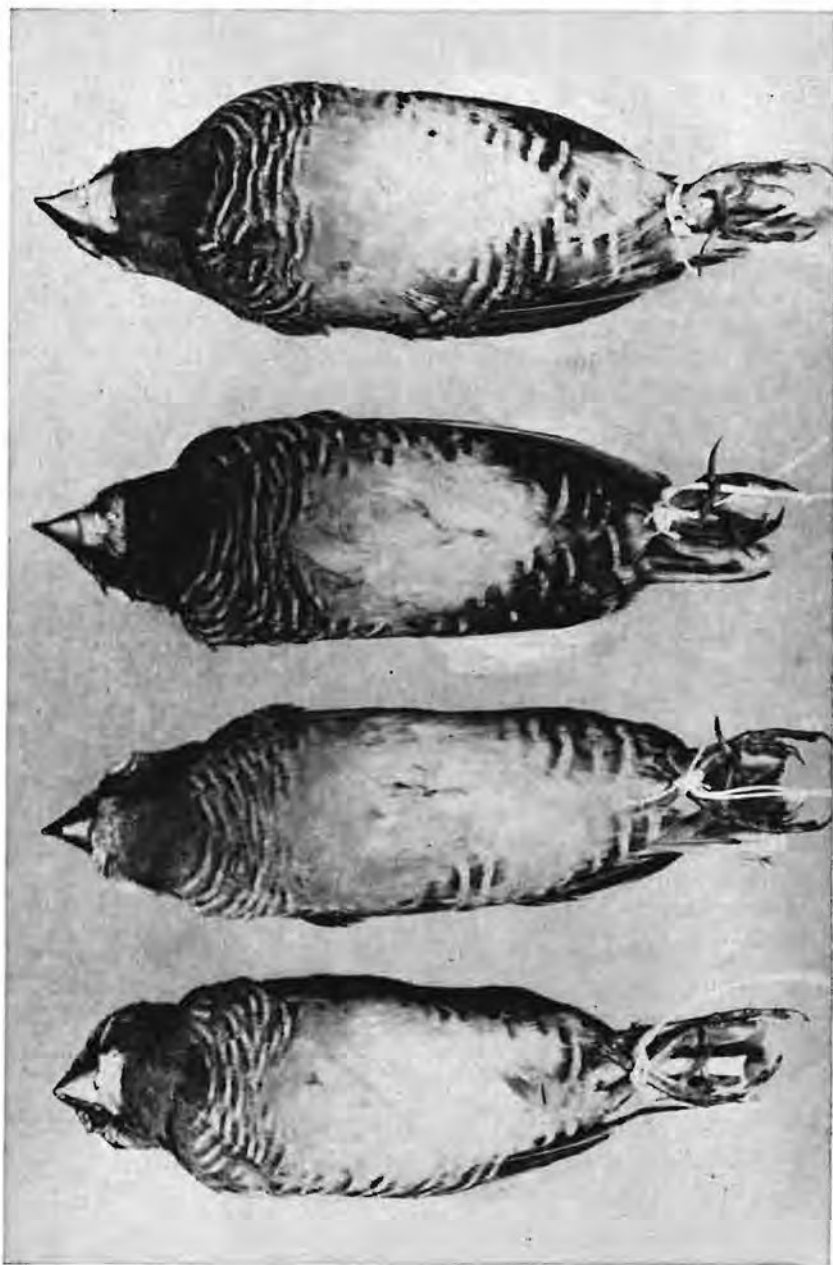


FIG. I

Females of two South African subspecies of the Quail Finch to show differences in ventral aspect.

Upper pair: *Ortygospiza atricollis digressa* Clancey.

Lower pair: *Ortygospiza atricollis bradfieldi* Roberts

The darker fore-throat and more sharply defined and heavily barred breast-band in *digressa* should be noted.

Photo: W. S. Yerbury