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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS XXXVIII

by

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FURTHER ON THE RACES OF THE MASKED WEAVER
PLOCEUS VELATUS VIEILLOT, WITH SPECIAL REFER-
ENCE TO THE STATUS OF *HYPHANTORNIS SHELLEYI*
SHARPE, 1890, AND *PLOCEUS FINSCI* REICHENOW, 1903

The southern African races of the Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* Vieillot were last reviewed by me in *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. v, 12, 1959, pp. 172-178, four subspecies being admitted for the Sub-Region. Since the publication of the main review fourteen years ago Mees, *Zool. Verhand. Rijksmus. Natuurl. Hist. Leiden*, No. 109, 1970, pp. 60-64, has commented on some of the decisions taken by me in 1959, while in my *Handlist of the Birds of Southern Moçambique*, 1972, p. 121, I resuscitated *Hyphantornis shelleyi* Sharpe, 1890, for the southern Moçambique population. Quickelberge, *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. ix, 17, 1972, pp. 272, 273, has recently commented on the characters, ranges and nomenclature of the Cape and Lesotho forms of this weaver.

In the southern African populations of this common and wide-spread ploceid the subspecific parameters in current use are those based on adult males in newly assumed nuptial dress, the critical

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variation affecting (a) general size, (b) the amount of raw sienna wash peripheral to the black head and neck surfaces and the extent of the frontal black itself, (c) the colour and degree of streaking of the mantle and scapulars, (d) the size of the yellow patch over the rump and upper tail-coverts, and (e) the level of intensity of the colour of the body plumage. While colour variation in non-breeding (eclipse) males and females has at no time been invoked to substantiate the claims of the currently recognised subspecies, a recent study of the long series of non-breeders in the Durban Museum collection now shows that variation of racial import is clearly evident in birds in non-breeding attire. Karoo and associated semi-desert (xeric) populations have the ground to the entire dorsum brownish, the brown colour extending over the rump and upper tail-coverts, whereas in the northern and eastern savanna-dwelling (mesic) elements the dorsum is more olivaceous or citrine coloured, the rump yellowish or pale citrine and the upper tail-coverts greenish.

Exposed as they are to the brilliant African sunshine for most of the day, the plumage of these weavers fades and erodes rapidly, and as a result not all specimens in museum collections are helpful in arriving at valid conclusions on the subspecies. In formulating my revised conclusions on the austral races I have relied heavily on specimens taken in the first half of the breeding season and shot between September and early December, as well as on freshly moulted non-breeders obtained May to early August.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the loan of material to augment that in the collection of the Durban Museum I am grateful to the State Museum, Windhoek (Mr. P. J. Buys), the National Museum of Rhodesia, Bulawayo (Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin), and the Instituto de Investigação científica de Angola, Sá da Bandeira (Dr. A. A. da Rosa Pinto). It was not deemed necessary to consult material housed in other southern African museums, most of which was studied closely in 1959. About 500 skins were examined during the course of this new enquiry.

THE SOUTHERN SUBSPECIES

A re-examination of the southern African populations of the Masked Weaver on the basis of a large assemblage of material taken since I last wrote on the species in 1959 indicates that my arrangement of the populations of the South African Sub-Region is fundamentally correct. Two major points to be dealt with here concern

(a) a re-arrangement of the eastern acacia-savanna dwelling populations into southern and northern races (*P.v.tahatali* and *P.v.shelleyi*), and (b) an appraisal of the status and range of *Ploceus finschi* Reichenow, 1903: Moçamedes, Angola. There is also the straight nomenclatural problem posed by Mees' observation that the putative "Type" of *Ploceus velatus* Vieillot in the collection of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie in Leiden, Netherlands, is of the Karoo rather than the lower Orange R. population of this weaver. While Vieillot gave the provenience of his *P.velatus* as Namaqualand, it has been generally assumed that the original material came from the valley of the lower Orange R. Macdonald, *Contr.Ornith. West.S.Afr.*, 1957, p. 161, went so far as to suggest that the type material came from either Goodhouse or Pella Drift, both on the lower Orange. The "Type" in the Rijksmuseum was at one time in the Temminck collection and was almost certainly collected by the French traveller F. Levillant during the course of his peregrinations in the western Cape in the second half of the Eighteenth Century. While I do not personally favour adjustments to existing arrangements of populations of the type advocated by Mees, based as they so often are on ancient specimens of uncertain origin, now grease stained and further affected by atmospheric pollution and acid from hands, as well as being badly foxed or faded through exposure in public galleries of museums, Mees' proposal seems reasonable and in keeping with the established limits of Levillant's travels. Conceding that Levillant did in fact collect the specimen in question, it was in all probability taken in the Klawer/Vanrhynsdorp area of southern Little Namaqualand, which may be accepted as the restricted type-locality of *P.velatus*.

Arising from the above, *P.v.inustus* Clancey, 1959: Lokenburg, Calvinia, western Cape, becomes a synonym of *P.v.velatus*. Populations now grouped in this subspecies range over the Cape to the south of the Orange R., east as far as the Great Fish R. (east of which they are replaced by *P.v.nigrifrons*), Griqualand West, where intermediate in size towards *P.v.tahatali* and *P.v.caurinus*, the Orange Free State, Lesotho, and the highveld of the Transvaal north to just north of 26° S. lat. to the east of Pretoria. With this revised grouping of the populations of the large-sized southern birds, the range of *P.v.nigrifrons* (Cabanis), 1850: King William's Town, eastern Cape, is now restricted to the seaward aspect of the Drakensberg Range, extending from the middle and lower reaches of the Great Fish R., north-eastwards through the Transkei and Griqualand East to the Midlands and Upper Districts of Natal and Zululand. *P.v.nigrifrons* closely resembles *P.v.tahatali* in colouration in the male in nuptial

dress, but is rather more saturated dorsally and shows less yellow over the rump and upper tail-coverts, in this agreeing with nominate *P.velatus*.

Mees, *loc.cit.*, also resuscitates Burchell's *Oriolus arundinarius*, 1822, the type-locality Klaarwater, Griqualand West, northern Cape, for the *P.v.velatus* of my 1959 revision of the southern races. The evidence I have now assembled does not support this action, because breeding males from Griqualand West are virtually indistinguishable from Karoo specimens in colour, differing only in averaging rather smaller in size, while both eclipse males and females in non-breeding dress have the dorsum brown, in this also agreeing with the Karoo form and not with the very different looking birds which occur still further north in the savannas of southern Africa. The latter populations have wings in ♂♂ 76-80, versus 82-90 mm in the larger southern birds (*P.v.velatus* and *P.v.nigrifrons*). The small-sized and rather brighter (than *P.v.nigrifrons*) populations, the breeding males of which show more clear yellow over the lower rump and upper tail-coverts, and in eclipse males and non-breeding females have the upper-parts more citrine coloured, less plain dull brown, the rump and upper tail-coverts yellowish or greenish olive, must bear the earlier of Smith's two names proposed on the same material from the western Transvaal, namely *P.v.tahatali*, the type-locality of which has been restricted to the Great Marico R.

The populations which I now group in *P.v.tahatali* extend from the bushveld of the western, northern and eastern Transvaal, south-eastern Botswana, eastern Swaziland, northern Zululand, and much of Sul do Save, Moçambique, north to the plateau of Rhodesia. North of this group of both eastern lowland and plateau populations occur others in which the male is more saturated and golden citrine in colour, with the entire rump and upper tail-coverts forming a broad brilliant cadmium yellow patch. In eclipse male and non-breeding female dresses such birds are rather greyer, less yellowish, more drab, citrine than in *tahatali*, but are similar ventrally. For such populations I have recently resurrected the name *P.v.shelleyi* (Sharpe), 1890: Tete, Moçambique (Clancey (1972)). The range of *shelleyi*, as at present understood, is from the Inhambane district of Sul do Save and the Sabi R. valley of south-eastern Rhodesia, north to northern Moçambique, southern Malawi, and the Zambesi R. valley of northern Rhodesia and southern and eastern Zambia.

Mees, *loc.cit.*, writing in his accustomed didactic style, suggests that in proposing *P.v.caurinus* in 1959 from Okahandja, South-West Africa, the presence of *Ploceus finschi* Reichenow, 1903: Moçamedes, Angola, was somehow deliberately overlooked. This was not so, because *finschi* was admitted in my 1959 revision of the species and placed in the synonymy of *P.v.velatus* for the very simple and valid reason that the material then available to me from southern Angola was of the populations grouped at that stage in our understanding of the geographical variation in nominate *P.velatus*. An examination of the situation obtaining in southern and south-western Angola indicates quite conclusively that two races of the Masked Weaver occur in this region, one confined to the actual desertic coast and the other to the high interior country lying to the south of the miombo biome.

Examination of recently-taken material from the actual coastal desert of south-western Angola shows that the birds of the endemic population of *P.velatus* of that harsh xeric region are smaller in size than those of the population of Damaraland (topotypical of *P.v.caurinus*), this most marked in the rather shorter tail of males, namely 45-49, *versus* 49,5-55 mm in *caurinus*, and rather smaller, more laterally compressed bill. In colour adult males of the Angolan desert coastlands exhibit dilute yellow surfaces, and more greyish green mantle and scapular surfaces, but with about the same amount of black to the distal head as in *caurinus*, *contra* Mees. Both *finschi* and *caurinus* incline to have less frontal black than other races of the species. The yellow rump patch is as extensive as in both *P.v.caurinus* and the eastern *P.v.shelleyi*. I have not been able to examine eclipse males and non-breeding females of the Angolan coastal form, *P.v.finschi*, which appears to range along the actual coast from Benguela to Moçamedes. Kaokoveld birds may be attributable to *finschi* rather than *caurinus*, but material in comparable dress is not presently to hand.

The population of central and southern Huila, Angola, is referable to *caurinus*, which race also extends from South-West Africa to Botswana and the northern Cape in northern Gordonia and the northern Kuruman districts, intergrading with *tahatali* and *shelleyi* to the east of the stated range along the Transvaal/Botswana and Rhodesia/Botswana borders. It is, in fact, the main savanna-dwelling race of the South West Arid District.

P.v.caurinus differs from *P.v.tahatali* in having the dorsum in males in nuptial plumage less boldly streaked, the ground colour

rather paler and greener, less citrine, coloured, and the rump patch is much more extensive, covering the entire rump and most of the upper tail-coverts. It is about double the size of the patch in male *tahatali*. Eclipse males and non-breeding females have the upper-parts light buffy brown rather than citrine, the streaking on the mantle and scapulars finer, more suppressed, and the yellowish or green over the rump and upper tail-coverts reduced or largely absent. Below, the plastron in freshly moulted non-breeders is less yellowish. There is no significant difference in size between the birds grouped under *caurinus* and those covered by the name *tahatali*.

While not strictly germane to the present exercise, the small, brightly coloured, paludicolous birds of Zambia and south-eastern Zaire lying immediately to the north of the range of *P.v.shelleyi* merit comment here. Benson *et al.*, *Birds of Zambia*, 1971, p. 319, record that *P.v.katangae* (Verheyen), 1947: Musosa, Zaire, occupies a swamp niche in the Lakes Bangweulu and Mweru sector of north-eastern Zambia, breeding in reed and papyrus beds in marked contrast to the breeding sites affected by the acaciaveld orientated southern forms. Compared with the neighbouring if not contiguous *shelleyi*, *P.v.katangae* is markedly smaller: wings of ♂♂ 69-71, versus 74-78,5 mm, and males in full breeding dress show more extensive black over the forehead and lower fore-throat than in *shelleyi*, the yellow surfaces are chrome rather than bright lemon yellow, and the mantle and scapulars a saturated orange-citrine.

While *P.v.katangae* and associated northern forms *P.v.upembae* (Verheyen), 1953: Mabwe, Zaire, *P.v.reichardi* Reichenow, 1886: Karema, south-western Tanzania, *P.v.uluensis* (Neumann), 1900: Ulu Hills, south-east of Nairobi, Kenya, and *P.v.vitellinus* (Lichtenstein), 1823: Senegambia, are now generally treated as conspecific with the southern *velatus* group, this is questionably correct, because *shelleyi* and *katangae* do not interbreed and occupy widely differing ecological niches. Furthermore, they exhibit marked size and colour (in males) differences. A more natural and satisfactory taxonomic grouping would be achieved by considering *velatus*, *nigrifrons*, *tahatali*, *shelleyi*, *caurinus* and *finschi* as racial elements of a purely southern African species, *P.velatus*, this centred on the South West Arid District and peripheral regions, the northern taxa *katangae*, *upembae*, *reichardi*, *uluensis* and *vitellinus* being grouped in other species. The northern forms could be arranged in either one or two species, *P.reichardi* and *P.vitellinus*, depending on the taxonomic weighting given the differences in iris colouration between northern and southern elements of the *katangae* - *vitellinus* sequence of subspecies. This latter arrangement is the one adopted in the main

by Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa*, vol. ii, 1955, pp. 899-901. Moreau, on the other hand, in the continuation of Peters' *Check-List*, vol. xv, 1962, pp. 44, 45, classifies all these taxa as subspecies of *P.velatus*.

To summarize the situation presented by variation in the Masked Weaver in southern Africa, the large southern, Karoo orientated, population complex groups into two races on quite well-defined colour characters (*P.v.velatus* and *P.v.nigrifrons*). North of this austral subspecies group is present a sequence of smaller and more brilliantly coloured (in breeding males) acaciaveld orientated populations, the north-western elements (*P.v.finschi*) resident in more or less absolute desert, the eastern terminal ones occurring on the humid and both mesic and hygric eastern coastlands (*P.v.tahatali* and *P.v.shelleyi*). Interposed between these two extremes is the intermediate *P.v.caurinus*.

Transition from large *velatus* and *nigrifrons* to small *tahatali* is sharp, often abrupt, but further west in southern Africa transition from *velatus* to *caurinus* is on a gently inclined gradient, well-defined intermediates and intergrading populations between these two taxa extending narrowly from Griqualand West, west to Bushmanland and the Kenhardt district and the valley of the lower Orange R. I would suggest that the contemporary subspecies of the *velatus* (*velatus* and *nigrifrons*) and *tahatali* groups (*tahatali*, *shelleyi*, *caurinus* and *finschi*) represent a second phase of subspeciation in the recent history of the present species of weaver, and that the current secondary contact between the two subspecies groups is a relatively recent development associated somehow with the continuing desiccatory climatic trend in the South African Sub-Region.

THE SUBSPECIES OF *PLOCEUS VELATUS*

(a) ***Ploceus velatus velatus*** Vieillot

Ploceus velatus Vieillot, *Nowv.Dict.d'Hist.Nat.*, vol. xxxiv, 1819, p. 132: Namaqualand. Here formally restricted to the Klaver/Vanrhynsdorp district, southern Little Namaqualand, western Cape.

Oriolus arundinarius Burchell, *Trav.Int.S.Afr.*, vol. i, 1822, p. 464: Klaarwater, Griqualand West, northern Cape.

Ploceus auricapillus Swainson, *Anim.Menag.*, 1837, p. 346: South Africa (ex Burchell).

Ploceus velatus inustus Clancey, *Durban Mus.Novit.*, vol. v, 12, 1959, p. 173: Lokenburg, Calvinia, western Cape.

Male in newly assumed nuptial dress with dilute Raw Sienna (Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. iii) wash to the periphery of the black on the distal head and lower fore-throat; mantle and scapulars near Olive Lake (pl. xvi), with dusky shaft-streaking; rump and upper tail-coverts showing little clear yellow. Ventrally, pale Lemon Yellow (pl. iv) from breast to crissum.

Eclipse male and female in freshly moulted non-breeding dress with the ground to the dorsum Light Brownish Olive (pl. xxx), grading over the rump to Buffy Olive (same pl.), with broad fuscous shaft-streaking to the mantle and scapulars. Size large.

Wings of 12 ♂♂ 82-90, m. 85,4, S.D. 2,10 mm.

Wings of 12 ♀♀ 73-79, m. 76,4, S.D. 1,47 mm.

Range: The western Cape of South Africa to the south of the Orange R., Bushmanland and the Kenhardt district, east through the Karoo to the north-eastern Cape, Griqualand West (where showing shift towards *P.v.tahatali*), the Orange Free State, Lesotho, and the southern Transvaal highveld (north to about 25° 47' S. lat. to the east of Pretoria).

Remarks: The revised type-locality restriction is necessary in view of Mees' observation that the putative "*Type*" unearthed in the Rijksmuseum is of the Karoo and not the lower Orange R. population as previously believed by workers.

Large size, virtual absence of clear yellow over lower rump and upper tail-coverts and dilute ventral yellow in male in breeding dress, and brown, not citrine, dorsum in non-breeding birds distinguish this race.

(b) ***Ploceus velatus nigrifrons*** (Cabanis)

Hyphantornis nigrifrons Cabanis, *Mus.Hein.*, Th. i, 1850 (1851), p. 306: Kaffernland. Restricted to King William's Town, eastern Cape, by Clancey, *Durban Mus.Novit.*, vol. vii, 13, 1966, p. 577.

Male in nuptial dress with deeper and rather more extensively distributed raw sienna wash over the yellow head surfaces and lower fore-throat; ground to mantle and scapulars more saturated (about deep Citrine (pl. iv), or yellower) than in nominate *velatus*. Below, with breast and caudad ventral surface Lemon Chrome rather

than Lemon Yellow. Female in breeding dress generally darker, more citrine or greenish above than in *P.v.velatus*.

Eclipse male and female in fresh non-breeding dress about Buffy Citrine (pl. xvi), grading to Yellowish Citrine (same pl.) on rump and upper tail-coverts. Ventrally, plastron more yellow tinged. Size averaging a little smaller.

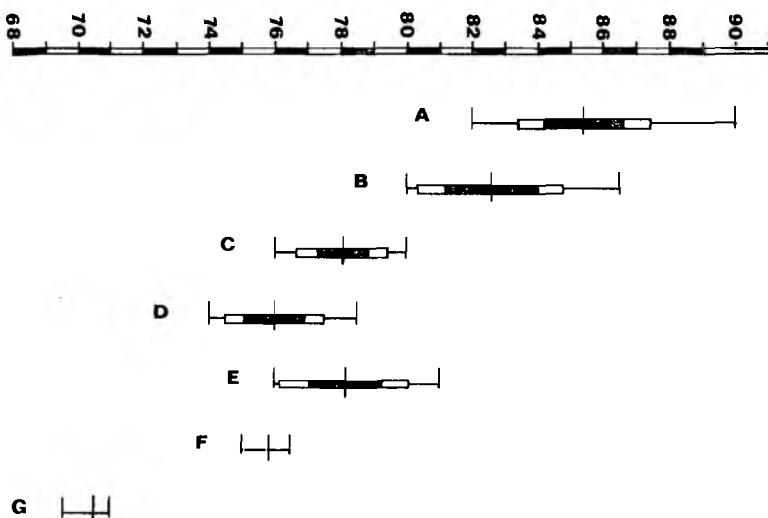
Wings of 10 ♂♂ 80-86,5, m. 82,6, S.D. 2,19 mm.

Wings of 4 ♀♀ 73,5-77,5, m. 75,3, S.D. 1,93 mm

Range: South-eastern Cape from the valley of the middle and lower Great Fish R., north-east through the Transkeian Territories to Griqualand East, the Midlands and Upper Districts of Natal and western Zululand, western Swaziland and south-eastern Transvaal (on the plateau).

Remarks: This race combines the large size of nominate *velatus* and the richer colouration of *tahatali*, and inhabits mesic acacia- and grassveld country on the seaward side of the Drakensberg escarpment.

TABLE I



Knot-diagram showing wing-lengths of adult males of *Ploceus velatus* races. Open rectangles represent one standard deviation on either side of the mean, the blocked in rectangles twice the standard error.

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. <i>P.v.velatus</i> | B. <i>P.v.nigrifrons</i> |
| C. <i>P.v.tahatali</i> | D. <i>P.v.shelleyi</i> |
| E. <i>P.v.caurinus</i> | F. <i>P.v.finschi</i> |
| G. <i>P.v.katanga</i> | |

(c) **Ploceus velatus tahatali** Smith

Ploceus tahatali A. Smith, *Rep. Exped. Expl. Centr. Afr.*, 1836, p. 50: between the Orange R. and the Tropic. Restricted to Great Marico R., western Transvaal, by Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Birds Eastern and North Eastern Africa*, vol. ii, 1955, p. 900.

Ploceus mariquensis A. Smith, *Illustr. Zool. S. Afr.*, Aves, 1845, pl. 103 (and text): north of Kurrichaine. (A straight renaming of the author's own *tahatali*).

Breeding male similar to that of *P.v.nigrifrons*, but ground to mantle and scapulars paler, less saturated (deep, dull Sulphine Yellow (pl. iv)), the lower rump and basal half of the upper tail-coverts exhibiting a broad clear Lemon Yellow patch. Breeding female generally paler, less saturated dorsally, the mantle and scapular streaking on the whole finer.

Eclipse male and non-breeding female with ground to upper-parts rather greener Buffy Citrine than in *nigrifrons*, the rump and upper tail-coverts still yellower. Size smaller.

Wings of 12 ♂♂ 76-80, m. 78,1, S.D. 1,19 mm.

Wings of 12 ♀♀ 70,5-75, m. 72,2, S.D. 1,47 mm.

Range: Extreme south-eastern Botswana, bushveld of western, northern and eastern Transvaal, eastern Swaziland, south-eastern Transvaal lowlands and northern Zululand, southern and western Sul do Save, Moçambique, north to the plateau of Rhodesia.

Remarks: Similar to *P.v.nigrifrons*, but smaller size and male's clear, bright yellow rump patch distinguish this race.

(d) **Ploceus velatus shelleyi** (Sharpe)

Hyphantornis shelleyi Sharpe, *Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.*, vol. xiii, 1890, p. 464: Tete, Moçambique.

Breeding male similar to *tahatali*, but more saturated golden yellow over the entire dorsum (golden Sulphine Yellow or Sulphine Yellow/Aniline Yellow (pl. iv)), the shaft-streaking to the mantle and scapulars about the same; entire rump and most of upper tail-coverts brilliant Light Cadmium (pl. iv), forming a more expansive pygal surface than in *tahatali*. The assumption of nuptial feathering in the wings is more complete than in other races, with greater contrast between the black and yellow. Breeding female generally brighter than in *tahatali*.

Eclipse male and non-breeding female with upper-parts about Citrine-Drab (pl. xl), the mantle and scapulars with the shaft-streaking broad and greyish brown in colour; rump and upper tail-coverts Olive Lake. Ranging still smaller in size.

Wings of 12 ♂♂ 74-78,5, m. 76,0, S.D. 1,57 mm.

Wings of 12 ♀♀ 68-73 mm.

Range: Moçambique north from about the Inhambane district and the Save R., south-eastern Rhodesia in the Sabi R. valley, and again in the north in the valley of the Zambesi R., southern and south-eastern Zambia, and western and southern Malawi. The western limits of this taxon are uncertain, and it conceivably extends as far west as the Caprivi and adjacent areas.

Remarks: Brighter, more golden yellow upper-parts and more expansive rump patch separate breeding male *shelleyi* from *tahatali*. Non-breeders are greyer citrine above.

(c) **Ploceus velatus caurinus** Clancey

Ploceus velatus caurinus Clancey, *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. v, 12, 1959, p. 177: Okahandja, South-West Africa.

Breeding male differs from *tahatali* in exhibiting reduced frontal black, and with slightly paler raw sienna wash peripheral to the black head and fore-throat surfaces; mantle and scapulars paler and rather greener, with reduced streaking (ground greenish Pyrite Yellow (pl. iv)); rump and upper tail-coverts much more extensively yellow, forming a broad patch as in the case of *shelleyi*. Tail slightly paler. Female in breeding dress generally rather paler.

Eclipse male and non-breeding female with dorsum Buffy Olive, *versus* greenish Buffy Citrine in *tahatali*, the streaking to the mantle and scapulars finer and somewhat reduced; rump and upper tail-coverts about Ecu Olive (pl. xxx). Below, rather more washed with vinaceous brown over breast, and plastron with reduced yellow. Similar in size to *tahatali*.

Wings of 12 ♂♂ 76-81, m. 78,2, S.D. 1,94 mm.

Wings of 12 ♀♀ 70-75, m. 71,8, S.D. 1,66 mm.

Range: South-West Africa, northern Cape in northern Gordonia and northern Kuruman districts, Botswana (except in south-eastern mesic corner), and southern Angola in Huila. Intergrades with

P.v.velatus in the valley of the lower Orange R. and the north-western Cape, and with *tahatali* and *shelleyi* to the east of the range as defined.

Remarks: The lower Orange R. and north-western Cape intergrades *P.v.caurinus* \rightleftharpoons *P.v.velatus* resemble the eastern *tahatali* in the breeding males (hence the treatment adopted by me in 1959), but non-breeders are brown over the dorsum, with relatively heavy streaking, agreeing with the norm of *velatus*.

Paler dorsum with reduced streaking and broader yellow rump patch in breeding male distinguish *caurinus* from *tahatali*. In non-breeding attire with browner dorsum and finer mantle and scapular streaking.

(f) ***Ploceus velatus finschi*** Reichenow

Ploceus finschi Reichenow, *Ornith.Monatsber.*, vol. xi, 1903, p. 23: Moçamedes, south-western Angola.

Breeding male with paler and more dilute yellow surfaces than in *caurinus*, and mantle and scapulars greyer, less yellowish, green, the streaking about the same; rump and upper tail-coverts broadly dilute Strontian Yellow (pl. xvi). Nuptial feathering in wings with pale Barium Yellow (same pl.) fringing. Bill smaller and more laterally compressed. Size smaller and tail distinctly shorter.

Birds in non-breeding plumage not seen.

Wings of 3 ♂♂ 75, 76, 76,5, tails 45, 47, 49 mm.

Range: The coastal desert of south-western Angola from Benguela south to Moçamedes. Perhaps ranging still further south to reach the north-western Kaokoveld.

Remarks: The tails of 3 ♂♂ from Moçamedes read 45-49, m. 47,1, S.D. 1,76, whereas in 12 ♂♂ of *P.v.caurinus* from the Damaraland highlands the tails measure 49,5-55, m. 51,4, S.D. 1,81 mm. Western Huila samples show the shift from a long tail in *caurinus* to a shorter one in *finschi*.

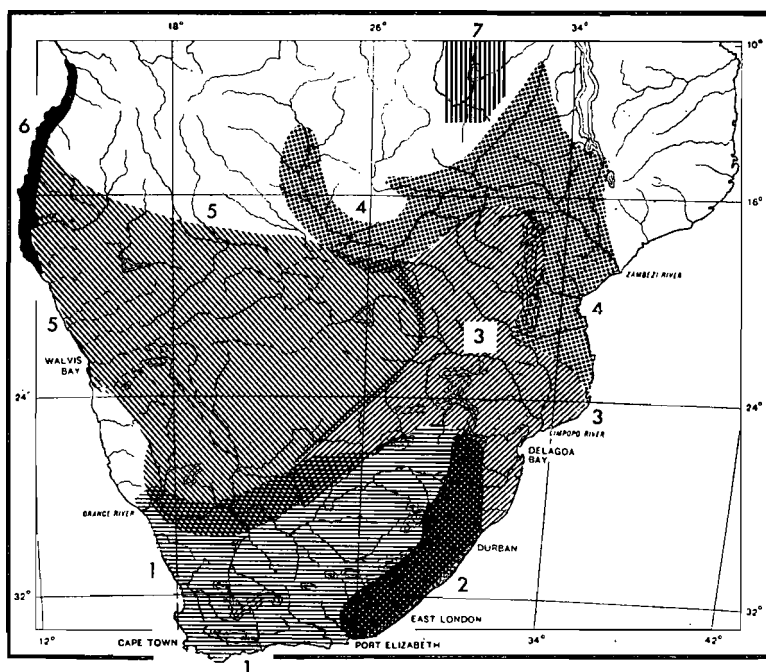
Mees, *loc.cit.*, states that the *P.v.finschi* males available to him were as small as in *P.v.katanga*. Four ♂♂ of *P.v.katanga* measured by me in Durban have wings 69,5-71, m. 70,5, S.D. 0,71 mm, 2 ♀♀

65, 67 mm. As far as I can determine, *P.v.katangae* is still smaller than *P.v.finschi*.

Non-breeders will in all probability be found to parallel colour variation in other Angolan xeric coastal endemics in being greyer and paler above and whiter below than in the case of South-West African plateau elements (*caurinus*).

Dilute yellow surfaces, greyish green mantle and scapulars, smaller bill and shorter tail segregate *finschi* from *caurinus*.

MAP I



Ploceus velatus Vieillot

Sketch-map showing the established ranges of the races of the Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* in the South African Sub-Region.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>P.v.velatus</i> Vieillot | 2. <i>P.v.nigrifrons</i> (Cabanis) |
| 3. <i>P.v.tahatali</i> Smith | 4. <i>P.v.shelleyi</i> (Sharpe) |
| 5. <i>P.v.caurinus</i> Clancey | 6. <i>P.v.finschi</i> Reichenow |
| 7. <i>P.v.katangae</i> (Verheyen) | |