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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS LIV

by

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ON THE SUBSPECIES OF THE KNOT *CALIDRIS CANUTUS* (LINNAEUS) WINTERING IN AFRICA

In a short note in Suppl. No. 3 to my *Catalogue of Birds of the South African Sub-Region* in *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. xi, 2, 1976, p. 38, I drew attention to the fact that a single Knot *Calidris canutus* (Linnaeus), 1758: Sweden, from Durban Bay, Natal, in the Durban Museum collection taken in 1964 is both colder and greyer dorsally and rather longer billed than in the case of a series of nominate *C. canutus* from western Europe (Netherlands, the specimens taken between 1 February and 6 April).

In recent years the Knot has increased considerably as a non-breeding visitor to estuaries along the south-eastern African coast, and four specimens taken in Durban Bay on 23 January, 1979, by Mr. John Mendelsohn, Scientific Officer (Vertebrates), Durban Museum, and a juvenile in transitional dress obtained in the same place in October, 1975, by R. K. Brooke now make six skins of this wader available for study from Natal.

The four specimens collected with a single shot in 1979 stand apart from all European skins in being much greyer, less brownish, above, with the bills appreciably longer in series. The upper-parts of these four Durban-taken specimens correspond to the Light Grayish Olive of Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. xlvi, as against Drab (same pl.) in the Netherlands series of nominate *C. canutus*. The six Knot specimens from Durban have the

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exposed culmen-length 33+ - 38 (34,8), SD 1,86, while in 11 ♂♂♀♀ from western Europe the culmens measure 30 - 34 (31,6), SD 1,29 mm. The difference in culmen-length is taxonomically significant.

As far as can be determined, there is no significance in the slight difference in wing-length existing between the two samples. The Netherlands series of *C.c.canutus* has the wings of 5 ♂♂ 159,5 - 169 (165,8), 6 ♀♀ 157,5 - 175 (168,4), while in the five adults or near adults from Durban Bay the wings of 2 ♂♂ measure 159 and 159 and in the 3 ♀♀ 159, 161 and 163. The juvenile in transitional dress has the wing 165 mm. The mensural data suggest, however, that the Durban-taken specimens are of a slightly shorter winged population.

In my 1976 communication (*loc.cit.*) I expressed the view that the grey, long-billed birds reaching eastern Africa might be the far eastern Palaearctic subspecies *C.c.rogersi* Mathews, 1913: Shanghai, China. However, judging by the findings of Portenko, who restricts the breeding range of *rogersi* to Wrangel Island, the wintering grounds are in Australia and New Zealand, with regular occurrence along eastern Asian coasts on both passages (see Dement'ev and Gladkov, *Birds of the Soviet Union*, vol. iii, 1969 (Engl. trans.), pp. 180, 181). This suggests, supported largely by recent findings on patterns of Knot migration (see Dick, Pienkowski *et al.*, *Ardea*, vol. lxiv, 1976, pp. 22 - 47), that the birds occurring in South Africa as a whole are of distinctive eastern populations of the present nominate subspecies, these birds which breed in the New Siberian Islands lying between the Laptev and East Siberian Seas and the Taimyr Peninsula of northern Siberia in the U.S.S.R.

In the event of the New Siberian Islands and Taimyr birds not being *rogersi* as claimed by Russian workers, which latter taxon is not, incidentally, recognised by Vaurie in his *Birds of the Palearctic Fauna*, vol. ii, Non Passeriformes, 1965, p. 403, a third Palaearctic race will require to be recognised on the basis of a colder and greyer winter dress and average longer bill-length when compared with more western breeding populations, these breeding in Spitzbergen, Greenland, and Ellesmere Island in north-eastern Canada. The Alaskan population, which on distributional grounds probably lies close to the Wrangel Island race, *rogersi*, is currently considered to be intermediate between the nominotypical race and the Nearctic subspecies *C.c.rufa* (Wilson), 1813: New Jersey, U.S.A., according to the *A.O.U. Check-List North American Birds*, 1957, footnote to p. 192 (following Conover (1943)).

No name lying in the synonymy of *C.canutus* is applicable to populations breeding in the New Siberian Islands and Taimyr Peninsula,

or to birds occurring in South Africa, but as Dick, Pienkowski *et al.*, *loc.cit.*, show, Knots occurring on passage in Sweden, the type-locality of *C.c.canutus*, are of Siberian origin, and, therefore, the birds wintering in Africa, south to the Cape, Natal and southern Moçambique, are of the nominate subspecies. Eastern North Atlantic coastal birds, breeding in Spitzbergen, Greenland and Ellesmere Island, with the bill-length ranging shorter and the winter dress browner above, and which winter south as far as the Bay of Biscay, will now become ***Calidris canutus islandica*** (Linnaeus), *stat.nov.*, 1767: Iceland (*vide* Linnaeus, *Syst.Nat.*, 12th edition, ii, 1767, Addenda: "Habitat in Islandia"). Two earlier synonyms for western European-taken Knots, namely, *Tringa cinerea* Brünnich, 1764, and *Tringa Calidris* Linnaeus, 1766, are of equivocal subspecific attribution.

A FURTHER RACE OF *COSSYPHA HEUGLINI* HARTLAUB FROM THE SOUTH WEST AFRICA/ANGOLA BORDER COUNTRY

Winterbottom, in his report on Okavango birds in *Cimbebasia*, No. 15, 1966, p. 57, and in *Prelim. Check List Birds South West Africa*, 1971, p. 187, places the Okavango R. population of the Whitebrowed Robin *Cossypha heuglini* Hartlaub as *C.h.subrufescens* Bocage, 1869: Caconda, Huila Angola. Examination of a recently assembled series from the Okavango shows that this is incorrect and that the population concerned is an undescribed subspecies, which may be known as

Cossypha heuglini orphea, subsp.nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Andara, Okavango R., north-eastern South West Africa (Namibia). 10 December, 1978. Collected by M. O. E. Baddeley. In the collection of the Durban Museum, D.M. Reg. No. 31 478.

Diagnosis: Differs from *C.h.subrufescens* in having the pileum more greyish slate, less jet black, and the central pair of rectrices olivaceous rather than brownish black (Deep Olive, *versus* Clove Brown (both pl. xl)). Separable from *C.h.occidentalis* Reichenow, 1909: Lufuku R., Marungu, south-eastern Zaïre, in having the mantle Deep Olive, as against light Medal Bronze (pl. iv); the rump also greener, less orange, and the central tail-feathers greyer. In worn dress the mantle becomes light bluish grey (Deep Neutral Gray (pl. liii)). Similar in size.

C.h.orphea differs from the eastern lowland race *C.h.euronota* Friedmann, 1930: Lumbo, northern Moçambique, on the basis of