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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS XLVIII

by

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ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN *INDICATOR VARIEGATUS* LESSON

Variation of subspecific moment in the Scalythroated Honeyguide populations present in the South African Sub-Region was first explored by me in a short communication in *Bull.Brit.Orn.Club*, vol. lxxxi, 3, 1961, p. 56, when two subspecies were admitted: nominate *I.variegatus* Lesson, 1830: Knysna, southern Cape, and *I.v.virescens* Reichenow, 1889: Lewa, Usambara Mts., north-eastern Tanzania. This arrangement was contested by Irwin and Benson in *Arnoldia Rhod.*, vol. iii, 4, 1967, pp. 10, 11, who arrived at the conclusion that only a single race could be recognised from South Africa. In a further communication on this honeyguide in *Durban Mus.Novit.*, vol. viii, 15, 1969, pp. 246, 247, I again affirmed that two races were admissible for the South African Sub-Region and that the eastern littoral population should be tentatively associated with *I.v.jubaensis* Neumann, 1908: Ionti, Giuba (Juba) R., south-western Somalia, rather than *I.v.virescens*, following Ripley and Heinrich, *Postilla*, No. 96, 1966, p. 10. In my *Handlist of the Birds of Southern Moçambique*, 1971 (1972), p. 296, the birds occurring to the north of the Save R. were again provisionally relegated to *jubaensis*. However, on further consideration of this question, I believe the Moçambique and southern Tanzanian populations should be characterized as an additional race to science.

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Range: Presently known from the Mwinilunga district of the North Western Province of Zambia, but almost certainly present in adjacent eastern Angola and Shaba, Zaïre.

Measurements of the Type: Wing (flattened) 84, culmen from base 10,25, tarsus 13,25, tail 56mm.

Remarks: In considering the systematic status of the north-western Zambian elements of *I.exilis*, I have noted the treatment of *Indicator minor angolensis* Monard, 1934: Tyihumbwe, Lunda, Angola, as a valid subspecies of *exilis*' sibling *I.meliphilus* (Oberholser) by Friedmann, *Proc.Biol.Soc.Wash.*, vol. lxxi, 1958, pp. 68 - 69. Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Birds Southern Third Africa*, vol. i, 1962, p. 569, do not recognise *angolensis*, which they merge with *I.e.exilis*, whereas in Traylor, *Check-list Birds of Angola*, 1963, p. 108, both *exilis* and *meliphilus* are admitted from Cabinda and Angola, and *angolensis* is treated as a recognisable race of the latter, following Friedmann, *loc.cit.*

I am indebted to Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin for kindly inviting me to study the Zambian material of this small honeyguide in the first instance.

PRELIMINARY STEPS IN THE STUDY OF THE POLY-
TYPIC STATUS OF THE PINTAILED WHYDAH
VIDUA MACROURA (PALLAS)

The Pintailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* (Pallas) of Ethiopian Africa is currently considered to be a monotypic species, though various authors, notably Chapin, *Birds of the Belgian Congo*, part iv, 1954, p. 575, and Nicolai, *Zeitschr.Tierpsych.*, vol. xxi, 1964, p. 166, have shown that it is not without demonstrable geographical variation.

Map 395 in Hall and Moreau, *Atlas of Speciation in African Passerine Birds*, 1970, shows that the range extends from Senegal and The Gambia in the west, east to Ethiopia and Eritrea, south to the Cape and Natal. In southern Africa it is absent over much of South West Africa, the arid western and Karoo districts of the Cape, and much of Botswana, and is most numerous in the east and south-east of the Sub-Region. In Botswana, South West Africa and south-western Angola it is very largely replaced by the more xeric *Vidua regia* (Linnaeus).

Chapin, *loc.cit.*, demonstrated a size difference between southern African birds and those from the north and west of the range. Nicolai detected a wider range of variation than Chapin, this affecting both size, stance and colouration, his comments on the matter being as follows: "With regards to *Vidua macroura*, over much of its immense range, which stretches from the southern edge of the Sahara to the southernmost parts of the Cape, *Estrilda astrild* has been shown beyond any doubt to be its host. However, throughout large areas in the north of its range *E. astrild* does not occur, being there represented by the closely related *E. troglodytes*, which appears to replace *astrild* as the host species, as suspected in the first instance by Neunzig (1929). Pintailed Whydahs imported (to Western Germany) from western (Senegal) and southern (Rhodesia) Africa show distinct structural differences. The southern African birds are substantially larger, have got a somewhat different shape and carriage of the tail, and the female and non-breeding dress (of the male) are differently coloured. *V. macroura*, therefore, does not seem to be such a uniform species after all, but like others to have formed subspecies if not different species. These hardly differ in the case of ♂♂ in nuptial dress, but are distinguishable on size, wing-length and in the female (and non-breeding male) dresses."

Material of this relatively common parasitic finch in the collections of southern African museums is insufficient for an appraisal of the geographically significant variation as a whole, but is comprehensive enough for certain decisions to be drawn in respect of the variation exhibited by the populations occurring in southern, central and eastern Africa.

In the case of males in nuptial dress, there is no taxonomically significant variation in wing-length in the populations resident in the South African Sub-Region and further north in Africa: from Angola and southern Zaïre, east to Kenya and Tanzania. Such variation as can be appreciated appears to be individual in the case of the presence or absence of a black interramal spot, or irregular in the case of tail-length. Some of the populations present in Tanzania, Malawi and north-eastern and eastern Zambia have males with distinctly shorter tails when in nuptial dress than in those from further south or west in the continent: longest central rectrices 220 and below, *versus* 220 - 280mm. and above. In such shorter tailed birds, the rectrices are also appreciably narrower. Dr. H. E. Wolters of the Zoologisches Forschungsinstitut und Museum Alexander Koenig, Bonn, who kindly investigated this character on my behalf, reports that he believes this particular variable to have a distribu-

tional pattern of mosaic type, and, accordingly, to have severely limited worth in arranging populations into acceptable racial taxa. In so far as South African Region breeding males are concerned, it can be unequivocally stated that none examined was found to be of the short-tailed form.

Turning to specimens in non-breeding dress, and utilizing only those in freshly moulted condition (late April - June), it can be readily demonstrated that the populations present locally in the South West Arid District are bright and extensively pale tawny over the pileum, with narrow lateral coronal streaks, and the rest of the upper-parts pale and sandy, the black shaft-streaking narrow. The range of such sandy dorsalled birds is from South West Africa and the northern Cape, east to south-western Zambia, the Tete district of Moçambique, the plateaux of Rhodesia and the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State. In the more mesic immediate south-east, east and north of the species' range the populations are demonstrably duller, more saturated, and less sandy dorsally, with heavier and blacker streaking, and duller, more wood brown, crowned, with broader and more proximally extended lateral coronal streaks. Populations of this darker facies range from the eastern Cape, Natal and Zululand, north in the eastern coastal lowlands to East Africa, and certainly west to northern Zambia, southern Zaïre and Angola. As this is the same facies as is present in the moist highlands of central Angola (hereunder designated as the restricted type-locality of *Fringilla macroura* Pallas, 1764), they will represent the nominate subspecies in any arrangement of the populations of this parasitic finch into subspecific taxa. Arising from these findings based on birds in fresh non-breeding dress, two acceptable groupings of populations can be differentiated in the southern, central and eastern sectors of the Ethiopian Region.

In studying the polytypic status of the Pintailed Whydah, consideration requires to be given to its extensive synonymy. The three Linnaean synonyms: *Emberiza vidua*, *E. serena* and *E. principalis*, all of 1766, are based on the same literary sources as Pallas's *Fringilla macroura* of 1764, and are absolute synonyms of it and need not be further considered here. As for the other names currently in synonymy, one or two may assume importance in future studies, and these are briefly considered as follows:

(a) *Vidua erythrorhyncha* Swainson, 1837: Senegal

Available for West and northern African elements of the species averred to differ from those from the southern and eastern parts of

the range on the grounds of smaller size, probably more frequently present and extensive black over the chin in breeding males, and other minutiae (*vide* Shelley, *Birds of Africa*, vol. iv, 1905, pp. 17, 18, Reichenow, *Die Vögel Afrikas*, vol. iii, 1905, p. 218, Chapin, *loc.cit.*, and Nicolai, *loc.cit.*).

(b) *Vidua fuliginosa* Lichtenstein, 1854

Nomen nudum (*vide* Reichenow, *Die Vögel Afrikas*, vol. iii, 1905, p. 218).

(c) *Vidua decora* Hartlaub, 1862: Angola

Described on the basis of smaller size (than in *V.macroura*) and the absence of a black interramal patch in the adult breeding male. Study of the material of *V.m.macroura* in the Durban Museum collection reveals that only 35 per cent. have black over the upper chin, the balance of 65 per cent. being plain white.

The *Type* of *V.decora* is in the collection of the British Museum (Nat.Hist.), Tring, and the name is an absolute synonym of Pallas's *Fringilla macroura*, likewise described from Angola.

(d) *Estrellda carmelita* Hartlaub, 1868: Pietermaritzburg, Natal

Based on a juvenile example of *V.macroura* obtained by Thomas Ayres on the bank of a stream near Pietermaritzburg. The more than adequate material from the Pietermaritzburg and neighbouring districts brought together in recent years through my agency shows that *carmelita* is a synonym of *V.m.macroura* as herein defined.

(e) *Pseudospermestes microrhyncha* Reichenow, 1916: Buddu, western Tanzania at 1° 09' S., 31° 29' E.

Named on a juvenile of *V.macroura* (*vide* Chapin, *Auk*, vol. xl, 2, 1923, pp. 331, 332). A synonym of *V.m.macroura*, but placing could be altered in a future revision.

The information given above supports Nicolai's contention that the Pintailed Whydah is not a uniform specific entity but rather a composite of an as yet undetermined number of subspecies and gentes. Complete elucidation of this complex question necessitates the gathering together of a much more comprehensive material than is presently available to me in South Africa. However, as a preliminary step, the populations of southern, central and eastern Africa are arranged in two subspecies, as hereunder listed:

(i) **Vidua macroura macroura** (Pallas)

Fringilla macroura Pallas, in Vroeg's *Catalogue Raisonné*, Adumbrat., No. 144, 1764, p. 3: "East Indies", *errore*=Angola (*ex* Edwards (1760) and Brisson (1760)). Here further formally restricted to Huambo, Angola.

Freshly moulted non-breeding adult and immature male and female with coronal streak dull vinaceous Cinnamon (pl. xxix), the lateral pileum with broad blackish stripes, these extended caudad to the sides of the occiput, where tending to meet; dorsum broadly streaked dull black, the feathers broadly edged dull Tawny-Olive (same pl.).

Wings of 16 adult ♂♂ in non-breeding dress 70,5 - 76,5 (72,5), SD 1,62, SE 0,41, of 20 breeding ♂♂ 70,5 - 76,5 (73,2), SD 1,71, SE 0,38, of 15 ♀♀ 64 - 71 (66,5), SD 1,88, SE 0,49mm.

Material examined (non-breeding adults): 65.

Southern, central and eastern African range: South-western, southern and eastern Cape, Transkei, Natal and Zululand, Swaziland, eastern Transvaal, eastern Rhodesia, and Moçambique, excepting dry Tete district, to Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, Comoros, Zambia north of *arenosa*, southern Zaïre, and Angola (except extreme south). Currently, all other populations north to the southern limits of the Sahara and west to Senegambia may be placed with this subspecies.

(ii) **Vidua macroura arenosa**, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Barkly West, northern Cape. 24 May, 1910. Collected by H. L. Hare. In the collection of the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, T.M. Reg. No. 11 019.

Diagnosis: Differs from *V.m.macroura*, as described above, in the freshly moulted non-breeding adult and immature male and female having the coronal streak paler and more orange-tawny, less dull vinaceous (Ochraceous-Tawny (pl. xi)), the lateral head streaks narrower and not so extended caudad to the sides of the occiput, revealing a more expansive tawny surface over the pileum, the tawny also extending to the hind neck; dorsum paler and more yellowish sandy, the black shaft-streaking on the whole finer. In wings, edging to coverts and tertiaries paler and more sandy.

Measurements: Wings of 15 non-breeding ♂♂ 71 - 76 (73,3), SD 1,59, SE 0,41, of 15 breeding ♂♂ 72 - 77 (74,2), SD 1,25, SE 0,32, of 15 ♀♀ 66,5 - 71 (68,7), SD 1,50, SE 0,39mm.

Material examined (non-breeding ♂♀ only): 57 (*Cape:* Goodhouse, Prieska, Tarkastad, Kimberley, Barkly West; *Orange Free State:* Excelsior, Springfontein; *Lesotho:* Mamathe's (Teyateyaneng); upper Natal: Colenso, Ladysmith (both winter-taken); *Transvaal:* Potchefstroom, Rustenburg, Pretoria, Hammanskraal, Kendal, Waterberg; *Rhodesia:* Essexvale, Bulawayo, Matopos, Bembesi, Chikore, Melsetter, Selukwe, Enkeldoorn, Norton, Salisbury, Banti Forest Reserve, Borrowdale, etc.: *Moçambique:* Msussa, Tambara Fort, Maringua; *Zambia:* Masese (Sesheke), Chilanga).

Range: South West Africa, where present mainly in south, the valley of the Orange R., and north-eastern and northern Cape, the Orange Free State, adjacent lowland Lesotho, the Transvaal (except eastern lowveld), the plateau of Rhodesia, Tete district, Moçambique, northern and eastern Botswana, south-western Zambia, and parts of southern Angola. Winter-taken birds from Upper Natal are probably visitors from the interior.

Measurements of the Type: Wing (flattened) 76,5, tail 58mm.

Remarks: Bright, pale tawny head-top, with narrow black lateral streaks, and pale yellowish sandy upper-parts with finer black streaking distinguish this new race from *V.m.macroura*.

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