DURBAN MUSEUM
Novitates

ISSUED BY THE DURBAN MUSEUM, DURBAN 4001, SOUTH AFRICA

VOL. XII, PART 13 ISSUED 1st NOVEMBER, 1980

MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS LVIII

by

P. A. CLANCEY
(Director, Durban Museum, Durban)

THE MAINLAND AFROTROPICAL SUBSPECIES OF THE LITTLE SWIFT *APUS AFFINIS* (GRAY)

The Afrotropical forms of the Little Swift were recently reviewed by Brooke, *Durban Mus.Novit.*, vol. ix, 7, 1971, pp. 93-103, in the course of his study of the species in the Afrotropics, the Palaearctic and southern and south-eastern Asia. This specialist admitted three mainland races for Africa: *A.a.galilejensis* (Antinori), 1855: Sea of Galilee, Israel, *A.a.aerobates* Brooke, 1969: Mbandaka, Equateur, Zaïre, and *A.a. theresae* Meinertzhagen, 1949: Brandvlei, north-western Cape, and an insular one, *A.a.bannermani* Hartert, 1928: São Tomé, from the Gulf of Guinea islands. In Brooke's study of 1971, *A.a.aerobates* was accorded an immense range, extending from far West Africa, east to Ethiopia and Somalia, south to Angola in the west and Natal in the south-east of the continent. For some time now it has been evident that *aerobates,* as defined in 1971, was composite, as East African and Natal and southern Mozambique samples in the Durban Museum collection appeared to differ subspecifically between themselves and, moreover, both did not agree with the characters laid down by Brooke as diagnostic of his *aerobates.*

A re-examination of the variation in the Little Swift in the Afrotropics indicates that *A.a.aerobates* is very largely a subspecies of the

[*Price R2,00 nett*]

type-locality is on the eastern verge of the range and poorly positioned. In his work on the races of the Cardinal Woodpecker, the skins which Roberts considered to be of *D.f.centralis* collected in the lowlands of southern northern Mozambique (Quelimane district) were in fact of *D.f.xylobates.*

ON THE LESSER GREY SHRIKE *LANIUS MINOR* GMELIN IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Lesser Grey Shrike is a highly migratory species which breeds in the south-western and south-central Palaearctic, and winters entirely in the drier parts of the South African Sub-Region. In recent times, its migrations, wintering range and weight and moult patterns have been ably reported on by Dowsett, *Ostrich,* vol. xlii, 4, 1971, pp. 259-270. The species is generally treated as monotypic, despite the fact that Fediuschin, *Journ.f.Ornith.*, vol. lxxv, 1927, p. 493, separated the eastern populations as discrete on the basis of paler colouration and average larger size under the name *Lanius minor turanicus* Fediuschin, the type-locality Ishak Sai, Fergana, Uzbekistan, U.S.S.R. Hartert and Steinbacher, *Vög.pal.Fauna,* Ergänzungsband, 1932, p. 210, Witherby *et al., Handbook British Birds,* vol. i, 1940, pp. 278-280, and Dement'ev and Gladkov, *Birds Soviet Union,* Engl.transl., vol. vi, 1968, p. 51, declined to admit the validity of *L.m.turanicus,* which, however, was later recognised by both Vaurie, *Birds Palearctic Fauna,* vol. i (Passeriformes), 1959, p. 107, and Rand, in the continuation of Peters' *Check-List Birds of the World,* vol. ix, 1960, p. 353. In an earlier, short communication, Grote, *Ornith.Monatsber.*, vol. xxxv, 1927, pp. 127, 128, admitted *turanicus,* determining it as reaching Ukamba, in Kenya, on migration, from which locality a skin with a wing of 124 mm was measured (in Zoologisches Museum, Berlin).

In recognising *turanicus* as valid, Vaurie did not use the characters given by Fediuschin in the original description, but rather the paler and more sandy, less greyish, colouration of its barred juvenal dress. This character is lost in so far as the contour plumage is concerned before the birds depart from the breeding-grounds in the northern autumn, with the result that, while both nominate *minor* and *turanicus* are known to winter synhiemally, no attempt has heretofore been made by workers to try and differentiate them on the wintering grounds. Dowsett, *loc. cit.*, acknowledged that two subspecies were recognised (by 1971), but made no effort to determine if subspecifically significant criteria existed in first-year birds and adults taken in southern Africa.

Examination of specimens obtained in the South West Arid district between October and early April indicates that nominate *minor* and *turanicus* are separable on colour characters in the winter-quarters.

In *Durban Mus.Novit.*, vol. xii, 9, 1980, p. 116, I state that judging from a series of *L.minor* from the Boshoek area of the western Transvaal taken in late February and March, 1973, the adult of *turanicus* is lighter and bluer grey above than in the nominotypical subspecies, while the ventral pink is more violaceous in quality. Further study of this and other material assembled in the Durban Museum shows that adults from the austral wintering grounds are about equally divided between those which are inseparable from a spring series from Austria, Jugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania, and therefore attributable to the nominate race, the type-locality of which is Italy, and the very pale bluish dorsalled birds recorded from Boshoek. These latter I believe represent *turanicus,* as pale colouration was one of the characters attributed to the said taxon by its describer. In birds in first-winter dress, the material polarises into two groups, again on dorsal colouration, one distinctly grey and the other markedly browner. The former group is almost certainly of eastern origin and represents *turanicus,* this decision being arrived at on the grounds that variation in this dress is of about the same style and extent as that detected in the adults. On the basis of this assessment, the Okavango series commented on in my 1980 contribution must be seen as actually comprising four examples of *turanicus* and one of nominate *minor.* As much of the material from southern Africa studied has the wing-tips seriously abraded, or else the wings are in moult, it has not been possible to determine if worthwhile variation in wing-length in fact exists. However, Grote and Hartert and Steinbacher, *loc. cit.,* show convincingly enough that the slightly larger size demonstrated for *turanicus* in the first instance is of no taxonomic worth. Even a wing-length of 124, *versus* the upper register of 122 mm for Balkan near topotypes of *L.m.minor,* is to all intents valueless.

While much of the subspecific variation seen to exist in freshly moulted adults from the wintering-grounds may be lost through abrasion and insolation quite early on while the birds are in the Palaearctic, it is now established that the two subspecies of *L.minor* are distinguishable in all plumages and not only in the barred juvenal dress.

Vaurie, *loc. cit.*, refers to the variation as observed on material from the breeding-grounds as being clinal, but in his work on Palaearctic birds this worker was inordinately addicted to a belief in the existence of clines. True clinal variation is uncommon in mobile and often highly vagile creatures such as birds. From evidence gathered in southern Africa, the phenetic variation in *L.minor* is relatively slight and is not graded (clinal) in nature.

The subspecifically important characters of the two taxa are laid out in the formal arrangement of the species given below.

Lanius minor minor Gmelin

Lanius minor Gmelin, *Syst.Nat.*, vol. i, 1, 1788, p. 308: "Habitat in Italia, Hispania, Russia", restricted to Italy.

Freshly moulted adult with dorsum Pale Smoke Gray or Smoke Gray (Ridgway (1912), pl. xlvi). Venter with lower breast and lateral surface Vinaceous-Buff (pl. xl).

First-year birds about Mouse Gray (pl. xlvi) over the upper-parts. Ventrally, creamy white, washed across the breast with buff, the lateral surfaces faintly scaled with grey.

A single juvenal from Muhlviertel, Upper Austria, collected by G. Schiebel on 28 August, 1909, has the upper contour plumage pale, dull buffy, the feathers fringed and barred Deep Olive-Buff (pl. xl). Below, creamy white, with indistinct vermicular barring to the lateral body.

Wings of 10 ♂♀ measured 115-122 (118,4) mm.

Southern African specimens examined: 34. *South West Africa (Namibia),* 5: Windhoek, Otjiwarongo, Okahandja, Okavango/Cuito confluence; *Northern Cape,* 1: Zoetvlei, Vryburg; *Botswana,* 3: Serondela (Chobe R.), N. of Mopipi, Francistown; *Transvaal,* 8: Elands R., W. of Boshoek, Rustenburg, Pretoria, Blouberg, Zoutspansberg; *Zimbabwe,* 8: Bulawayo, Nyamandhlovu, Cyrene Mission, Shangani R., Senyati/Zambesi confl.; *Zambia,* 9: Namwala, Kalichero, Mayao (Kabompo), Mufulira, Luanshya R., Museshya (Mweru Marsh).

Range: Breeds in western continental Europe from France (south to the Mediterranean), Germany and Italy, east in the north to about the Volga R. and the Caucasus in the U.S.S.R., and in the south through the Balkans to Asia Minor, and, perhaps, northern parts of the Middle East. Replaced further east by the following subspecies. In the west of the range it is not now as widely distributed as a breeder as indicated by Vaurie, *loc. cit.*

L.m.minor winters in south-western and southern Africa within the 600 mm isohyet from south-western Angola and South West Africa (Namibia), east to the northern Cape, Botswana, south-western and southern Zimbabwe, the Transvaal, eastern Swaziland and the interior of Natal and Zululand. It is present from the second half of October to early April, during which time it undergoes an entire moult.

Lanius minor turanicus Fediuschin

Lanius minor turanicus Fediuschin, *Journ.f.Ornith.*, vol. lxxv, 1927, p. 493: Ishak Sai, Ferghana, Uzbekistan, U.S.S.R.

Adults in newly moulted dress on the wintering-grounds brighter and more bluish, less olivaceous, grey over the dorsum than in the nominate subspecies (Pale Neutral Gray or Gull Gray (pl. liii)). Ven-

trally, clearer white over the entire fore-throat, and pink of lateral surfaces more violaceous (about Shell Pink (pl xxviii)). Wing-length ranging to 124 mm.

First-year birds distinctly greyer, less brownish, than in *L. m. minor* (Light Grayish Olive (pl. xlvi)) over the upper-parts, the dorsal surfaces of the head and neck normally scaled with off-white. Generally inclined to be whiter ventrally, the breast tinged vinaceous rather than buff. Wings darker. Juvenal described as being paler and more sandy, less grey, on the upper-parts than in *L. m. minor* (after Vaurie).

Specimens examined: 46. *South West Africa (Namibia),* 9: Windhoek, Okanjande, Okahandja, Gobabis, Rundu, Okavango/Cuito confluence; *Botswana,* 15: Tierputs, Shorobe, Nata district, Makgadikgadi, Francistown, Kedia, W. of Kanye, Murwamusa Pan, Sekhuma Pan, Lehututu; *Transvaal,* 7: Elands R., W. of Boshoek, Zoutpansberg; *Zimbabwe,* 14: Matetsi, Gwanda, Bulawayo, Selukwe, Fort Victoria, Gutu TTL, Ndanga TTL, Sevajalaba's Kraal (Zambesi R.); *Zambia,* 1: Kasenga (Mweru Marsh).

Range: Vaurie, *loc. cit.,* sketches the breeding range as being from eastern Russia (? from about the Volga R.) eastwards, north to about 56° N. in the west and 53° in the east, to Barnaul and the Altai, south to the Kirghiz Steppes, the Oz.Zaysan region, the Tarbagatai Range, Semirechia, Dzungaria (Alatau), Tadzhikistan and northern Afghanistan, thence west in the south to much of northern Iran and the Caspian region. He states that it migrates through Russian Turkestan, Transcapia and the Iranian region from eastern Baluchistan to Iraq to its African winter-quarters, though how this was arrived at is uncertain, as he only differentiates *turanicus* on the juvenal dress, the contour feathering of which is shed prior to the autumn migration. Winters in southern Africa alongside the nominate race.

Remarks: The name *Lanius luebberti* Reichenow, 1902: Brakwater, N. of Windhoek, South West Africa (Namibia), may antedate *turanicus,* but without access to the immature (first-winter) *Type* it is not possible to place the name subspecifically at this stage.

The subspecific status of *Lanius yemenensis* Ogilvie-Grant, 1914: San'a, Yemen, is likewise equivocal, but it, too, could conceivably antedate *turanicus.*

Adults on arriving on the austral African wintering-grounds are in an excessively abraded and insolated state, but even in such an unsatisfactory condition, the feathering is still all that much paler, often whiter, than in *L. m. minor.* First-year examples of *turanicus* arrive in southern Africa in relatively unworn condition in so far as the contour plumage is concerned, but the wing- and tail-feathers of the juvenal dress are frayed and the former somewhat bleached terminally. Some

new tertial feathers are, however, assumed by some on the breeding grounds in conjunction with the contour plumage moult.

On the moult regime of *L. minor*

The confusion surrounding moult in *L. minor* was largely elucidated by Dowsett in his painstaking study of the species (1971). This worker showed conclusively that first-year birds and adults undergo a complete moult (contour plumage and entire wings and tail) on the southern African wintering-grounds between mid-December and the end of March/early April, this pattern being confirmed by my own study of material in the collections of the Transvaal and Durban Museums and the National Museum of Zimbabwe. Birds start the northbound migration in early April, often before the moult is completed. Dowsett, however, failed to draw attention to the fact that the barred and yellowish contour feathering of the true juvenal dress is moulted in the northern autumn on the breeding-grounds. First-year birds arrive in southern Africa in the second half of October, the contour feathering by then still relatively unworn, but with the wings and tail of the juvenal dress faded and frayed. In some individuals, fresh tertials are taken in to the wings during the autumnal moult in the Palaearctic. The first-year birds wear rapidly in the wintering area, and by late December and January are much abraded and often seriously soil stained.

Old material in museum collections is usually badly grease stained and requires cleaning with solvents prior to critical examination. This factor probably underpins the difficulty some workers have had in resolving the geographical variation in the present shrike.

I am indebted to both the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, and the National Museum, Bulawayo, for the loan of material. Dr H. E. Wolters, of the Museum Alexander Koenig, Bonn, kindly assisted with the literature.