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## Exhibition of Eggs of *Charadrius forbesi* (Shelley)

By DR. WILLIAM SERLE

*Exhibited at the December meeting of the B.O.C.*

*C. forbesi* and *Charadrius tricollaris* (Vieillot) are two Aethiopian Plovers so similar that many authorities including Sclater (Syst. Av. Aeth., 1924, pt. 1, p. 120) and Peters (Check-List, 1934, 2, p. 253) have regarded them as conspecific.

The eggs of *C. tricollaris* are well-known from both South and East Africa. Their markings are peculiar and very constant in character. The whole surface is covered with blackish scrawls and hair lines.



On the left the egg of *Charadrius tricollaris* (Vieillot);  
On the right the egg of *C. forbesi* (Shelley).

The clutch of three eggs of *C. forbesi* exhibited was taken by me at Enugu, 6° 25' N., 7° 30' E., Nigeria, on 29th May, 1954. The male was brooding and was collected to confirm identification. The eggs are ovate with the narrow end somewhat compressed. The ground colour is cream tinged with pink. The markings take the form of evenly distributed rather blurred blotches and spots of sepia and olive-brown, and the ashy secondary suffusions and blotches are prominent and thickly distributed. There are no hair lines or other linear markings. They measure 31.2 × 23.2, 31.9 × 23, 30.8 × 22.6 mm.

The eggs are altogether different in ground colour and markings from those of *C. tricollaris*. On the evidence of the eggs alone these two forms cannot be considered conspecific.

There is one previous record of the breeding of *C. tricollaris*, also from Nigeria—by Brown (Ibis, 1948, pp. 529-531). From the description the eggs seen by Brown closely resembled those obtained at Enugu.

## Geographical Variation in the Southern African Populations of *Dicrurus adsimilis* (Bechstein)

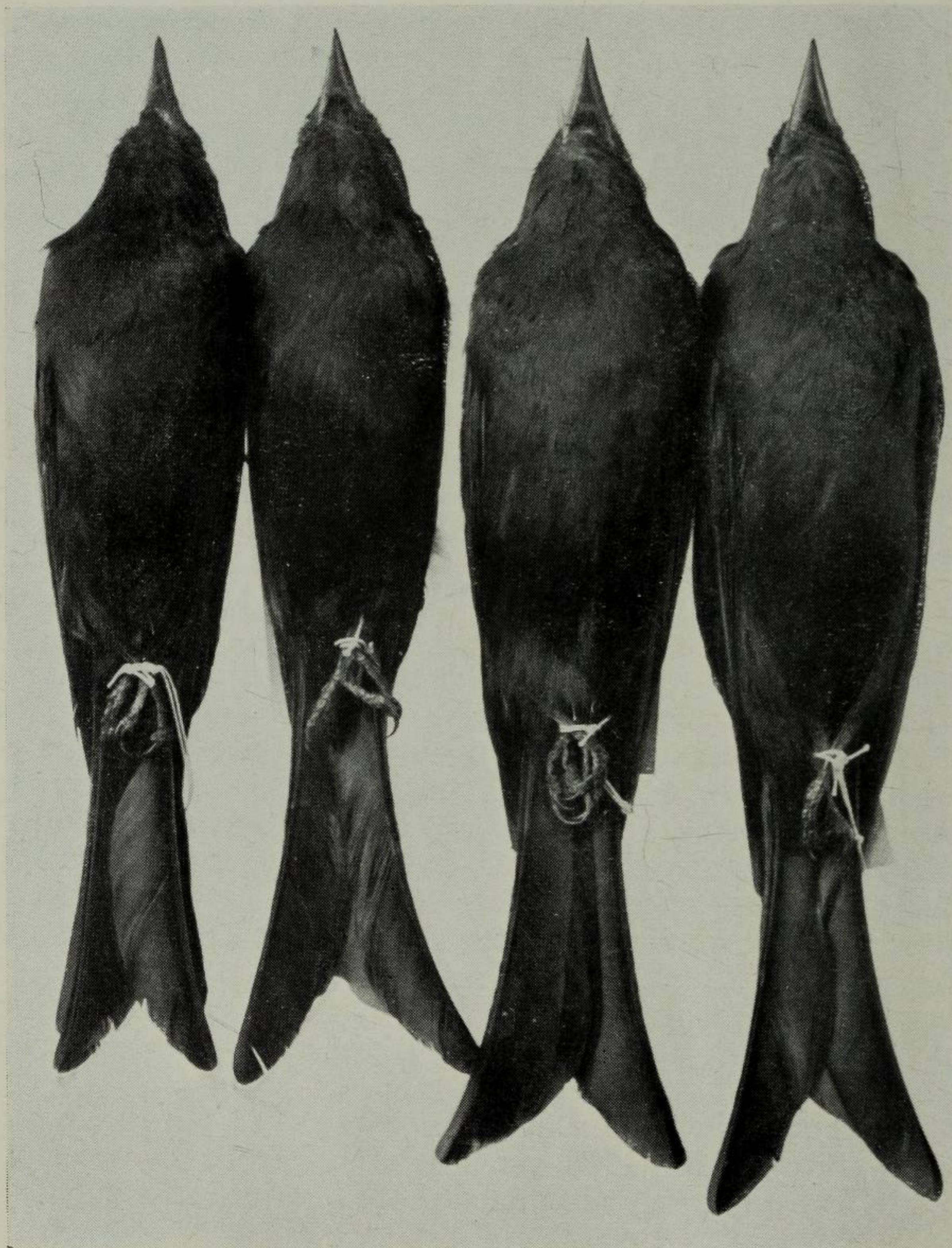
by MR. P. A. CLANCEY

*Received 28th November, 1955*

The African Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* (Bechstein) is a glossy black passerine with a wide continental range, five geographical races being recognised in the most recent authoritative revision, that of Vaurie,



“Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History,” vol. 93, art. 4, 1949, pp. 222–231. In his classification this author accepts the modern view that the velvet-backed forms, *D. modestus* Hartlaub, 1849: Principe, and *D. coracinus* Verreaux and Verreaux, 1851: Gaboon, are conspecific with the widely distributed *D. adsimilis* and its races, pointing out that the glossy- and velvet-backed races are linked by an intermediate group of populations in the Upper Guinea forests — the race *D. a. atactus* Oberholser, 1899: Fantee, Gold Coast. Vaurie’s findings are followed



*Dicrurus adsimilis* (Bechstein)

Left pair: *D. a. fugax*. Adult ♂♂ from Swaziland and Southern Portuguese East Africa. Right pair. *D. a. adsimilis*. Adult ♂♂ from coastal Natal

Note the much smaller size and deeper black colouration of *D. a. fugax* when compared with the nominate race  
Specimens collected and preserved by P. A. Clancey.

(Photograph: A. L. Bevis)



by Chapin, "Birds of the Belgian Congo", part iv, 1954, pp. 6-13, but not by Mackworth-Praed and Grant in their even more recent "Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa", vol. ii, 1955, pp. 563-565.

The belief now generally held by workers is that only one race worthy of nomenclatural recognition, *i.e.*, *D. a. adsimilis* (Bechstein), occupies that enormous portion of the Ethiopian region which extends from the Belgian Congo (areas to the south of the rain forest), Kenya Colony and Uganda to the southern extremities of the continent. This view has not always been held, and it is a well-documented fact that the birds inhabiting the eastern low country (Tanganyika Territory, Kenya Colony, etc.) tend to be smaller in all dimensions than those of the west (Angola) and the south (Cape Province, Natal, etc.). At the present time it is also considered that this size variation is clinal, with no marked step or break, and that it cannot be described adequately by the use of the trinomen. The small-sized, eastern populations have at different times been assigned by workers to *D. a. divaricatus* (Lichtenstein), 1823: Senegambia, or *D. a. fugax* Peters, 1868: Tete and Inhambane, Portuguese East Africa. *D. a. divaricatus* is recognised by Vaurie as a valid race, which ranges from Senegal to the Somalilands in areas to the north of rain forest. It differs from the southern *D. a. adsimilis* as defined by Vaurie in having a markedly shallower tail-fork. *D. a. fugax* is synonymized with the nominate form by this same worker, but I hope to show that it is a recognisable race.

Through the kindly co-operation of the Directors of the following museums I have been able to bring together well over 200 skins of *D. adsimilis* for a detailed study of the size variations in the southern populations: Transvaal Museum, Pretoria; Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg; National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo; and the Museu Dr Alvaro de Castro, Lourenço Marques. My findings, which are given below, have been based solely on fully adult birds, especially adult males.

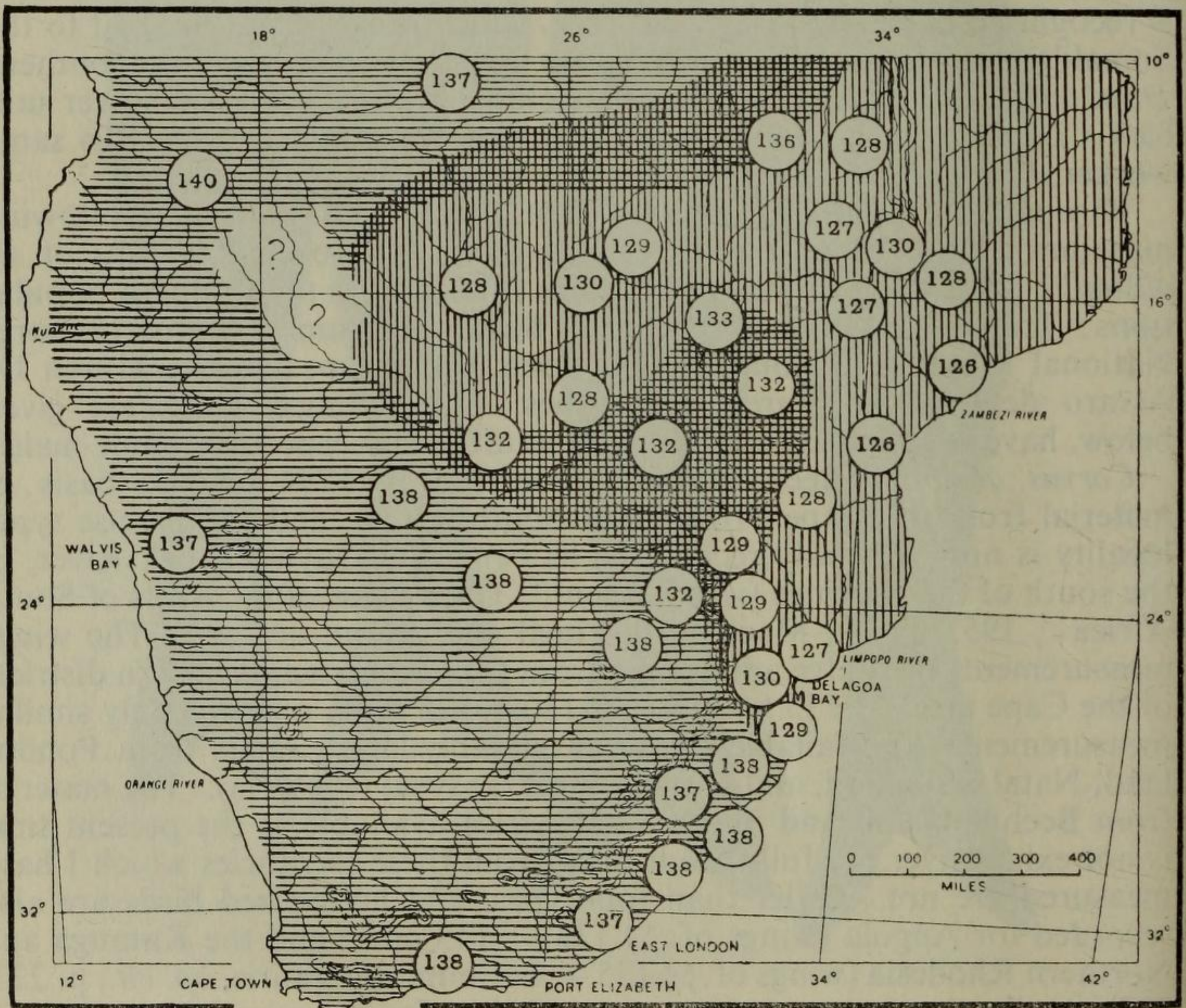
*Corvus adsimilis* Bechstein was described in 1794 on the basis of material from the Cape Province of South Africa, and the precise type-locality is now generally recognised as being the Duywenshoek River, in the south of the province (*vide* Vincent, "Check List of the Birds of South Africa", 1952, p. 90; Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *op. cit.*). The wing-measurements of twelve adult birds from the southern and eastern districts of the Cape are: ♂♂ 135.5 — 140, ♀♀ 130 — 138 mm., and precisely similar measurements are available from considerably larger series from Pondoland, Natal, Zululand, and parts of the Transvaal (Pretoria). The material from Bechuanaland and South West Africa available at the present time is not exhaustive, but fully adult birds from these territories which I have measured are not smaller than topotypes, and large-sized birds are also recorded for Angola (wings of ♂♂ 138 — 143 mm.) and the Katanga and Northern Rhodesia (wings of ♂♂ 135 — 141 mm.) by Vaurie, *op. cit.*, p. 223. These collective measurements suggest that for all practical taxonomic purposes the populations of the southern Congo, north-western Northern Rhodesia, Angola, South West Africa and Bechuanaland to the Cape are mensurally the same.

Recent work in the coastal lowlands of south-eastern Africa has shown that the large nominate race occurs in Natal and most of Zululand, but is replaced in the areas immediately to the north, *i.e.*, in north-eastern Zululand (Tongaland), Swaziland and southern Portuguese East Africa



by a palpably smaller bird with wings in ♂♂ 125 — 132, ♀♀ 122 — 127.5 mm. The two races occur quite close together, because specimens in the Durban Museum collection from Melmoth, in Zululand, are *D. a. adsimilis*, while a series from near Gollel, in southern Swaziland (95 miles to the N.E.), are referable to the small race.

When viewed in series the structural differences separating the two forms are most marked (see Figures), affecting all the more important physical proportions, but in addition to these there are minutiae of plumage colouration which are considered to be of equal subspecific import. The small-sized birds are deeper, less bluish, black throughout, and the pale inner webs to the major flight feathers are appreciably whiter than in topotypes of the nominate race. The general pallor of the major flight feathers is most marked in life in these small-sized birds of the south-east African lowlands, and in the dry, colourless thorn country on a hot day birds hawking for insects seem almost to have white-tipped wings.



Map depicting the ranges and zones of intergradation of the African Drongo races, *D. a. adsimilis* and *D. a. fugax*

Horizontals = *D. a. adsimilis*.

Verticals = *D. a. fugax*.

Cross-hatching = Zones of intergradation

Figures contained in circles represent the mean wing-length of local adult ♂♂ (to nearest integer), either measured for this study or from data extracted from the literature



I am of the opinion that we have two perfectly distinct geographical races of *D. adsimilis* in the low country extending from southern Zululand to southern Portuguese East Africa. The transition from one race to the other is, judging on available data, accomplished in a relatively short distance in closely similar country, and there is no obvious zone of intergradation between the two forms. Reduced dimensions and lightening of the plumage colouration are common phenomena in many of the resident bird races of north-eastern Zululand, Swaziland and Portuguese East Africa, when compared with those of the Cape and Natal, and the criteria which have just been noted in respect of the indigenous populations of *D. adsimilis* parallel closely what is already well-known and accepted in our classification in the case of many other species of birds. The evidence available from this study suggests that the two forms of *D. adsimilis* belong to two discrete elements of the South African fauna, and as such warrant nomenclatural segregation..

Peters, "Journal für Ornithologie", vol. xvi, 1868, p. 132, introduced the name *Dicrurus fugax* for the small-sized birds of Portuguese East Africa, the type-localities being Tete and Inhambane, and it would seem desirable to resurrect this name for all the populations of small-sized birds which range from north-eastern Zululand and Swaziland through Portuguese East Africa, the Zambesi Valley, most of northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and Tanganyika Territory to Kenya Colony and Uganda. All the wing-measurements which I have taken from fully adult birds collected within the range of *D. a. fugax* as here defined, in addition to those given by Vaurie, *op. cit.*, pp. 223–224, are unquestionably smaller than those available for *D. a. adsimilis*, and there is virtually no overlap (see Table).

In dealing with the populations of the lowlands of south-eastern Africa, I have shown that *D. a. adsimilis* and *D. a. fugax* replace one another extremely rapidly and that there is no marked zone of intergradation. This is, of course, exceptional and throughout most of their distribution the ranges of both races tend to overlap to a varying degree (this is clearly shown in the accompanying map). The populations of the eastern and northern Transvaal are intermediate, with wings in ♂♂ measuring 126.5–138.5 mm., and similar unstable populations are found on the Southern Rhodesian plateau and in Ngamiland (wings of ♂♂ 127—137 mm.), and large-sized birds (wings in ♂♂ up to 137 mm.) from Mpika, Northern Rhodesia, suggest the presence of a similar condition in areas far to the north of the Zambesi valley. Additional information given by Vaurie shows that still further north the two races intergrade in the region of Lake Tanganyika.

Earlier attempts to re-instate *D. a. fugax* as a valid race have received little support from workers, and Friedmann, "Bulletin of the United States National Museum", No. 153, 1937, pp. 61–65, dismissed the race simply on the grounds that specimens from Changamwe (near Mombasa, coastal Kenya Colony) with wings in adult ♂♂ 123.5 — 129 mm. were found not to differ in size from those of the interior districts of the same territory. Vaurie, *op. cit.*, p. 227, in supporting these findings in defence of his own actions, gives still further measurements from various districts of East Africa, but such arguments are actually quite untenable, because the question is not that of resolving in terms of nomenclature slight size



differences between contiguous eastern African populations of *D. adsimilis*, but rather one of deciding if eastern African birds are different in size to those of South Africa. On this point there need be no further doubt. The extensive measurements given by these workers fit in perfectly with the measurements taken during my recent studies, and which are here detailed:

TABLE 1

WING-MEASUREMENTS OF FULLY ADULT *D. adsimilis* IN SOUTH AFRICAN COLLECTIONS STUDIED

<i>D. a. adsimilis</i>	
Cape Province, Natal, southern Zululand	♂♂ 134, 135, 135, 135.5, 135.5, 135.5, 136, 137, 137, 137, 138, 138, 138, 138, 138, 138, 138.5, 139, 139, 139, 139, 139, 139, 139.5, 139.5, 140, 140.5, 142 mm. ♀♀ 130, 130, 130, 131.5, 132, 132, 133, 133, 133.5, 134, 134, 134, 134, 134, 134.5, 136, 136, 137.5, 138, 138 mm.
29 specimens.	Range ♂♂ 134–142 (Mean 137.8 mm.).
19 specimens.	Range ♀♀ 130–138 (Mean 133.7 mm.).
Transvaal (Pretoria), Bechuana-land (not Ngamiland), South West Africa	♂♂ 132.5, 133, 136, 136, 137, 138, 138, 138, 140, 140, 140.5 mm. ♀♀ 132, 132.5, 133.5, 134, 134, 135, 135 mm.
11 specimens.	Range ♂♂ 132.5–140.5 (Mean 137.2 mm.).
7 specimens.	Range ♀♀ 132–135 (Mean 133.7 mm.).
<i>D. a. adsimilis</i> $\gtrsim$ <i>D. a. fugax</i>	
Eastern and northern Transvaal, Southern Rhodesia, Ngamiland	♂♂ 125, 126.5, 126.5, 127, 127.5, 128, 129, 130, 130, 130, 130, 130.5, 131.5, 132, 132, 132, 132, 132, 132.5, 133, 134, 134, 135, 137, 138.5 mm. ♀♀ 121, 123, 125, 125, 127.5, 127.5, 129, 129, 129, 129.5, 130.5, 131, 131, 131.5, 132, 132, 132, 132.5, 132.5, 132.5, 133.5 mm.
27 specimens.	Range ♂♂ 125–138.5 (Mean 131.1 mm.).
21 specimens.	Range ♀♀ 121–133.5 (Mean 129.3 mm.).
<i>D. a. fugax</i>	
Northern Zululand, Swaziland, southern Portuguese East Africa and Zambesia	♂♂ 125, 125.5, 126, 126.5, 127, 127, 127.5, 127.5, 127.5, 129, 129, 132 mm. ♀♀ 122, 123, 125.5, 127.5 mm.
12 specimens.	Range ♂♂ 125–132 (Mean 127.4 mm.).
4 specimens.	Range ♀♀ 122–127.5 (Mean 124.5 mm.).
Nyasaland and south-eastern Northern Rhodesia	♂♂ 127, 127, 128, 128, 129, 131 mm. ♀♀ 124, 127.5, 128, 130.5 mm.
6 specimens.	Range ♂♂ 127–131 (Mean 128.3 mm.).
4 specimens.	Range ♀♀ 124–130.5 (Mean 127.5 mm.).

We can conclude on the basis of the extensive series of measurements and other data now available that the race *D. a. adsimilis* of recent workers is an unsatisfactory unit, especially in view of the findings made in the area of south-eastern Africa extending from Natal to southern Portuguese East Africa. I believe that it would be more accurate for us to recognize two races instead of the current one, and the nomenclature, characters and ranges of these can be summarized as follows:



1. *Dicrurus adsimilis adsimilis* (Bechstein)

*Corvus adsimilis* Bechstein, "Johann Latham's Allgemeine Uebersicht der Vögel," vol. ii, part 1, 1794: South Africa. Restricted type-locality: Duwyenshoek River, southern Cape Province, South Africa.

Plumage wholly glossy black, except for primaries which have inner webs brownish. Tail deeply forked. Measurements: wings ♂♂ 134–142, ♀♀ 130–138, tails ♂♂ 116–127, culmens ♂♂ 25–28 mm. (Based on topotypical material).

*Note*: Young birds are smaller than adults and are duller in plumage, the under-surfaces flecked with white. The adult plumage is not attained until the second complete moult.

*Range*: The Cape Province, Natal, southern Zululand and most of the Transvaal northwards in the west through Bechuanaland and South West Africa to Angola, north-western Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo in areas to the south of the equatorial rain forest. Intergrades with *D. a. fugax* in the eastern and northern Transvaal, the Southern Rhodesian plateau, Ngamiland, parts of Northern Rhodesia, and in the Lake Tanganyika area, and replaced by *D. a. coracinus* of the forested regions of the Congo, which occurs to the north of its range.

2. *Dicrurus adsimilis fugax* Peters

*Dicrurus fugax* Peters, "Journal für Ornithologie," vol. xvi, 1868, p. 132: Tete and Inhambane, Portuguese East Africa.

Similar to *D. a. adsimilis* but rather deeper, less bluish black, and with the inner webs of the primaries paler. Much smaller in size.

*Measurements*: Wings ♂♂ 125–132, ♀♀ 122–130.5, tails ♂♂ 108–117, culmens ♂♂ 22–24 mm. (Based on all available adult specimens).

*Range*: North-eastern Zululand, Swaziland and southern Portuguese East Africa to the Zambesi Valley, the south-eastern half of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland northwards in the east to Tanganyika Territory, Kenya Colony and Uganda. Intergrades with *D. a. divaricatus* to the north of its range and with *D. a. adsimilis* to the west, as recorded above.

*Note*: *D. a. divaricatus* differs from *D. a. fugax* in having the tail much less deeply bifurcated, while the nominate race is similar to the latter in this respect.

## Remarks on the nidification of the Forest-Robin

### *Stiphornis erythrothorax* Hartlaub

by DR. WILLIAM SERLE and CAPT. CHARLES R. S. PITMAN

Received 19th January, 1956

Hitherto all that was known of the nidification of *Stiphornis erythrothorax* was a brief note by Bates (*Birds of West Africa*, 1930, p. 398) on *S. e. xanthogaster* Sharpe describing a shallow nest of moss said to have been found hidden at the base of a tree in the forest.

The systematic position of *Stiphornis* Hartlaub has for long been in doubt. Reichenow (*Vog. Afr.* iii, 1905, p. 623) and Sclater (*Syst. Av. Aethiop.* ii, 1930, p. 546) placed it amongst the *Sylviidae*, Jackson (*Birds of Kenya Colony and Uganda Prot.*, ii, 1938, p. 1088) following Sclater, whilst Bates (*loc.cit.*) and Chapin (*Birds of Belg. Congo*, iii, 1953, p. 507) place it amongst the *Turdidae*.