



<http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/>

Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club.

London :The Club,1893-

<http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/46639>

v.89-90 (1969-1970): <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/126847>

Page(s): Page 124, Page 125, Page 126, Page 127, Page 128, Page 129

Contributed by: Natural History Museum Library, London

Sponsored by: Natural History Museum Library, London

Generated 15 April 2015 8:54 AM

<http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/pdf4/038480700126847>

This page intentionally left blank.

photograph illustrates the nest in what I feel is a position close to its original form. It (N63.1) is a bulky cup made mostly of many leaves, both large and broad and thin and long. The broad leaves measure up to 125mm. long by 35mm. wide. A few of the thin, long leaves measure up to, and in excess of, 160mm. by 16mm. Around the outer leaves is a sparse mesh of creeper tendrils. These tendrils (which do not have enough characters to be identified) are more profuse on one side of the nest and rise above the cup in a thick rope-like knot. Possibly this was part of a live vine that the bird used for material and support at the nest site.

There are a few small odd pieces of moss and fern leaf around the outside of the structure, mostly near the rim of the cup. The nest cup is lined with a thin layer of fine black hair-like fibres, possibly fern rootlets, which measure c. 200mm. in length and c. 0.5mm. in thickness. There are a number of dried droppings in the bottom of the cup.

The exterior measurements are 138mm. in diameter and 111mm. deep, not including the vine "rope". The interior measurements, which are rough approximations due to the tying of the nest, are c. 83 mm. in diameter and 66mm. deep. Unfortunately there is no information regarding the situation of the nest or the habitat.

I am grateful to Frank Greenaway and Tim Parmenter for the photograph.

References:

Gilliard, E. T. 1969. *Birds of Paradise and Bower-birds*. London.

Ogilvie-Grant, W. R. 1915. Report on the birds collected by the British Ornithologists' Union Expedition to Dutch New Guinea. *Ibis, Jubilee Supp.* no.2.

The European Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (L.) in southern Africa

by R. P. Borrett and H. D. Jackson

Received 23rd June, 1970

Introduction: There are very few records of the European Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (L.) in southern Africa. Alexander (1900: 87) supposedly obtained a male in winter plumage at Zumbo on 16th January 1899. Wilde secured one at Salisbury in 1915, but this specimen was overlooked by Priest (1935), Roberts (1940) and Vincent (1952), and was not reported in the literature until 1957 (Smithers, Irwin and Paterson). Brooke (1959) reported seeing a solitary bird at Barberspan in the western Transvaal on 22nd October 1958. A specimen taken on 22nd December 1963, by von Maltzahn (1964) near Sissekab in South West Africa was identified as *Oenanthe oenanthe* by Prof. J. M. Winterbottom; von Maltzahn also records that he saw two more a week later. Vernon (pers. comm.) saw two on 27th December 1964, at Rainham Farm, Salisbury. Finally, Jackson (1969) reported seeing two, one in partial breeding plumage, on 17th December 1968, at Sua Spit in Botswana, ca. 20° 52' S., 26° 12' E.

Alexander's record has been rejected by Benson, Brooke, Dowsett and Irwin (1970); this specimen cannot be found and there is good reason for believing that it may have been a young *O. pileata*. We have examined the specimens taken by Wilde and by von Maltzahn and find that von Maltzahn's specimen is an immature *O. pileata*; we are obliged therefore to reject this record also. Until recently then Wilde's Salisbury specimen provided the

only material evidence to suggest that *Oenanthe oenanthe* crosses the Zambezi River on migration. A further three specimens have now come to hand, all taken in Rhodesia, so this opportunity is taken of reviewing the status of this species in southern Africa.

Material: Details of the four Rhodesian specimens are now given. All are in the collection of the National Museum of Rhodesia in Bulawayo.

1. No. NM.70564, ♂ collected in 1915 (exact date not known) by C. Wilde at Salisbury, 17° 49' S., 31° 03' E., 1525 metres a.s.l.
2. No. NM. 66882, ? sex, collected on 27th October 1968, by E. W. Lowden Stoole at Tawstock Farm, Chakari, 18° 06' S., 29° 50' E., 1110 metres a.s.l.
3. No. NM. 70566, ♂ collected on 22nd December 1968, by R. P. Borrett at Rainham Farm, Salisbury, 17° 46' S., 30° 53' E., 1430 metres a.s.l.
4. No. NM. 70567, ♂ collected on 29th December 1968, by H. D. Jackson at Retreat Farm, Salisbury, 17° 55' S., 31° 02' E., 1490 metres a.s.l.

Measurements (in millimetres) and weights (in grammes)

are:

	1	2	3	4
<i>Wing (chord)</i>	98	93	95	97
<i>Tail</i>	56	57	57	58
<i>Culmen (to skull)</i>	20	20	20	18
<i>Tarsus</i>	28	27	28	27
<i>Weight</i>	—	—	27	25

Plumage and moult: We have compared these specimens with the plumage descriptions of nominate *O. o. oenanthe* (L.) (Witherby in Witherby, Jourdain, Ticehurst and Tucker, 1938: 147–149), and with 54 skins on loan from various institutions; 40 were taken in East Africa, 5 in Zambia, 3 in Malawi and 6 in Europe.

The Tawstock specimen could not be sexed at the time of skinning, but from its plumage we consider it to be a male in post-juvenal plumage. The only signs of moult appear on the mantle, where there are a few feathers in pin; thus moult into first nuptial dress is just commencing in late October. The brown remiges and black ear-coverts of the other three specimens are diagnostic; they are also first year males. The Rainham bird (22nd December) shows very heavy moult of all the contour feathers, while that from Retreat (29th December) has almost attained the first nuptial dress, only a few feathers still growing out. Wilde's specimen shows no sign of moult and in appearance differs from the Retreat specimen only in the extent to which abrasion has exposed the grey of the upperparts; we presume from this, and from an examination of the moult pattern in the other material available, that it must have been collected in February or early March. It is evident from our study that the prenuptial body moult commences in November/December, is heaviest in December/January, and is complete by early February. Witherby's statement (in Witherby *et al.*, *loc. cit.*) that the prenuptial moult takes place in January/February seems to refer more correctly to the completion of moult rather than to the active moult phase.

According to Witherby *et al.* (*loc. cit.*) and Stresemann and Stresemann (1966: 37–38) the juvenile remiges of *O. oenanthe* are retained for more than a year until the first nuptial plumage is lost in July/August. The four specimens from Rhodesia fit this pattern; all the remiges are present, fully grown and juvenile. However, a first year male, taken on 6th March 1933 by R. E.

Moreau at Olmolog on the west side of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, has three adult remiges, the innermost secondary on the left wing and the inner two on the right wing. Of the 16 first year males examined, this is the only one which shows any adult remiges. Vaurie (1949: 14) has previously noted that males occasionally replace the two innermost secondaries during the pre-nuptial moult.

Witherby *et al.* go on to say that the juvenile rectrices too are not replaced at the time of the first moult but are retained until lost with the remiges a year later. Adult rectrices have a black sub-terminal bar edged terminally with white, and so are easily distinguished from a juvenile's which have a brown sub-terminal bar edged with buff. We find that adult rectrices appear in all four Rhodesian specimens at random as follows (numbering centrifugally): Tawstock, L2 and L4 (L3 is damaged, L5 and L6 are juvenile, L1 and R1-6 are missing, apparently shot out); Rainham, R1 (remainder juvenile); Retreat, L1, L2, and R5 (remainder juvenile); and Wilde's specimen L2 (remainder juvenile). All adult rectrices are fully grown, so were apparently acquired at the time of the post-juvenal moult. Exactly half of the 16 first year males examined show one or more adult rectrices.

It is remarkable that so many adult flight feathers occur in the sample of first year males examined, and we believe the incidence to be too high for these to be regeneration feathers replacing feathers lost accidentally.

Taxonomy: It is clear from the measurements given by Witherby *et al.* (1938: 150) and by Mackworth-Praed and Grant (1951: 236) for *O. oenanthe leucorrhoa* that the wing lengths of the Rhodesian specimens are too short to fit this taxon. It has been suggested by Benson (1956: 602) that two of the specimens from Zambia may be *O. o. libanotica*, but more recently Benson *et al.* (1970) have reconsidered the matter and concluded that they should be referred to the nominate form. We have examined them and agree with their findings; in fact, we now follow Ripley (in Mayr and Paynter, 1964: 124) who sinks *libanotica* in the synonymy of nominate *oenanthe*. The Rhodesian specimens are thus referred to the nominate form.

Status in southern Africa: Ripley (in Mayr and Paynter, *loc. cit.*) states that *O. o. oenanthe* winters *inter alia* in Rhodesia; the material recently collected lends some weight to this statement, but it can as yet hardly be said that it is present regularly anywhere in central or southern Africa. It is quite clear that the wintering grounds are well to the north of the Zambezi river, mainly in East Africa, and that it is only the occasional vagrant that appears in southern Africa. These vagrants rarely reach the eighteenth parallel. Often it is the young birds of a species that wander furthest on migration and in this case again it would appear that most of the vagrants are first year birds. This is unfortunate because of the ready confusion in the field with immature *O. pileata*; it makes the evaluation of sight records difficult and we would urge extreme caution in field identification.

Vernon's (pers. comm.) detailed description, made at the time, leaves us in no doubt as to the correctness of his identification of the birds seen at Rainham Farm, so we have no hesitation in drawing upon his field notes when discussing habitat and behaviour later in this paper.

Jackson's record (*op. cit.*) from Botswana is also considered satisfactory since one of the birds seen was in partial adult male plumage, and since he collected a similar bird on Retreat Farm within a fortnight of seeing the birds in Botswana. Brooke's Transvaal record (*op. cit.*) is less satisfactory since it concerns the plumage phase most likely to be confused with *O. pileata*. Von

Maltzahn's sight records (*op. cit.*) cannot be considered, in view of the specimen collected being *O. pileata*.

We consider the status of *Oenanthe oenanthe* in southern Africa to be that of an occasional vagrant, perhaps penetrating further south in some years than in others.

Habitat and behaviour: Lowden Stoole (*in litt.*) records that the Tawstock specimen was collected in an open area of some four acres, consisting mainly of old cattle pens. Although situated near some Miombo woodland the pens were quite bare, the only vegetation being clumps of dry grass and weeds with patches of bare red earth. There were no stones but the concrete troughs and fence rails of the pens provided the bird with elevated perches from which to view the approach of an intruder. It was first seen on 19th October, and subsequently on the 24th, 26th and 27th, when it was collected; on each occasion it flew up from the floor of the pens to perch on a fence-rail. Apart from one mid-afternoon observation, these sightings were all made in the early hours of the morning; the bird not being found in the heat of the day. It did not appear to visit the nearby pastures of freshly-mown *Chloris gayana*; in our opinion this would be due to the absence of suitable perches and bare patches in such habitat. It was not heard to make any sound or seen to indulge in any wing or tail flicking.

The Rainham specimen was collected in an open area of short grassland with bare patches and numerous low termite mounds. It was first seen at 11.30 a.m. on 22nd December, on the shaded face of an outcrop of balancing granite boulders. On being flushed it flew from one termite mound to another, frequently flicking its wings and bobbing its tail; it was rather wary, not permitting a close approach. At times it was seen feeding from the top of a termite mound and was heard giving a low warble and also a call note reminiscent of the "chack" note of a Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*. According to Tucker (in Witherby *et al.*, 1938: 146) there are no records of song in Africa, and Mackworth-Praed and Grant (1963: 142) say "a silent bird in Africa". It appeared to favour the vicinity of the rock outcrop, the impression gained being that it was deliberately seeking shade in the heat of the day.

Vernon (pers. comm.) saw his birds in the same area of Rainham Farm where Borrett collected his specimen four years later, also noting both the song, described as a warbler-like undertone, and the call, given as "stsk tsk", reminding him of the Familiar Chat *Cercomela familiaris*.

The Retreat specimen was collected in an area of recently cleared woodland, with tree stumps and small piles of brushwood remaining, the only other perches available being small scattered granite boulders and termite mounds. This bird was difficult to approach, flying from perch to perch and occasionally dropping to the ground, but nevertheless remaining within an area of some five acres; this reluctance to leave the "territory" was noted in the Rainham bird also. At Retreat a second individual of *O. oenanthe* was present in the same field and also in an adjoining field, which was fallow, very open, and with only a few perches available in the form of dry weeds and clods of earth. This bird, which was generally pale brown in colour, had been seen there a week earlier, when it displayed similar behaviour to the one collected. We were particularly struck by its "nervous" actions and extreme wariness compared to that of the local Capped Wheatear *O. pileata*, which were occupying the same field a few months earlier.

It is clear that *O. oenanthe* is partial to open areas in which to winter, just as it prefers such a habitat during the breeding season (Tucker, p.145, and

Jourdain, p.146, in Witherby *et al.*, 1938). We believe, however, that perches are essential in the habitat, even though they be no more than minor prominences on the landscape. Such habitats are often the result of human activity and most of the birds we have found have been within sight and sound of farm buildings; even in Botswana the two seen by Jackson were only a few yards from the buildings of a weather station, the only habitation for many miles.

The low warble uttered by the Rainham birds appears to be the first record of the species singing in Africa; otherwise the behaviour in general observed in Rhodesia agrees well with that described by Tucker (*loc. cit.*) for the breeding grounds in Britain.

Food: A cursory examination of the stomach contents of the Tawstock specimen revealed a predominant number of apterous termites plus ants and other small insects (Lowden Stooles, *in litt.*). A more detailed analysis of the stomach contents of the Rainham and Retreat specimens provided the following data:

Rainham: Isoptera, 102 heads of worker termites and one soldier termite. Coleoptera, one dung beetle (Scarabaeidae) and numerous thoraxes and legs of beetles. Many small pieces of grit and chitinous fragments.

Retreat: Diplopoda, a few segments of one millipede. Coleoptera, 13 small grey and two very small brown weevils (Curculionidae). Hymenoptera, two heads of bees. Small amount of very fine grit. Numerous chitinous fragments, mainly from Curculionidae.

The data on food adds little to Jourdain's (*loc. cit.*) summary, other than the Isoptera which are of course absent from the British Isles.

Acknowledgments: Comparative material was loaned by the British Museum (Natural History) (per Dr. D. W. Snow), the Durban Museum (per Mr. P. A. Clancey), the National Museum, Bulawayo (per Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin), the Transvaal Museum (per Mr. O. P. M. Prozesky) and the South African Museum (per Prof. J. M. Winterbottom). The original data on Wilde's specimen were traced by the Director, National Museums of Rhodesia, Mr. R. H. N. Smithers. The Acting Curator of the Queen Victoria Museum, Salisbury, Mr. M. A. Raath, provided us with study facilities and assisted in other ways. We are pleased to acknowledge the assistance rendered by these institutions and their officers.

Mr. E. W. Lowden Stooles and Mr. C. J. Vernon kindly allowed us to quote from their field notes. The identification of stomach contents of the specimens collected was carried out by Mr. K. J. Wilson of the Rhodesia Department of Research and Specialist Services. Dr. R. M. Harwin and Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin commented on the draft of the paper, and assistance was also rendered by Mr. C. W. Benson. To these people too we extend our thanks for their considerable help.

Summary: The status of *Oenanthe oenanthe* in southern Africa is reviewed in the light of three new specimens recently collected in Rhodesia and it is concluded that the main wintering grounds lie well to the north of the Zambezi river, the species only occasionally reaching southern Africa, when vagrants, usually young birds, wander further afield. The specimens are referred to the nominate subspecies.

Plumage and moult are discussed. The prenuptial body moult takes place

in December/January. Adult rectrices appear at random in eight of the sixteen first year males examined, and adult remiges in one of them; it is considered unlikely that these have been replaced feathers lost accidentally, but that the prenuptial moult in first year males is often not confined to the body feathers.

Habitat preference, food preference and behaviour in Rhodesia are discussed and found to be similar to that recorded for the British Isles, except that vocalisation in the winter quarters is noted for the first time.

References:

- Alexander, B. 1900. An ornithological expedition to the Zambezi river. *Ibis* Ser. 7, 6(21): 70-109.
- Benson, C. W. 1956. New or unusual records from Northern Rhodesia. *Ibis* 98: 595-605.
- Benson, C. W., Brooke, R. K., Dowsett, R. J. and Irwin, M. P. S. 1970. Notes on the birds of Zambia. Part V. *Arnoldia, Rhod.* 4(40): 59pp.
- Brooke, R. K. 1959. Avian highlights of a journey across southern Africa. *Ostrich* 30: 82-83.
- Jackson, H. D. 1969. Notes on a collection of birds from the Khwae river in Botswana. *Arnoldia, Rhod.* 4(24): 1-9.
- Mackworth-Praed, C. W. and Grant, C. H. B. 1951. On the races of the Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (Linnaeus) occurring in Eastern Africa. *Ibis* 93: 234-236.
- 1963. *Birds of the southern third of Africa*, Vol. 2. Longmans, London.
- Mayr, E. and Paynter, R. A. (Eds.) 1964. *Check-list of birds of the world*, Vol. 10. Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Priest, C. D. 1935. *The birds of Southern Rhodesia*, Vol. 3. William Clowes, London.
- Roberts, A. 1940. *The birds of South Africa*. Central News Agency, Johannesburg.
- Smithers, R. H. N., Irwin, M. P. S. and Paterson, M. L. 1957. *A check list of the birds of Southern Rhodesia*. Rhodesian Ornithological Society, Cambridge University Press.
- Stresemann, E. and Stresemann, V. 1966. Die Mauser der Vogel. *J. Ornithol.*, 107: 1-53. (English translation of the General Section prepared by Susan Kalma).
- Vaurie, C. 1949. Notes on the bird genus *Oenanthe* in Persia, Afghanistan and India. *Amer. Mus. Novit.* 1425: 1-47.
- Vincent, J. 1952. *A check list of the birds of South Africa*. Cape Times, Parow.
- von Maltzahn, H. 1964. Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe* (L)) in South West Africa. *Ostrich* 35: 123-124.
- Witherby, H. F., Jourdain, F. C. R., Ticehurst, N. F. and Tucker, B. W. 1938. *The handbook of British birds*, Vol. 2. Witherby, London.

On *Prodotiscus insignis* (Cassin) parasitising *Zosterops abyssinica* Guérin

by G. R. Cunningham-van Someren

Received 3rd April, 1970

On 23rd February, 1970, a nearly completed cup nest of *Zosterops abyssinica flavilateralis* Reichenow was found about four feet up in a coffee tree near indigenous forest at Karen near Nairobi, Kenya. On 25th February the first egg was laid and a second on the 26th, both being light blue.

The writer was away from Karen from 26th February to 12th March but on the 13th visited the nest to find a single very small chick which was obviously only a few days old and was not that of a *Zosterops*. A thorough search around the tree and in the vicinity was made but no evidence was found of *Zosterops* eggs or chicks or other egg shell.

The chick was virtually naked brownish orange in colour with a pale yellow bill and orange gape. There was no evidence of mandibular or maxillary hooks. Traces of emerging quill were present on the back, head, flanks, wing and tail.

The nest was inspected daily to watch progress of the nestling whose growth was very rapid and by 22nd March bursting quills were present on