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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS

XXXII

by

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1. ON THE PRESENT NOMINATE SUBSPECIES OF *MEROPS SUPERCILIOSUS* LINNAEUS

Nominate *Merops superciliosus* Linnaeus, 1766: Malagasy, is generally believed to be in the main a Malagasy breeding form, which spends the off-season in Africa, but which also breeds locally along the east of the continent from Somalia, coastal Kenya and Pemba Island, south to about Beira, in Moçambique. Winterbottom, *Cimbebasia*, Windhoek, No. 19, 1966, p. 34, recently drew attention to the fact that a reasonably large population of this bee-eater is resident on the western coast of Africa, in Angola and northern South-West Africa, breeding along the course of the Cunene R. and elsewhere in adjacent arid and semi-arid regions. In a short note in the *Ostrich*, vol. xxxix, 3, 1968, p. 202, I showed that the western continental population of *M. superciliosus* differed somewhat from birds taken in East Africa on structural and colour characters. Discussing but one of the differences defined for western birds in my 1968 communication, Winterbottom, *Ostrich*, vol. xl, 4, 1969, p. 214, dismissed my suggestion that the birds resident and breeding in Angola and South-West Africa differed genetically from those of Malagasy and the eastern African littoral. Further study of this interesting question, utilizing a much larger corpus of material than employed when I prepared my first note reveals that the western African population of *M. superciliosus* is actually more markedly

differentiated from Malagasy topotypes than at first believed, sufficiently so in my estimation to be separated as an additional race. For the loan of material for this new study, I am grateful to the South African Museum, Cape Town (through Professor J. M. Winterbottom), the State Museum, Windhoek (through Mr. P. J. Buys), the National Museum of Rhodesia (through Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin), the Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola, Sá da Bandeira (through Dr. A. A. da Rosa Pinto), and the Bird Room, British Museum (Nat. Hist.), London (through Dr. D. W. Snow).

M.s.superciliosus is reputedly a highly migratory form, which, as stated above, breeds mainly on the island of Malagasy. Nine Malagasy topotypes examined in Durban are dated 24 September — April, and 3 June. After breeding, the bulk of the population supposedly leaves the island for the mainland of the African continent, where it is concentrated in the eastern tropics. In so far as south-central and south-eastern African records of this bee-eater are concerned, most are for the second half of September and October, when there is a marked influx of this species, these presumably largely birds on passage to Malagasy from wintering grounds further north in eastern Africa, thus:

3 ♂♀ from eastern Zambia	15 and 16 September
11 ♂♀ from southern Malawi	17 — 27 September, October
6 ♂♀ from southern Moçambique	18 September — 1 October

The September/October birds are all in freshly moulted dress, whereas two from Binga, Lake Kariba, Rhodesia, dated 20 April are in the middle of wing and contour plumage moult, and appear to have been recent arrivals (? from Malagasy) when shot.

The data from the material before me suggest that the mainstream of Malagasy *M.s.superciliosus* winters well north of South African zoogeographical limits during the course of its non-breeding sojourn in Africa, arriving in south-central and south-eastern Africa in the latter part of September, immediately prior to departure for the Malagasy breeding grounds. The paucity of specimens of worn post-breeding birds and of records from between April and mid-September from south-central and south-eastern Africa further suggest that the April outward going movement takes a different route to the return one in September, and that Malagasy *M.superciliosus* perform a roughly circular post-breeding movement. Benson, *Check List of Nyasaland Birds*, 1953, p.39, considers this bee-eater a passage migrant during September and early October in Malawi, and a similar status is given for the species in the case of Zambia

(*vide* Benson and White, *Check List of the Birds of Northern Rhodesia*, 1957, p. 51).

The population occurring in western southern Africa, in Angola and northern South-West Africa, is seemingly not connected with Malagasy migrants, which probably do not extend west of 26° E. long., while in Africa, but which occur seasonally at similar latitudes in the east of the continent, being resident or largely so as far as can be ascertained. A careful study of material also reveals that the western residents exhibit a variety of differences when compared with Malagasy specimens, most of them initially rather subtle, but on critical study found to be constant to a degree which dictates that we recognise western African resident breeding *M. superciliosus* as an additional race. Using the fine recently assembled series from southern Angola lent to me by the Instituto de Investigaçao Cientifica de Angola, the following characters can now be laid down for the occidental African population: (a) the head-top, particularly in males, is paler and more invaded with green, appearing less dark umber brown; (b) the hind neck, mantle, scapulars and rump are a light grass, not olive, green; (c) the chin and malar streaks are more expansively and purer white, less green tinged, and the cinnamon throat patch is smaller and lighter, this well-marked in the adult female; (d) the rest of the underside is paler, the breast lacking much of the olive-brown overlay present in topotypical *M. superciliosus*; and (e) the size is greater, though there is much overlap. Arising from these findings, I arrange the populations of the present nominate subspecies of *M. superciliosus* in two races, as follows:

(a) ***Merops superciliosus superciliosus*** Linnaeus

Merops superciliosus Linnaeus, *Syst. Nat.*, 12th edition, i, 1766, p. 183: Malagasy.

Male with head-top dark Raw UMBER (Ridgway, pl. iii); rest of upper-parts Yellowish Oil Green (pl. v). Below, with chin and malar streaks off-white, tinged with yellow; forethroat patch dull Tawny (pl. xv).

Female similar to the male, but head-top duller, less deep brown, and rest of upper-parts rather bluer, less yellowish olive, green. Below, with a slightly smaller and duller forethroat patch, and rest of underside slightly paler. In the tail, the innermost pair of rectrices are not so apically extended into filaments.

Wings of 3 Malagasy ♂♂ 133, 134.5, 139, of 5 ♀♀ 130, 131.5, 132, 136, 138. Wings of 8 ♂♂ from Kenya, Zambia, Malawi and Moçambique 133—141 (137.3), of 10 ♀♀ 129—139 (132.8). Culmens from base of 8 ♂♂ from Malagasy 44.5—50 (47.5) mm.

Material examined: 35. (Somalia, 1; Kenya, 3 (Sokoke Forest); eastern Zambia, 3 (Mpika, Lundazi); Rhodesia, 2 (Binga, Lake Kariba); Malawi, 11 (Fort Hill, Chiromo, Port Herald); Moçambique, 6 (Nyakafura, Beira); Malagasy, 9 (Manombo, Tulear, Ankafana, Analatsor, Andreba, Nossi Be, etc.).

Range: Breeds on the island of Malagasy, in the Comoros, on Pemba Island, in Somalia, and locally along the eastern coast of Africa from Kenya to Moçambique. The bulk of Malagasy breeding birds are believed to leave the island for the eastern African tropics after breeding, though Benson, *Ibis*, vol. 103b, 1, 1960, pp. 58, 59, comments "One wonders whether there is any wholesale migration from Madagascar or the Comoros." Rand, *Bull. Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, vol. lxxii, 1936, p. 421, records the species for every month of the year on Malagasy, showing that there is certainly no complete exodus of the species from the island. This form range as far north as Eritrea and northern Somalia, in north-eastern Africa, west as far as Lake Albert, Uganda, in East Africa, and further south, west to Manyema, eastern Congo-Kinshasa, and Livingstone and Lake Kariba, on the Rhodesia/Zambia border. In the south-east of Africa, recorded as far south as southern Sul do Save and north-eastern Zululand. The non-breeding birds occurring on the African mainland seem to winter in the north-eastern tropics, and this form's status in south-central and south-eastern Africa is largely that of a passage-migrant. Archer and Godman, *Birds of British Somaliland and the Gulf of Aden*, vol. iii, 1961, pp. 751-756, show that Somali and Eritrean records have nothing to do with Malagasy migrants, and that there is a large resident breeding population of this bee-eater in northern Somalia at least, with a different breeding season to that of Malagasy birds, namely from April -July, whereas Malagasy birds breed from September. Benson records breeding in the Comoros in late October and November. Critical study of well-prepared Somali material may show that North East Arid District birds, are, like those of the South West Arid District, moderately well-differentiated from true *M.s.superciliosus*.

(b) ***Merops superciliosus alternans***, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Carunjamba, Lucira, Moçamedes, Angola. 4 December, 1969. At sea level. Collected by E. Santos. In the collection of the Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola, Sá da Bandeira. Reg. No. 31, 558.

Diagnosis: **Male.** Head-top paler, not such a dark saturated brown (Medal Bronze (pl. iv), *versus* dark Raw Umber (pl. iii)) and somewhat washed with green (in about thirty per cent. of individuals

the top of the head is wholly green, not brown); mantle, scapulars and rest of upper-parts paler and brighter, less dull olive, green (mantle centre in fresh dress Lettuce Green (pl. v), against Yellowish Oil Green (same pl.)). Below, with more expansive and clearer white over chin and malar surfaces; throat patch paler (Ochraceous-Tawny (pl. xv), *versus* Tawny (same pl.)); rest of underside paler green, not strongly tinged with olive over the breast, Size averaging larger, the bill longer.

Female. Not so sharply differentiated above as the male, but mantle, scapulars and rump paler and brighter green as described for the male. Below, with a markedly whiter and more expansive chin spot and malar streaks, lacking the green or yellowish suffusion present in nominate *M. superciliosus*, and brown patch over fore-throat smaller and paler (Clay Color (pl. xxix), *versus* Tawny (pl. xv) ; rest of underside paler, and breast without an olive wash. Size averaging larger, but bill not longer.

Wings of 10 ♂♂ 139—145 (142.7), of 10 ♀♀ 132—141 (135.5). Culmens of 10 ♂♂ 48—56.5 (51.6) mm.

Material examined: 30. (**South-West Africa**, 10 (Swartboois Drift, Cunene R., Warmquelle, Guiney R.); **Angola**, 20 (Chitado, Cunene R., Foz do Cunene, Ruacana, Lagoa dos Arcos (Porto Alexandre), Lucira)).

Range: Breeding resident in the north-western aspects of the South West Arid District in northern South-West Africa and the valleys of the Cunene and Okavango Rivers, north to south-western and western Angola, ranging north to about Luanda. Traylor, *Check-list of Angolan Birds*, 1963, p. 96, also records it as being present along the lower Cuanza R., and in southern Cuanza Norte.

Measurements of the Type: Wing (flattened) 143, culmen from base 52, tail 150+ mm.

Remarks: Of the two names given to African-taken specimens of *M. superciliosus*, namely, *Merops ruficapillus* Vieillot, 1817: Africa, restricted to Dar-es-Salaam, and *Merops superciliosus donaldsoni* Oberholser, 1904: Ganana R., Somalia, neither is applicable to South West Arid birds, though the latter is available for North East Arid birds if they should ever prove different (see comment above).

As the population of the South West Arid District is moderately well-differentiated from western Indian Ocean birds, it has obviously

enjoyed isolation for some very considerable time, and is a relict from an expansionist phase in the species' evolutionary history.

Winterbottom, *loc.cit.*, found *M.s.alternans* breeding at Ruacana, Cunene R., in mid-October, and gonad measurements on labels of Angolan birds in the collection of the Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola indicate that birds were laying on the Cunene in November and at Lucira in the coastal desert of Moçamedes in December. The breeding season of *M.s.alternans* seems to be somewhat later in the year than in nominate *M.superciliosus*, with the exception of the Somali and Eritrean population which has a different breeding season to either *alternans* or Malagasy birds.

The following are weight data from the twenty Angolan paratypes of *alternans* examined during the course of this study:

♂♂ 43, 44 (2), 45 (8), 46 (3), 48, 49 gm.

♀♀ 37, 40, 42, 46 gm.

2. A NAME FOR AN UNDESCRIBED RACE OF *POGONIULUS BILINEATUS* (SUNDEVALL) FROM MALAWI

When I reviewed the races of *Pogoniulus bilineatus* (Sundevall), *sens.strict.*, in *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. iv, 1, 1952, pp. 3-8, I treated the Malawi montane forest populations as a distinct innominate race. After a lapse of eighteen years, this complex of montane isolates is still without a name, but as a result of extensive collecting in recent years in many parts of Moçambique and in eastern Rhodesia, a more accurate assessment of its position in the species' race mosaic is now possible. As the Malawi montane isolates are still seen as not being attributable to any of the named races, they may henceforth be known as

***Pogoniulus bilineatus oreonesus*, subsp. nov.**

Type: ♂, adult. Chikala Mtn., upper Shiré district (Zomba), southern Malawi. Altitude 1525 m. a.s.l. 12 May, 1945. Collected for C. W. Benson. In the collection of the Durban Museum. D. M. Reg. No. 13, 236.

Diagnosis: Similar to *P.b.riparium* Clancey, 1952: Pongola R., north-eastern Zululand, of the Moçambique littoral and off-shore islands, but differs in having the yellow tipping and edging to the coverts and remiges of the wings more golden, not such a greenish lemon, yellow (Strontian Yellow (Ridgway, pl. xvi), *versus* Bright Chalcedony Yellow (pl. xvii)). Also with the throat duller white, and