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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS XLIX

by

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SUBSPECIFIC VARIATION IN THE REDCRESTED KORHAAN *EUPODOTIS (LOPHOTIS) RUFICRISTA* (SMITH), 1836

The small Redcrested Korhaan or Bustard *Eupodotis (Lophotis) ruficrista* was described by Dr. Andrew Smith in his *Report of the Expedition for Exploring Central Africa*, 1836, p. 56, where it is stated to inhabit the country between Latakoo (Kuruman) and the Tropic of Capricorn. In his *Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa*, Aves, 1838, pl. iv (and text), the collecting locality is more precisely given by the author, when Smith states that the "species was first discovered in the vicinity of Latakoo," which may be accepted as the type-locality. The Redcrested Korhaan is frequently considered to be conspecific with two northern Ethiopian African bustards: *Eupodotis (L.) gindiana* Oustalet, 1881: between Somaliland and Zanzibar, East Africa=Bardera, Giuba R., south-western Somalia, according to Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Birds Eastern and North Eastern Africa*, vol. i, 1952, p. 323, and *Eupodotis (L.) savilei* Lynes, 1920: En Nahud, western Kordofan, Sudan, though Sclater, *Syst. Av. Aethiop.*, part i, 1924, p. 115, treats *ruficrista*, *gindiana* and *savilei* as three separate species, which latter arrangement appears to be nearer the truth of the matter.

The north-eastern *gindiana* differs in the adult male in lacking the leaden streak below the eye, in being paler and more creamy, less bluish grey, over the sides of the neck, and on the breast the white is

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more extensive. The black of the throat is extended down the centre of the lower fore-throat and mid-breast to link up with the black ventral surface, narrowly sundering the pectoral white. The crest is also markedly paler, more buffy (hence the vernacular name Buffcrested Bustard), less vinous than in *ruficrista*. The dorsum further exhibits markedly reduced cream-coloured sagittate markings, appearing more uniform, and in the wings the remiges have the inner vanes extensively pale greenish yellow, forming a pale yellow patch over the ventral wing when closed. In *ruficrista* this surface appears black. The north-western *savilei* is more rufous-sandy above than *gindiana*, the black over the throat in males not extending caudad to the lower fore-throat and breast, and the white on the breast again restricted laterally as in *ruficrista*, which it also resembles in the male having a grey smudge-mark below the eye. Bannerman, *Birds of Tropical West Africa*, vol. ii, 1931, p. 62, gives wings of *savilei* as ♂♂ 243 - 257, ♀♀ 240 - 246mm in ten measured, these measurements smaller than in the austral *ruficrista*. The forms *savilei* and *gindiana* (with its second race *E.(L.) g.hilgerti* (Neumann), 1907: Dabab, northern Somalia), while probably not in contact in the southern Sudan, are still not spatially remote in this region of north-eastern Africa. They may be considered a parapatric pair of allospecies rather than being treated as conspecific at this stage in our understanding of the relationships of the small African bustards of the sub-genus *Lophotis* Reichenbach, 1848.

As for the southern African Redcrested Korhaan, I can see no advantage in associating this form with *gindiana* and *savilei* owing to the wide range of characters separating the adult males and the extensive geographical gap between it and the two latter taxa. The southern populations of *gindiana* reach as far south as east-central Tanzania according to Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *loc.cit.*, while *ruficrista* ranges no further north-east than south-western and southern Zambia and about the Gorongosa National Park in southern Moçambique.

E.(L.) ruficrista is distributed from south-western and southern Angola and South West Africa, east to south-western and southern Zambia, Rhodesia, southern Moçambique, the Transvaal north of the highveld, Botswana, the northern Cape, eastern Swaziland, and eastern Zululand. It affects lightly to moderately densely wooded savanna with a good grass understorey, and, while quite numerous in some localities, tends to be highly local. At no time has it been suggested that the populations show anything in the nature of sub-specifically significant variation. A recent study reveals, however, that the accepted uniformity of the populations is an illusion, and

that in common with many other birds whose ranges extend from the xeric west of the South African Sub-Region to the mesic south-eastern coastal lowlands, the Redcrested Korhaan can be arranged in two subspecies, based on variation in the colouration of the upper-parts.

The xeric western populations of *ruficrista*, extending probably from south-western Angola, but certainly from the Kaokoveld, south to northern and eastern Great Namaqualand, South West Africa, the western Kalahari in Botswana, and the north-west of the northern Cape differ at above the accepted level of discrimination for subspecies from the populations occurring to the north-east and east in having the mantle, scapulars, tertials and adjacent wing-surfaces redder, more ochraceous-rusty, less dull earthen or stone-coloured. Such a pattern of colour variation is common to many plastic species with comparable distributions in the dry interior and far west of the South African Sub-Region.

A short series of *ruficrista* from Kuruman, the type-locality, shows that the two facies meet in this district of the northern Cape. Of four from Kuruman in the collection of the Durban Museum, one resembles the reddish backed western element, the others the eastern populations, with which latter, acting as first reviser, I here formally associate the nominate subspecies. Study of the original description of Smith's *Otis ruficrista* of 1836 at first suggested that the name might be more accurately assigned to the reddish backed western population, but the coloured figure by the artist George Ford in Smith's *Illustrations* (pl. iv of 1838) is clearly of the duller, more earthen brown, backed eastern populations, which are treated as the nominate subspecies in the following arrangement of this southern African bustard:

(a) **Eupodotis (Lophotis) ruficrista ochrofacies**, subsp.nov.

Type: ♂, adult. 109,5km from Stamprietfontein to Dordabis, central South West Africa. 3 May, 1959. Collected on Transvaal Museum Namib Expedition, 1959. In the collection of the Transvaal Museum, T.M.Reg.No: 29 806.

Diagnosis: Differs from nominate *ruficrista*, as defined below, in the adult female having the fore-throat and breast more washed with warm buffy (deep Pinkish Buff (pl. xxix)) in newly moulted condition, and taxonomically in both sexes having the ground to the dorsum and adjacent wing-surfaces paler and more ochraceous-rusty, less dull earthen or stone-coloured (Cinnamon (Ridgway (1912), pl. xxix), *versus* dull Saccardo's Umber (same pl.)), the dark

median surfaces to the pale buffy sagittate shaft-streaking and vermiculations also rather lighter and redder brown. Rump, upper tail-coverts and rectrices with rather coarser transverse vermiculations on a lighter ground. Similar ventrally and in size. The juvenile does not differ.

Measurements: Wings in 6 adult ♂♂ 264 - 272 (266,5), SD 3,50, culmens from base 42 - 47,5 (45,0), SD 2,47, tarsi (approx.) 74 - 92 (85,2), SD 6,13, tails 140 - 148 (144,0), SD 3,03, wings of 4 ♀♀ 248 - 256 (250,7), SD 3,59, culmens 42 - 49 (44,7), SD 2,99, tarsi (approx.) 73 - 86,5 (77,3), SD 6,16, tails 129 - 135 (133,2), SD 2,87mm.

Material examined: 10 (northern Cape: Kuruman; south-western Botswana: 96,5km N. of Boshu Bohulu Pan, 29km E. of Tshane; South West Africa: 109,5km Stamprietfontein - Dordabis, near Otjiwarongo, Warmquelle, Ohopoho).

Range: Northern Cape west of 23° E., western Kalahari Desert in Botswana (west of 23° E.), South West Africa, west and south of the Etosha Pan, north to the Kaokoveld. South-western Angola birds probably belong here.

Measurements of the Type: Wing (flattened) 265, culmen from base 44, tarsus c. 86, tail 142mm.

Remarks: Warm reddish brown or cinnamon upper-parts distinguish this western race.

(b) **Eupodotis (Lophotis) ruficrista ruficrista** (Smith)

Otis ruficrista A. Smith, *Rep. Exped. Expl. Centr. Afr.*, 1836, p. 56: "between Latakoo and the Tropic" = Kuruman, northern Cape.

Adult male with pileum dark bluish slate; on nape a lank crest of pinkish vinous decomposed feathers. Dorsum with ground dull Saccardo's Umber, or more vinaceous, the feathers marked with Pinkish Buff sagittate markings and heavily vermiculated; rump, upper tail-coverts and rectrices pale buffish grey, vermiculated with darker.

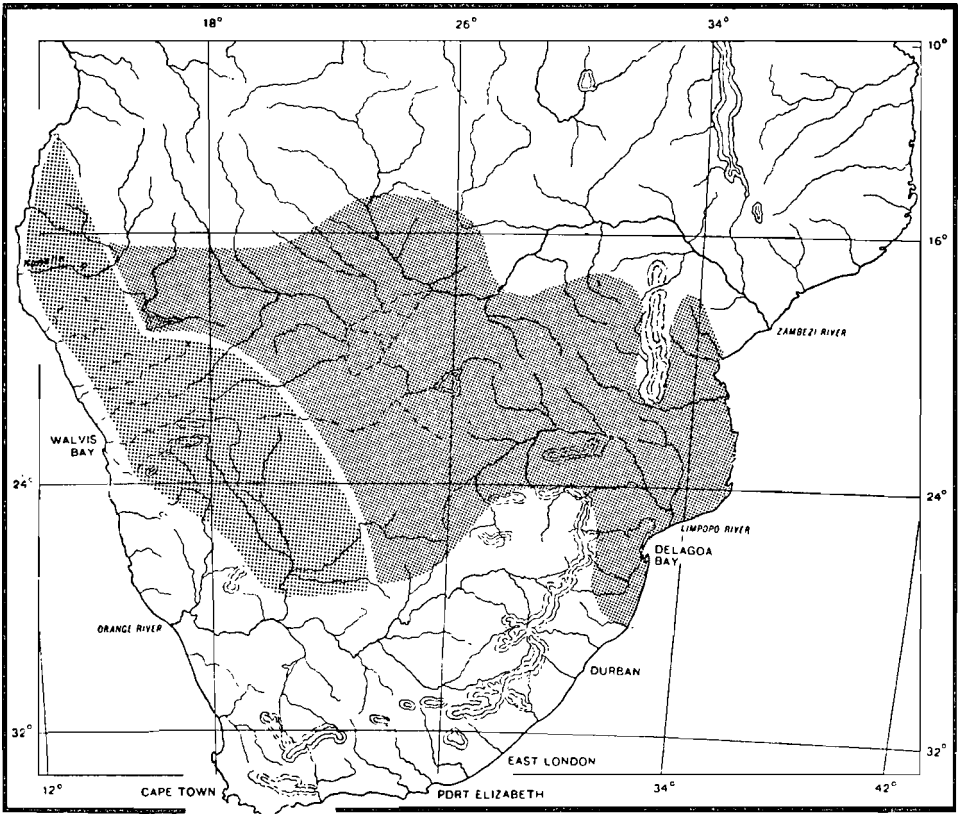
Adult female with pileum streaked Pinkish Buff and dark brown; nuchal crest vestigial. Rest of dorsal surface as in male. Ground to fore-throat Vinaceous-Buff (pl. xl).

Material examined: 25 (northern South West Africa: Etosha Pan region, Grootfontein; Botswana: Dciua (20° S., 21° 15' E.), Chawe Pan, near Tshane, 45km E. of Sekhuma Pan, Kuki/Makalamabedi, Sukwane, 16km N. of Nata; Rhodesia: Deka, Tshabema (Wankie), Fishan (Sabi/Lundi confl.); Zambia: 56km W. of Nangweshi; Transvaal: Newington; Swaziland: Big Bend; northern Cape: Kuruman).

Range: North-east and east of last in southern Angola, Etosha Pan region, Ovamboland and north-east of South West Africa, Caprivi Strip, Botswana (except south-west), northern Cape east of last, south-western and southern Zambia, Rhodesia, Transvaal north of the highveld, southern Moçambique, eastern Swaziland, and eastern Zululand, south to Umfolozi.

Remarks: Dull earthen or stone-coloured ground to upper-parts distinguishes present race.

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MAP I

Sketch-map showing the ranges of the two subspecies of the Redcrested Korhaan

Left: *Eupodotis (Lophotis) ruficrista ochrofacies* Clancey
 Right: *Eupodotis (Lophotis) ruficrista ruficrista* (Smith)