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Hall hoped that some skinning instruction could be provided for members, so that those birds which die on board could be preserved for study and Dr. J. G. Harrison pointed out that such birds could be brought home in the refrigerators or injected with formo-saline and skinned later. He also mentioned assisted passages for birds and Captain Tuck said that the Society had already obtained a great deal of information about this.

The Chairman then thanked Captain Tuck for giving us a most interesting evening. The Society is a small but most unusual one and is worthy of every support.

Notes on some African Warblers

Part One

by Mr. C. M. N. White

Received 21st September, 1959

The present series of notes was compiled during the preparation of a Check List of certain genera of African warblers.

(1) *Bradypterus baboecala* Vieillot

The variation in this species is rather slight, and insufficient note has been taken of the fact that much of it is clinal. A cline runs from nominate *baboecala* northwards to Tanganyika; birds from eastern Northern Rhodesia show the small size and darker, browner upperside of *moreaui* (type locality Amani), and the latter in northern Tanganyika is scarcely different from *centralis* in colour. Both topotypical *moreaui* and *centralis* are dark olive brown above, *centralis* being slightly less tawny on the flanks, slightly smaller in bill size, and better streaked on the foreneck. It seems likely that *moreaui* will eventually be found to link via coastal Kenya and the Juba river with Ethiopian birds which are again similar to *moreaui* but rather lighter above and still weaker in bill. On the western side of central Africa the slightly atypical *moreaui* likewise grade into the darker *msiri*, which in its most western localities (Ngamiland and Angola) becomes more blackish. I regard *benguellensis* as a synonym of *msiri*.

A final group of races is characterised by its dark rich red upperside; it comprises *elgonensis* (darkest), *sudanensis* and *chadensis*. The latter two are lighter red than *elgonensis*, and seem only to differ in size, the unique *chadensis* having a wing of 58 mm., and *sudanensis* wings of 50–54. Here again it is likely that there will be found a continuous range linking these red backed populations; at present it would be convenient to unite *sudanensis* with *chadensis*.

(2) *Bradypterus graueri* Neumann.

The differences between *graueri* and *grandis* seem no more than subspecific, and although the unique type of *grandis* has only 10 feathers, the tail of *grandis* is somewhat worn, and loss of tail feathers in *Bradypterus* is common. I regard *grandis* and *graueri* as conspecific.

(3) *Bradypterus barratti* Sharpe.

There is every reason for considering *barratti* and *mariae* as conspecific. Three species groups can be recognised viz.

(a) the southern *barratti* group, comprising *godfreyi*, *major*, *barratti* and *priesti*.

(b) the eastern *mariae* group comprising *mariae*, *granti* and *usabarae*.
(c) the western *camerunensis* group comprising *camerunensis*, *boultoni*, *manengubae*.

The type series of *camerunensis* is rather lighter and warmer than *youngi* Serle which is more olive brown and notably olive washed on the breast. This led Serle to think that two species might exist on Cameroon mountain. But recently collected *boultoni* from Angola show that lighter and darker birds exist there also. The lighter colour of *camerunensis* may also be accentuated by foxing of old skins. I believe that *youngi* is a synonym of *camerunensis*. *Boultoni* is very near to *camerunensis*, only differing in its heavier streaking on the foreneck.

(4) *Bradypterus cinnamomeus* (Ruppell).

The various populations of this species can also be most easily understood by dividing them into three groups.

(a) a northern group of strongly cinnamon and tawny birds. In addition to the very richly coloured *bangwaensis*, I find that *mildbreadi* of Ruwenzori is sufficiently brighter red than *cinnamomeus* to warrant recognition. The brighter and lighter upperside is especially marked on the head top. I cannot distinguish *macdonaldi* (west Ethiopia) from other *cinnamomeus*, but *cavei* of the Imatong mountains is darker and more brownish red above.
(b) an intermediate group of populations comprising *rufoflavidus*.
(c) a southern group in which cinnamon and rufous is replaced by olive brown. Here I would only recognise *nyassae*. The supposed darker colour of *ufipae* is not constant or well marked and although Sumbawanga birds show slightly scaly crown patterns due to darker feather edging, this is not found in the populations of Northern Rhodesia. The latter on the other hand sometimes show a trace of streaking on the foreneck. None of these southern populations seems sufficiently well differentiated to merit recognition of more races than *nyassae*.

(5) The genus *Schoenicola*.

After comparing the Indian *platyura* and African *brevirostris* I have no doubt that they should be made conspecific, *platyura* being the earlier name for the species.

(6) *Acrocephalus rufescens* Sharpe and Bouvier.

The darker eastern and central African populations bear three names—*niloticus*, *foxi*, and *ansorgei*. Of these the supposedly larger *foxi* of the Kigezi and Kivu highlands is not in fact very well differentiated with wings 80–85 against 72–81 in *niloticus*. It may average slightly whiter below than *niloticus*, but is at best a rather slight highland race. The range of *niloticus* has now been extended west in Northern Rhodesia to the Lukanga swamp and western Balovale. The unique type of *ansorgei* (wing 82 mm.) is very doubtfully separable and the gap between Balovale and Duque de Bragança in north Angola is not very great. Further collecting seems likely to show that *ansorgei* is the same as *niloticus*.

(7) *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* Hartlaub.

The clinal nature of variation in this species has been insufficiently demonstrated. In south and east Africa *gracilirostris* and *leptorhyncha* differ only in the small size of the latter, both being rather light birds with whitish undersides, and tawny flanks and rumps. It is interesting to note

the existance of an isolated population of *leptorhyncha* in the Aussa country of the Hawash valley which may be brighter and more tawny on rump and flanks than other *leptorhyncha*. Unfortunately the skins available are rather worn and not very well prepared, so I refrain from naming them.

The large *parvus* of the Kenya highlands is a darker and richer olive brown than *leptorhyncha* above, with much less contrasting tawny on the rump, and the flanks more grey brown, less tawny. Similar coloured but smaller birds occur in north Tanganyika at Mondul, Mbulu, Kome island in lake Victoria, and the Lugufu river on lake Tanganyika. These small birds are much darker than *leptorhyncha* to which they have been referred, and I cannot distinguish them in colour from *parvus*. They have wings in males of 67–70 against 70–77 in the Kenya highlands. In southern Ethiopia (lakes Zwai and Margherita) another similar coloured population occurs with wings 67–72 mm. Probably *palustris* Reichenow (1917, Ndjiri swamp, near Kilimanjaro) could be used for the small birds of north Tanganyika if they are separated, but in view of the intermediate birds of south Ethiopia, I think it better to keep all these dark populations as *parvus*. *Tsanae* of lake Tana is very similar, and only slightly differentiated in its more extensively and darker greyish underside, and average darker and duskier upperside. Wing 70–75 mm.

I cannot separate the pale greyish olive *jacksoni* of lake Victoria from *nuerensis* of the White Nile on colour. Uganda birds are larger, wings 67–71 mm. against 63–67 mm. in Sudan birds, but the variation is comparable to that in *parvus*. I do not recognise *nuerensis*.

(8) *The genus Sphenoeacus*.

The monotypic *Sphenoeacus* is characterised especially by its specialised tail with stiffened shaft, and narrow webs. *Achaetops pycnopygius* is structurally very like *Sphenoeacus afer* in its streaky plumage, bill structure, wing form and feet, but has a normal tail, of dark colour with ill defined light tip, and rufous flanks. *Melocichla mentalis* is again structurally very like *Achaetops*, but lacks the streaky plumage. Its tail is exactly like that of *Achaetops*, and it has similar rufous flanks. The habits of these three monotypic genera of warblers are in general very similar. I believe that relationships would be better expressed by placing all three species concerned in the genus *Sphenoeacus*.

(9) *Sphenoeacus mentalis* (Fraser)

The difficulty in defining any races in this warbler has been noted before (e.g. by Chapin and Benson). The series in the British Museum is now very large, and shows that in West Africa and the Belgian Congo, there is very great individual variation ranging from redder to browner and more dusky or greyish backed birds, with flanks extensively and deeply rufous or with little and pale tawny there. This led Schouteden to place all the Belgian Congo birds under nominate *mentalis*.

I find that birds from the north eastern Belgian Congo, south Sudan, west Ethiopia, Uganda and west Tanganyika are fairly constantly of the dark type, and those from Angola, the Katanga and Northern Rhodesia mostly of the rather warm reddish brown type. Birds from central Kenya are more greyish brown, and those of the Chyulu hills are again very dark. I can see no difference to separate so called *amauroura* and *granviki*.

Although these more constant variations in the east and south might be thought enough to justify the recognition of *amauroura* and *grandis* they fall within the much more unstable range of variation of West African and Belgian Congo birds.

I consider that in addition to *mentalis*, the only definable races are *orientalis* (very pale and sandy brown above) and *luangwae* (very pale and greyish above). I have examined *orientalis* from Pangani river, Usambara, Pugu hills, Kilosa, Njombe, Mocuba and Melsetter. A bird from Mahenge in Tanganyika is however dark. South Nyasaland birds show a trend towards *orientalis*, but I consider fall better under *mentalis*.

(10) *Hippolais pallida laeneni* Niethammer.

Prior to the recent description of *laeneni*, the birds of this species breeding from Air and Zinder to Maidugari and lake Chad were assigned to *reiseri*, breeding in the oases of south Algeria. Vaurie (Bds. Pal. Fauna. 1959) states that topotypical *reiseri* is paler and more sandy above than the Egyptian *pallida*, and males have wings of 64–69 mm. I find six males from Maidugari and Chad have wings of 60–66 mm., and I find some difficulty in separating them in colour from Egyptian breeding birds (wing of males 63–67 mm.). They may average a little paler but the difference is very slight. Birds breeding at Khartoum were erroneously identified by Captain Grant as *elaeica*. They are in fact inseparable from Chad birds. 8 females from the same range have wings 58–62 mm. It seems inappropriate to assign these birds to *reiseri* if the latter is really more sandy than *pallida*, and as large as Vaurie states. Unfortunately the British Museum possesses no topotypical *reiseri*. On the material which I have seen *laeneni* seems very close to *pallida;* all that can be said for it is that it averages a little smaller and paler.

(11) *Eminia cerviniventris* (Sharpe).

Chapin (bds. Belg. Congo. iii) has drawn attention to the possibility that this bird is in fact very closely related to *Bathmocercus rufus*. He had not seen *cerviniventris*. Examination of the series in the British Museum shows that *cerviniventris* is in fact the upper Guinea representative of *B. rufus*. *Cerviniventris* differs in wholly black crown, olive brown (not rufous) upperside, and cinnamon (not grey) flanks and belly. No females of *cerviniventris* were available to show whether the same sexual dimorphism is present here as in *B.rufus*, but a juvenile agrees well with the juvenile of *B.rufus*.

A note on *Acrocephalus boeticatus* Vieillot

by MR. C. M. N. WHITE

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Examination of this reed warbler has revealed several points of interest. Birds from the Cape Province to Transvaal and Natal, and those usually separated as *suahelicus* Crote from Mafia, Pemba, Zanzibar and the coast of Tanganyika are inseparable on colour, and about the same in size. Nominate *boeticatus* has wings 58–62 mm. and *suahelicus* 56–60 mm. I conclude that *suahelicus* cannot be maintained as a distinct form. Birds from South West Africa are however separable. For these I propose:—

Acrocephalus boeticatus hallae—subsp. nov.