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*A. noctua* are known to breed underground, sometimes in association with snakes and rodents.

The differences between the two genera are that in *Cunicularia* the tarsus is less feathered, though hairs extend to the end of the toes and the back of the tarsus is almost devoid of hairs. In some races of *Athene noctua* the hairs on the toes are exactly as in *Cunicularia* but the back of the tarsus is always feathered, sometimes scantily. There is nothing in the length of the tarsus.

In *Cunicularia* the notching on the outer web of the fifth primary is absent, but sometimes slightly suggested, whereas in *Athene* the fifth primary is usually distinctly notched but sometimes scarcely perceptibly.

In both genera the nostrils are swollen in a fresh state but the nostril aperture is slightly differently placed in *Cunicularia* to what it is in *Athene*.

I cannot help feeling that *Cunicularia* is maintained partly on account of continental isolation but also for its rather pleasing association with rattle-snakes and rodents. Its name "burrowing" may well also contribute to separation; but I have seen both *A. brama* and *A. noctua* excavating with vigour in earth and the rarest snake I ever collected (*Walterinnesia*) was secured from a burrow in which a pair of *Athene noctua glaux* were nesting in Egypt.

I therefore consider Nature is better reflected in systematics by placing *Cunicularia* as a synonym of *Athene*.

### On *Oenanthe tractrac* (Wilkes) and *Oenanthe albicans* (Wahlberg) and the development of the 'sickle wing'.

Colonel R. MEINERTZHAGEN sent the following note:—

During a recent visit to Namaqualand I became closely acquainted with three Chats—*O. tractrac*, *O. albicans* and *O. tractrac barlowi*.

*Oenanthe tractrac tractrac* (Wilkes). 1817. Orange River. Named after Levaillant's plate 184, an excellent representation of the bird. The name "tractrac" is Levaillant's rendering of the bird's call note. The type locality can be restricted to Bushman Flats south of the Orange River where the species is common.

The darkest race. The tip of the second primary is slightly less rounded than in *O. t. albicans* (fig. 4) and in six cases out of eighteen examined the tip is strongly attenuated (fig. 5).

This race only occurs in the dry karroo country of Great and Little Namaqualand, both north and south of the Orange River, east to Deelfontein, Middelburg and Aliwal North and never occurs far from bush country. In behaviour I could detect little difference from the usual wing and tail movement normally associated with other members of the genus *Oenanthe*.

*Oenanthe tractrac barlowi* (Roberts) 1937. Aus, South West Africa. Described as a race of *Oenanthe tractrac*.

In colour, closely resembling *O. t. albicans*, but a shade darker and with the tip of the second primary with a slightly developed



attenuated tip (fig. 3), very much as in some examples of *O. a. albicans*.

Not too common round Aus, Luderitz and on the borders of the southern Namib.

*Ænanthe t. albicans* (Wahlberg). 1855. Walvis Bay.

The palest race and confined to the absolute desert from Cape Cross in the north to an undefined area south of Walvis Bay but not reaching to within twenty miles north of Luderitz.

The tip of the second primary is rounded and without attenuation in fifteen specimens examined (fig. 1) and has slight attenuation in five cases and marked attenuation (fig. 2) in one case.

It is clear that the attenuation of the tip of the second primary is not a generic character, not even a specific character in the genus *Ænanthe*. In which case the genera *Karrucincla* Roberts and *Emarginata* Shelley must be placed as synonyms of *Ænanthe*. *Emarginata* exemplifies the extreme form of attenuation (fig. 6). The tip of the second primary of *Karrucincla schlegeli* (Wahlberg) is also shown (fig. 7).

The biological significance of this attenuated second primary is not clear. It apparently has no connection with sex or age. It probably has some connection with courtship, but if used for sound, I can find no record of such a use. *Ænanthe sinuata* (Suudevall) is a persistent wing-flicker, more so than is usual in *Ænanthe* and more closely resembling the wing and tail movements of *Cercomela*. But the slow deliberate flicking could not produce sound. In flight, the attenuated tip of the second primary is not apparent.

