



DURBAN MUSEUM NOVITATES

Issued by the Durban Museum, Durban, South Africa

Vol. V

15th APRIL, 1957

Part I

MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS

VIII

by

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THE SOUTH AFRICAN RACES OF THE ASHY FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa cinerea* (CASSIN)

The Ashy Flycatcher *Muscicapa cinerea* (Cassin) is a widely distributed species of forest and wooded savanna country, which ranges from the Upper Guinea forests, the southern Sudan, Uganda, Kenya Colony and southern Somalia south in the west to Angola and northern South-West Africa, and in the east to Natal and the eastern Cape Province. Four races are currently recognised by workers, two of which occur within South African sub-continental limits, these being *M. c. caerulescens* (Hartlaub), 1865: Natal, and *M. c. cinereola* Finsch and Hartlaub, 1870: Usaramo, Dar-es-Salaam district, eastern Tanganyika Territory, of which *M. c. kukuuyuensis* (van Someren), 1921: Kyambu, Kenya Colony, is now generally conceded to be a synonym. Roberts, *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 278, proposed the recognition of three races from within our limits as follows: *M. c. pondoensis* (Gunning and Roberts), 1911: Port St. Johns, Pondoland, restricted to Pondoland; *M. c. caerulescens* of Natal to the eastern Transvaal, and *M. c. kikuyuensis* of Ngamiland, Southern Rhodesia and southern Portuguese East Africa. This arrangement is not adopted by Vincent, who, in his recent *Check List of the Birds of South Africa*, 1952, p. 66, follows Sclater, *Systema Avium Æthiopicarum*, part ii, 1930, p. 401, in synonymizing *M. c. pondoensis* with *M. c. caerulescens*. In two recent communications (*Annals of the Natal Museum*, vol. xii, 2, 1952, pp. 256-257, and *Durban Museum Novitates*, vol. iv, 13, 1955, pp. 206-207) I have indicated that the South African populations are in fact divisible

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into three races as suggested by Roberts, *loc. cit.*, but that the nomenclature used for these by that worker is in need of adjustment.

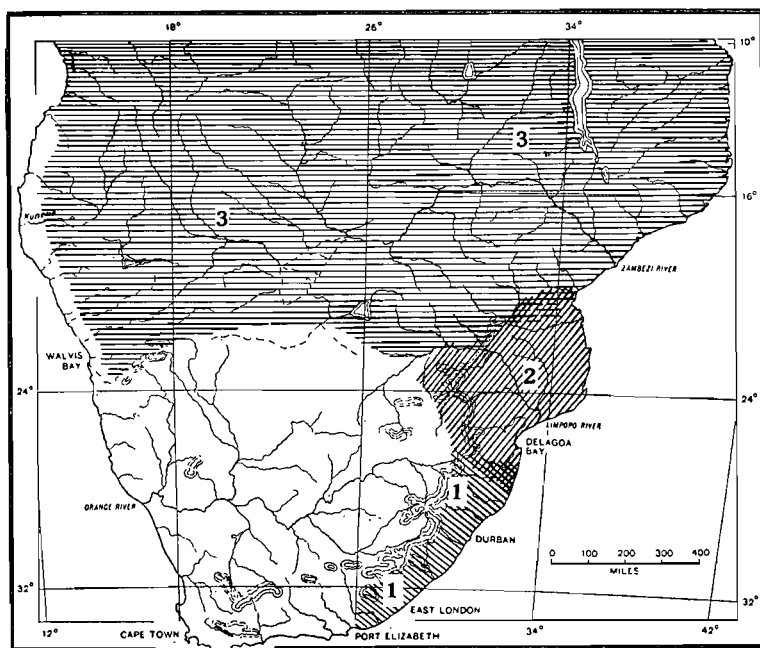
Through the kindness of the Directors of the East London Museum, the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo, and the Museu Dr. Alvaro de Castro, Lourenço Marques, I have been able to study a comprehensive material of the South African sub-continental populations of this flycatcher. For the loan and gift of material of the East African races, *M. c. cinereola* and *M. c. kikuyuensis*, I am grateful to my colleague, Mr. John G. Williams, Ornithologist of the Coryndon Museum, Nairobi, and I am equally indebted to Dr. A. L. Rand of the Chicago Natural History Museum, U.S.A., who has graciously placed material from the van Someren collection now housed in that institution at my disposal for study. Both Mr. R. H. N. Smithers, Director of the National Museums of Southern Rhodesia, and Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin, of Bulawayo, have studied part of my assembled material and have offered useful suggestions.

At the southern extremity of its range, in the eastern Cape Province, Pondoland, Natal and Zululand, the Ashy Flycatcher is generally to be found in moist forest and riparian cover. It is particularly fond of small wooded valley bottoms, complete with dark shade-trees and sequestered glades. The ample material now available from the entire area shows that Pondoland birds are not darker grey than those of Natal, as claimed by Gunning and Roberts, *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, vol. iii, 2, 1911, p. 114, when they described the Pondo population as *Alseonax caerulescens pondoensis*, the *Type* being a specimen collected by Swinny at Port St. Johns on the 21st July, 1909 (T.M. No. 7288). Forty specimens from the area extending from the valley of the Great Fish River in the eastern Cape Province through coastal Pondoland, Natal and Zululand, as far as Ingwavuma in the southern Lebombo Mountains, all clearly belong to one well-marked race, the earliest name for which is *Muscicapa caerulescens* (Hartlaub), 1865: Natal. *M. c. caerulescens* is very constant throughout most of its range, as given above, but in north-eastern Zululand the influence of the next race to be considered (*M. c. vulturina*) is observable in a marked incidence of rather lighter-coloured birds (*vide* Clancey, *loc. cit.*, 1952). *M. c. caerulescens* is also smaller than the races occurring to the northward, the wings of 12 ♂♂ measuring 71.5–79 mm., 8 ♀♀ 70–74.5 mm.

North of *M. c. caerulescens* occur populations which have received very indecisive and indifferent treatment at the hands of various

systematic workers. The birds of the populations resident in northern Swaziland, eastern and northern Transvaal and most of southern Portuguese East Africa favour a rather drier biotope to the austral race just dealt with, occurring mainly in light riparian cover in comparatively dry wooded savannas. When compared carefully with toptotypical *M. c. caeruleascens* they are found to differ sub-specifically on account of the much less dark grey upper-parts, and ventrally they are altogether whiter, with less dark olivaceous grey clouding on the breast, sides of the body and flanks. In size they range rather larger than most *M. c. caeruleascens*, the wings of 16 ♂♂ measuring 73.5–82 mm., 9 ♀♀ 71–78.5 mm. When compared with a good East African series of *M. c. cinereola* they are found to be slightly paler and less bluish on the upper-parts, though the difference in many instances is slight. On the ventral surfaces, however, they reveal their discreteness, being much whiter and less heavily washed with grey on the breast, sides of the body and flanks, but there is absolutely no difference whatever in size, the wings of 11 East African ♂♂ of *M. c. cinereola* measuring 73.5–82 mm., 10 ♀♀ 70.5–78 mm. The bill is appreciably finer, and less coarse and broad basally. Most workers have considered these populations to be either similar to toptotypical *M. c. caeruleascens* or else intermediate between that race and *M. c. cinereola*. I believe them to be distinct enough to bear a subspecific name of their own, and for the new race the name *M. c. vulturina* mihi is introduced below.

North and north-west of the range of *M. c. vulturina* occur birds which are lighter and less bluish grey on the upper-parts, and more uniformly whitish below, the breast, sides of body and flanks exhibiting less clear grey. The wings of such birds are also less blackish, and they range larger in size, viz. 18 ♂♂ have wings 79–86 mm., 14 ♀♀ 75–82 mm. Populations of birds exhibiting such characters range throughout northern South-West Africa (including the Caprivi Strip), northern Bechuanaland, southern Rhodesia and some northern districts of southern Portuguese East Africa. Extralimitally, also in southern Angola, Northern Rhodesia, the southern Belgian Congo, Nyasaland and northern Portuguese East Africa. These birds have been consistently identified by workers with those of equatorial East Africa. Comparison between a series of 48 specimens from the regions just listed and one of 21 specimens of the true *M. c. cinereola* (= *M. c. kikuyuensis*) from Jubaland (southern Somalia), Kenya Colony and the north-eastern districts of Tanganyika Territory, shows that the currently held opinion that all are *M. c. cinereola* is incorrect. *M. c. cinereola*, *sens. strict.*, is darker



MUSCICAPA CINEREA (CASSIN)

Sketch-map showing the approximate ranges of the southern African races of the Ashy Flycatcher:

1. *M. c. caerulea* (Hartlaub)
2. *M. c. vulturina* Clancey
3. *M. c. impavida* Clancey

and bluer above, blacker on the wings and more heavily clouded with grey on the under-parts. In wing-length it is also rather smaller (see above), and the bill is usually rather broader and coarser. The evidence gathered as a result of this study suggests that *M. c. cinereola* is a race confined to eastern equatorial Africa in southern Somalia, Kenya Colony and most of Tanganyika Territory, and that the pallid populations of the Ashy Flycatcher occurring in south-central Africa belong to a further undescribed race. This I formally describe below as *M. c. impavida* mihi, the *Type* being from near the Victoria Falls in western Southern Rhodesia.

Through the kindness of Dr. Rand, some of the paratypical material of *M. c. kikuyuensis* has been available for study. Specimens from Kiambu (Kyambu) Forest, near Nairobi, Kenya Colony, the type-locality of *M. c. kikuyuensis*, scarcely differ at all from those from coastal Kenya Colony and north-eastern Tanganyika

Territory (*M. c. cinereola*). In series they are perhaps a trifle paler and less bluish dorsally and in some instances less greyish below, but the distinctions, if they be such, are extremely labile, and I incline to the view that only one race can be recognised from East Africa, the earliest name for which is *M. c. cinereola*, of which I believe *M. c. kikuyuensis* to be correctly placed as a synonym.

To return to the South African populations and their classification. Study of adequate material now shows that both size and colour character clines occur within our limits, running more or less parallel in a north-south direction, the smallest and darkest birds residing in the extreme south of the species' range in association with high rainfall and considerable humidity (*M. c. caerulescens* in the eastern Cape Province, Pondoland, Natal and Zululand). The much larger and paler birds found in the considerably drier and less humid interior regions of south-central Africa represent the northern culmination of the clines, which can be conveniently broken down into a group of three races, consisting of two well-marked terminal forms and a nomenclaturally recognisable intermediate. The three northern subspecies (*M. c. cinereola*, *M. c. cinerea* and *M. c. nigrorum*) are not segments of a cline or clines as are the southern races, though a cline of increasing saturation and a parallel one of size diminution may ultimately be demonstrated to run in a north-easterly direction from the very pallid *M. c. impavida* through the labile *M. c. kikuyuensis* to the dark-coloured coastal populations of *M. c. cinereola*. *M. c. cinereola* is apparently similar to *M. c. caerulescens* in its preference for open forest and riparian "jungle," while both *M. c. cinerea* and *M. c. nigrorum* are entirely forest-dwelling forms.

The nomenclature, characters and ranges of the three races of *Muscicapa cinerea* which I propose to recognise from within South African limits are as follows:

1. *Muscicapa cinerea caerulescens* (Hartlaub)

Butalis caerulescens Hartlaub, *Ibis*, 1865, p. 268: Natal. Type-locality restricted to Durban, Natal, *vide* Clancey, *Durban Museum Novitates*, vol. iv, 13, 1955, p. 206. Synonym: *Alseonax caerulescens pondoensis* Gunning and Roberts, *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, vol. iii, 2, 1911, p. 114: Port St. Johns, Pondoland.

Upper-parts dark bluish slate (about OOS-4-1°). Under-parts dull whitish, the breast, sides of the body and flanks clouded with olivaceous grey. Size smallest.

Wings ♂♂ 71.5–79 (76.4) mm., ♀♀ 70–74.5 (72.2) mm. 20 specimens measured.

Type: Not traced (? Destroyed during the 1939-1945 war).

Material: 40: Eastern Cape Province, 2; coastal Pondoland, 8; Natal, 17; Zululand (mainly north-eastern districts), 13.

Range: Eastern Cape Province from the valley of the Great Fish River through Pondoland, East Griqualand and Natal to Zululand, where, in the north-eastern districts, and in southern Swaziland it intergrades with the next race.

2. *Muscicapa cinerea vulturina*, subsp. nov.

Paler, less deep bluish slate, on the upper-parts than *M. c. caerulescens* (about SSO-6-1°). On the ventral surfaces, the throat and abdomen purer white, and the breast, sides of the body and flanks clearer grey, the olivaceous tinge lacking. Averaging larger in size. Compared with *M. c. cinereola* the upper-parts are seen to be slightly less bluish grey. Ventrally whiter, much less heavily washed with grey on the breast, sides of the body and flanks. Bill rather finer, less coarse and broad basally.

Wings ♂♂ 73.5–82 (78.1) mm., ♀♀ 71–78.5 (75.4 mm.) 25 specimens measured.

Type: ♂, adult. Farm Malamala, Newington district, eastern Transvaal "lowveld." 900' a.s.l. 9th August, 1956. Collected by P. A. Clancey. In the collection of the Durban Museum. Wing 80 mm.

Material: 33: Northern Swaziland, 1; eastern Transvaal, 18; northern Transvaal, 3; south-eastern Southern Rhodesia, (Mt. Selinda district), 3; Sul do Save, southern Portuguese East Africa, 8.

Range: Northern Swaziland, northern and eastern Transvaal, extreme south-eastern Southern Rhodesia and Sul do Save, southern Portuguese East Africa.

3. *Muscicapa cinerea impavida*, subsp. nov.

Still paler dorsally than *M. c. vulturina*, more ashen, less bluish (about SO-7-1°). Ear-coverts rather paler. Ventrally more uniformly whitish, the breast, sides of the body and flanks less suffused with grey. The white of the throat and abdomen is duller, and in many there is only a vestige of the grey breast-band present in both *M. c. caerulescens* and *M. c. vulturina*. Wings paler. Much larger than *M. c. caerulescens* and averaging larger than *M. c. vulturina*.

Compared with *M. c. cinereola* of equatorial East Africa lighter and duller, less deep bluish grey, dorsally. Ear-coverts lighter, and black loreal spot usually smaller in size. On under-parts whiter with reduced grey clouding on the breast, sides of the body and flanks, which is usually well developed in *M. c. cinereola*. Wings considerably paler, less blackish. Averaging larger than *M. c. cinereola*, but bill rather less coarse.

Wings ♂♂ 79–86 (81.5) mm., ♀♀ 75–82 (78.1) mm. 32 specimens measured.

Type: ♂, adult. Zambesi River, 14 miles west of the Victoria Falls, western Southern Rhodesia. 18th August, 1956. Collected by M. P. Stuart Irwin. In the collection of the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo. Museum Register No. 26920. Wing 85.0 mm.

Material: 48: Caprivi Strip, 2; northern Bechuanaland Protectorate, 3; Southern Rhodesia, 25; districts of Manica and Sofala, southern Portuguese East Africa, 10; Nyasaland, 5; Zambezia, northern Portuguese East Africa, 3.

Range: Northern South-West Africa (including the Caprivi Strip), northern Bechuanaland Protectorate, Southern Rhodesia and the districts of Manica and Sofala, southern Portuguese East Africa. Extralimittally to central and southern Angola, Northern Rhodesia, southern Belgian Congo in the Katanga, Nyasaland and northern Portuguese East Africa.

Extralimital Races

For the sake of completeness, these are listed briefly below:

4. *Muscicapa cinerea cinereola* Finsch and Hartlaub

Muscicapa cinereola Finsch and Hartlaub, *Die Vögel Ost-Afrikas*, vol. iv, 1870, pl. 4, p. 302: Usaramo, Dar-es-Salaam district, eastern Tanganyika Territory. Synonym: *Alseonax caerulescens kikuyuensis* van Someren, *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. xli, 1921, p. 102: Kyambu, Kenya Colony.

Darker and more bluish grey on upper-parts than *M. c. impavida* (about SSO–7–1°). Wings blacker and under-parts more copiously washed with grey. Averaging smaller in size, and with a slightly broader and coarser bill.

Wings ♂♂ 73.5–82 (77.6) mm., ♀♀ 70.5–78 (74.1) mm.

Range: Eastern equatorial Africa from the valleys of the Juba and Webi Shebeli Rivers, southern Somalia, and the central districts of Kenya Colony south to Tanganyika Territory (mainly in the eastern districts). Southern limits not ascertained.

5. *Muscicapa cinerea cinerea* (Cassin)

Eopsaltria cinerea Cassin, *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, 1857 (1856), p. 253: Moonda River, Gaboon, French Equatorial Africa.

Darker blue-grey on upper-parts than *M. c. cinereola*, and more dusky below. Averaging smaller in size.

Wings ♂♀ 67–78 mm. (after Bannerman, *Birds of West and Equatorial Africa*, vol. ii, 1953, p. 907).

Range: From southern Nigeria east of the River Niger and the southern Cameroons, the Gaboon coast, French Equatorial Africa, and the northern districts of Angola eastwards through the forested regions of the Belgian Congo (north of the range of *M. c. impavida*) to the southern Sudan and Uganda.

6. *Muscicapa cinerea nigrorum* (Collin and Hartert)

Alseonax cinereus nigrorum Collin and Hartert, *Novitates Zoologicae*, vol. xxxiv, 1, 1927, p. 52, nom. nov. pro *Muscicapa cinerascens* Sharpe, 1879: Fantee, Gold Coast, nec *Muscicapa cinerascens* Spix, 1825.

Slightly lighter and rather more brownish grey on upper-parts and grey of under-parts brownish tinged when compared with *M. c. cinerea*. Similar in size.

Wings ♂♀ 71–75 mm. (After Chapin, *Birds of the Belgian Congo*, part iii, 1953, p. 607).

Range: Forested Upper Guinea. At present known only from the Gold Coast and Togo.