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It is suggested that because Blackbirds are so much more fond of insectivorous food than pellets, that the white-headed bird, after a long period on prepared food, continued by preference to eat an excess of this food over the moult period, thus producing the white plumage. The other Blackbirds, after varying periods on prepared food, all had a pre-moult and moult period under N conditions, when due to less preference for pellets they did sufficient natural feeding to produce normal plumage. It is suggested that similar conditions may occur in the wild, especially in urban areas where in winter in times of scarcity of live animal food a preference may be developed for prepared food. This preference, exercised in the period preceeding and during the moult, especially in late July, August and September, when in addition to other sources there are scraps from picnics in parks, camps and so forth, could well be the cause of white plumage in wild Blackbirds. Similar causes no doubt operate in many other species, especially urban species such as the House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus).

These studies were made at the World Bird Research Station, Glanton, Northumberland; the young birds were studied between 1953 and 1957 and the adults in 1957-1958.

Reference:

Rollin, N. (1953). "A Note on Abnormally Marked Song Thrushes and Blackbirds", *Trans. Nat. Hist. Soc. Northumberland and Durham*, Vol. X, pp. 183-184.

Review of the Races of the Cape Wagtail, *Motacilla capensis* L.

by DR. J. M. WINTERBOTTOM

Received, 23rd March, 1959

Five forms of *Motacilla capensis* L. have been described. In 1911, Ogilvie-Grant separated the Kenya and Uganda birds as *wellsi*; in 1929, Neumann divided off the Angola population as *simplicissima*; and in 1932, Roberts described new forms from South West Africa (*bradfieldi*) and Portuguese East Africa (*beirensis*).

We can dismiss the first two forms briefly. *M.c.wellsi*, with a deep black chest-band and a deep smoky colouration above, and *M.c.simplicissima*, in which the chest-band is reduced to a spot and sometimes virtually absent, are well-marked subspecies. There remain for consideration the two races described from southern Africa by Roberts.

M.c.bradfieldi was said to be darker than *capensis*, especially on the sides of the face. Roberts himself, however, in 1940, admitted the form was invalid when he stated "Three subspecies have been named from South Africa . . . ; but there are probably only two admissible within our limits, the typical western one and an eastern one . . . *beirensis*." Nevertheless, the name was revived by Vincent (1952) and sustained by McLachlan and Liversidge (1957). A series of five topotypical examples from Swakopmund seem to me, however, quite indistinguishable from *capensis*; and Macdonald (1957) appears to have come to similar conclusions.

M.c.beirensis has had a wider currency. It was said to be yellower below and faintly tinged with yellowish on the back. The latter character is not perceptible by me in either of the two topotypes I have seen. The amount of yellow on the underparts is an exceedingly variable character in *M.capensis*. From a long series of these Wagtails I picked out 13 which were especially yellow below. They included one of the two topotypes of *beirensis*; and others from the south-west Cape (4), northern Cape, Orange Free State, Natal, southern Portuguese East Africa (2), Southern Rhodesia (2) and Bechuanaland Protectorate—in other words, from the whole range of *M.capensis* south of the Zambezi and Kunene except the karoo and South West Africa.

It had also been suggested to me that Cape birds differed from those from Natal in being less olivaceous above and in having the crown and nape blue-grey. This, too, I am unable to confirm as a consistent character. I would agree, however, that there is a tendency for eastern birds (Natal and Portuguese East Africa) to be yellower below and less grey on the head than those from the Cape; but the differences do not begin to approach the "separate 75%" convention. I therefore conclude that there is only one form of this Wagtail recognisable from southern Africa, namely *Motacilla capensis capensis*.

Summarising the races:

1. *Motacilla capensis capensis* L.

Motacilla capensis Linnaeus, Syst. Nat., 12th ed., 1, 1766: 333—Cape of Good Hope.

Synonyms: *Psamophilus capensis beirensis* and *P.c.bradfieldi* Roberts, Ann. Tvl. Mus., 15, 1932: 29—Zimbiti (near Beira) and Swakopmund respectively.

Characters: Olivaceous grey above; white, washed to a variable extent with yellow below; with a complete and broad dark grey band across the chest.

Range: The whole of Africa south of the Zambezi and Kunene except the Chobe area of southern Bechuanaland and the Caprivi Strip. Meets the next race at Kasane, Chobe River, where both forms occur.

Measurements: 47 ♂♂: wing, 79–91, av. 85.5 mm.; tarsus, 18–25, average, 22.9; culmen, 18–20, average, 19.0.

42 ♀♀: wing, 77–86, average 82.6 mm.; tarsus, 17–25, average, 22.3; culmen, 17–20, average, 18.5.

Material examined: South-west Cape, 16; Eastern Cape, 23; Natal, 11; Karoo, 13; Northern Cape, 2; Highveld, 10; Bechuanaland Protectorate, 4; Southern Rhodesia, 15; South West Africa, 5; Portuguese East Africa, 12: total, 111.

2. *Motacilla capensis simplicissima* Neum.

Motacilla capensis simplicissima Neumann, Orn. Monatsb., 37, 1929: 176—Angola.

Characters: Similar to the preceding but with the chest-band reduced to a spot, sometimes entirely absent. One specimen from the eastern Kafue Flats shows a complete band, but much narrower than in *M.c.capensis*. It is assumed to be an intermediate. Males average slightly smaller than *capensis* males.

Range: Angola, the Caprivi Strip, Northern Rhodesia, Katanga and Nyasaland. The species is rare (perhaps only a straggler) in the middle Zambezi region and the subspecific status of these birds is unknown.

Measurements: 9 ♂♂: wing, 79–86, average, 81.9 mm.; tarsus, 22–26, average, 24.0; culmen, 15–20, average, 18.1.

7 ♀♀: wing, 80–84, average, 81.7 mm.; tarsus, 20–26, average, 23.7; culmen, 17–19, average, 18.8.

Material examined: Northern Rhodesia, 13; Bechuanaland Protectorate, 3: total, 16.

3. *Motacilla capensis wellsi* O.-Grant

Motacilla wellsi Ogilvie-Grant, Bull. B.O.C., 29, 1911: 30—Kigezi, S.W. Uganda.

Characters: Deep smoky black above; below, chest-band, usually complete but sometimes broken at the sides, and deep black.

Range: Kivu, Uganda, inland Kenya, northern Tanganyika.

Measurements: 2 ♂♂: wing, 82, 85 mm.; tarsus, 78; culmen, 18, 19.

2 ♀♀: wing, 82 mm.; tarsus, 24; culmen, 18, 20.

(No measurements of a series appear to have been published).

Material examined: Kenya, 1; Uganda, 2; Tanganyika, 1: total, 4.

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The Races of *Euplectes capensis* (L.) in the Cape Province

by DR. J. M. WINTERBOTTOM

Received 10th December, 1958

Four races of the Yellow Bishop, *Euplectes capensis* (L.), have been described from the southern part of its range; but both W. L. Sclater (1930) and J. Vincent (1952) have placed the two described by Roberts, namely *macrorhyncha* (*Euplectes capensis macrorhyncha* Roberts, 1919) and *knysnae* (*Xanthomelana capensis knysnae* Roberts, Ann. Tvl. Mus., 8, 1922: 266—Knysna) in the synonymy, leaving only two races, *E.c.capensis* and *E.c.approximans* (Cab.).

Recently collected material in the South African Museum from the area that might be supposed to be inhabited by *macrorhyncha* caused me to suspect that that race might be valid; and I therefore assembled