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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. kukuyuensis* (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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THE SOUTH AFRICAN RACES OF THE
COMMON WAXBILL *ESTRILDA ASTRILD* (LINNÆUS)

Four races of the Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* (Linnæus) are currently recognised by workers from the South African sub-continent, these being *E. a. astrild* (Linnæus), 1758: Cape Town, South Africa; *E. a. damarensis* Reichenow, 1902: Rehoboth, Damaraland, South-West Africa; *E. a. ngamiensis* Roberts, 1932: Shorobe, Thamalakane River, north of Maun, northern Bechuanaland Protectorate; and *E. a. cavendishi* Sharpe, 1900: Mopicuti, Cheringoma district, southern Portuguese East Africa. A recent study of much of the comprehensive material of this species now available in southern African museums shows that a fifth race should be recognised, and has enabled reasonably accurate ranges to be defined for the various subspecies. For the loan of material I am grateful to the Directors of the following museums: South African Museum, Cape Town (through Dr. J. M. Winterbottom); East London Museum; Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg; and the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo. The material in the collections of the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, and the Museu Dr. Alvaro de Castro, Lourenço Marques, was studied independently earlier. About 90 specimens available to me have been obtained since 1950.

Of the nominate race, a large recently-taken material, including many topotypical specimens, is now available to workers in the collections of the South African, East London and Durban Museums. This race is characterised by its large size and the pale, earthy grey-brown colouration of the upper-parts. The coronal and nuchal surfaces are often markedly greyish, and in very freshly-moulted dress some birds display a distinct pinkish flush over the lower back and upper tail-coverts, while others are more olive-tinged. In this race the wings of both sexes measure 49–53.5, and the tails 50–60 mm. Specimens from widely scattered localities in the south-western Cape (Cape Town, Malmesbury, Mamre, Touws River, Ceres, Calvinia, etc.), eastern Karroo (Murraysburg) and the eastern Cape Province (Aliwal North, Rossouw, Committees Drift, East London, etc.) are all closely similar and appear to represent a single homogeneous race. Limited material from the Aughrabies Falls, on the lower Orange River, suggests that the populations in this and adjacent arid regions to the northward are slightly more pallid on the upper-parts than topotypical *E. a. astrild*, but the difference is at the best slight and I do not feel that the creation of a new subspecies is justifiable, certainly on the basis of existing material. Nominate

E. astrild ranges throughout the greater part of the Cape Province to the south of the Orange River and west of the valley of the Great Kei River, and north of the Orange in the southern parts of Great Namaqualand, northern Cape Province (Bechuanaland), southern Bechuanaland Protectorate, southern and western districts of the Orange Free State, and in the south-western and western Transvaal.

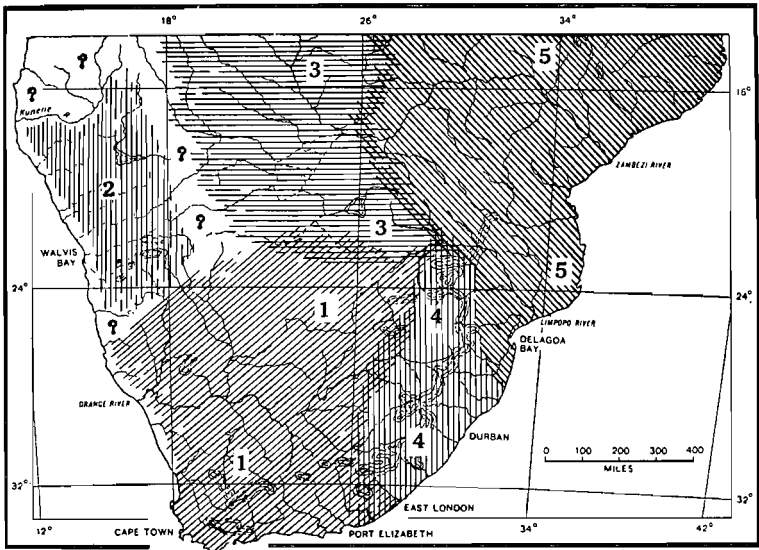
To the north of the range of the nominate race in South-West Africa occur birds which are paler and more bleached in general appearance but closely similar in size. *E. a. damarensis*, described by Reichenow in 1902 on material from Rehoboth, is a well-marked race, differing from *E. a. astrild* in its paler upper-parts, the head-top, rump and upper tail-coverts being particularly pallid. On the underparts *E. a. astrild* and *E. a. damarensis* are not constantly different, some Cape specimens being just as pale as those from Damaraland. The wings measure 49–53, the tails 51–58.5 mm. The range of the pale *E. a. damarensis* is imperfectly understood at the present time, and the race is still known mainly from material collected in Damaraland and northern Great Namaqualand, but it presumably ranges northwards through the Kaokoveld and Ovamboland to the Cunene River and, perhaps, south-western Angola.

Interposed between *E. a. damarensis* and the Southern Rhodesian populations of *E. a. cavendishi* are populations the birds of which are remarkably similar in the colouration of the upper-parts to the nominate race, but short-tailed like *E. a. cavendishi* and with a similar whitish or pinkish white throat and whitish ear-coverts. To such birds Austin Roberts has given the name *E. a. ngamiensis*, and the wings of 7 ♂♀ measure 48–51, tails 47–51 mm. Writing in the *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, vol. xvi, 1, 1935, p. 180, Roberts gives very similar measurements taken from the paratypical series of twelve specimens collected on the Vernay-Lang Kalahari Expedition of 1930, thus—wings 46–49.5, tails 46–50.5 mm. The range of *E. a. ngamiensis* cannot be accurately defined on existing material. It appears to range from the Caprivi Strip and the swamp region of northern Bechuanaland eastwards into parts of western Matabeleland (Victoria Falls, near Bulawayo, Matopos, etc.). Extralimitally it occurs in south-eastern Angola, Barotseland and parts of the western province of Northern Rhodesia (*vide* White and Winterbottom, *Check List of the Birds of Northern Rhodesia*, 1949, p. 131).

To return to the Cape populations of *E. a. astrild*, which race is currently believed by workers to range north-eastwards to Natal and Zululand and throughout the Transvaal, it has now been ascer-

tained that the populations which occur in the districts to the east of the Great Kei River through Pondoland, East Griqualand and Basutoland to Natal and southern Zululand, the eastern Orange Free State and the highveld regions of the Transvaal are subspecifically distinguishable. Such birds are darker and distinctly washed with warm olivaceous brown on the upper-parts when compared with *E. a. astrild*, which is greyish by comparison, and the barring on the dorsal surfaces tends to be partially obscured by the olivaceous brown wash, which imparts a more uniform dorsal aspect. In size this new race averages slightly smaller than toponominate *E. astrild*, thus—wings ♂♀ 47–50.5, tails 50–56 mm., and for it the name *E. a. tenebridorsa* mihi, subsp. nov., is introduced below. *E. a. tenebridorsa* may range north into parts of Southern Rhodesia, because 2 ♂♂ from Essex Vale Road, 9 miles from Bulawayo, taken on the 20th July and 3rd August, 1955, agree closely with it in the colouration of the upper-parts and in the length of the tails (54, 54.5 mm.), though the dates suggest that they may have been migrants from elsewhere.

The small, short-tailed and brightly-coloured *E. a. cavendishi*, described by Sharpe in 1900 on material from just south of the lower reaches of the Zambesi River in southern Portuguese East Africa, is the last form to be considered. This race is usually as dark on the upper-parts as *E. a. tenebridorsa*, but the head-top is a clear dark grey and it is usually redder on the mantle and rump, the transverse barring coarser, while the ear-coverts and throat are whiter or pinkish white, less markedly greyish. However, it is in its much smaller dimensions that the best distinctions lie, thus—wings of ♂♀ 45–49 (51), tails 44–50.5 mm. Within South African sub-continental limits *E. a. cavendishi* ranges in the eastern lowlands from north-eastern Zululand and the eastern Transvaal “lowveld” northwards to the Zambesi Valley and throughout most of Southern Rhodesia, and extralimitally through the central and eastern districts of Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and northern Portuguese East Africa to the south-eastern Belgian Congo, and perhaps most of the southern and south-western districts of Tanganyika Territory. There is a measure of variation within the populations of this race, and it is interesting to note that some individuals collected at Manhiça, Sul do Save, southern Portuguese East Africa, are similar to *E. a. ngamiensis* in the colouration of the upper-parts, but others obtained at the same time are darker and typical of *E. a. cavendishi*. However, it should be noted that in all races worn breeding specimens are paler than newly-moulted ones, and as a result subspecific distinctions are best assessed on birds in fresh plumage.



ESTRILDA ASTRILD (LINNÆUS)

Sketch-map showing the approximate ranges of the five southern African races of the Common Waxbill:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>E. a. astrild</i> (Linnæus) | 4. <i>E. a. tenebridorsa</i> Clancey |
| 2. <i>E. a. damarensis</i> Reichenow | 5. <i>E. a. cavendishi</i> Sharpe |
| 3. <i>E. a. ngamiensis</i> Roberts | |

As has been shown above, the populations of the Common Waxbill occurring in South Africa can be arranged clinally, the longest-tailed and palest birds occurring in the arid west and south-west, the shortest-tailed and darkest in the moister and more humid east and south-east. This pattern of geographical variation is normal, and I believe it to be correct to admit five nomenclaturally recognisable races, and the nomenclature, characters and ranges of these are as follows:

1. *Estrilda astrild astrild* (Linnæus)

Loxia astrild Linnæus, *Systema Naturae*, 10th edition, vol. i, 1758, p. 173: Canaries, America, Africa. Restricted type-locality: Cape Town, South Africa (*vide* Sclater and Mackworth-Praed, *Ibis*, 1918, p. 442).

Adult ♂: Upper-parts, wings and tail (upper surface) dull greyish brown (about the "drab" or "hair brown" of Ridgway, *Color Standards and Color Nomenclature*, 1912, pl. xlvi), minutely barred with a slightly darker shade on the head-top and nape, and more coarsely on the mantle, rump and upper tail-coverts, wings and tail. In freshly-moulted plumage the lower back, rump and upper tail-coverts are in some instances washed with pink. Loes and streak

through eye bright crimson. Throat, cheeks and ear-coverts dull greyish white; the breast, sides of the body and flanks similar, but more buffish tinged and finely barred with dark brown. (There is a measure of individual variation, and some adult males have the breast and even the throat suffused with pink.) The centre of the lower breast and upper abdominal surface rose or vermilion pink; the lower abdomen, crissum and under tail-coverts blackish.

Adult ♀: Similar to the male but duller below, the rose on the centre of the lower breast and abdomen paler, and with less black from lower abdomen to under tail-coverts.

Measurements: ♂♀ wings (flattened) 49–53.5 (50.7), tails 50–60 (55.9), culmens from base 10–11 (10.2) mm. 33 specimens measured.

Type: None designated.

Range: Virtually the whole of the Cape Province to the south of the Orange River, except in the districts lying to the east of the Great Kei River, northwards to the southern parts of Great Namaqualand, northern Cape Province (Bechuanaland), southern Bechuanaland Protectorate, the southern and western districts of the Orange Free State, and in the south-western and western Transvaal.

2. *Estrilda astrild damarensis* Reichenow

Estrilda astrild damarensis Reichenow, *Ornithologische Monatsberichte*, vol. x, 1902, p. 173: Rehoboth, Damaraland, South-West Africa.

Like *E. a. astrild* but considerably paler and of a more bleached appearance on the upper-parts, particularly on the head-top and upper-tail coverts. On the ventral surfaces not constantly different, though usually paler on the throat and upper breast. Rose-pink on centre of lower breast and upper abdomen rather darker. Wings and tail paler. Similar in size.

Measurements: ♂♀ wings 49–51 (49.8), tails 51–58.5 (54.5), culmens 10–11 (10.2) mm. 5 specimens measured.

Type: In the Zoological Museum, Berlin.

Range: The northern parts of Great Namaqualand and Damaraland, South-West Africa, ? northwards to the Kaokoveld and Ovamboland. Perhaps extralimitally to south-western Angola.

3. *Estrilda astrild ngamiensis* Roberts

Estrilda astrild ngamiensis Roberts, *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, vol. xv, 1, 1932, p. 33: Shorobe, Thamalakane River, north of Maun, northern Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Very similar to the nominate race in the colouration of the upper-parts, but on the under-parts like *E. a. cavendishi* in respect

of the whitish ear-coverts and whitish or pinkish white throat. Similar in size to *E. a. cavendishi*.

Measurements: ♂♀ wings 48–51 (49.3), tails 47–51 (49.6), culmens 9.5–10.5 (10.0) mm. 7 specimens measured.

Type: In the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria.

Range: From the Caprivi Strip and the swamp region of northern Bechuanaland eastwards to parts of western Matabeleland, Southern Rhodesia (Victoria Falls, near Bulawayo, Matopos Hills, etc., are localities). Extralimitally in south-eastern Angola, Barotseland and parts of the western province of Northern Rhodesia.

Note: *Estrilda astrild niedieki* Reichenow, *Ornithologische Monatsberichte*, vol. xxiv, 1916, p. 168: Namwala, Kafue River, Northern Rhodesia, may actually be the correct name for this race, because White and Winterbottom, *loc. cit.*, record that a specimen available to them from Namwala agrees better with *E. a. ngamiensis* than *E. a. cavendishi*. Unfortunately, material from Namwala has not been available to me for this study, but the locality concerned certainly lies extremely close to the ascertained range of *E. a. ngamiensis*. Two topotypes of *E. a. ngamiensis* are more pinkish, less olive, grey on the upper-parts than the western Southern Rhodesia examples of the race available to me, but a similar range of colour variation is present in the nominate race.

4. *Estrilda astrild tenebridorsa*, subsp. nov.

Similar to the nominate race of the Cape Province but more saturated, darker and strongly washed with warm olivaceous brown on the dorsal surfaces, which appear more uniform and less markedly barred. *E. a. astrild* is by comparison with *E. a. tenebridorsa* a very greyish form. Averaging slightly smaller than the nominate race.

Measurements: ♂♀ wings 47–50.5 (48.7), tails 50–56 (52.0), culmens 10–11 (10.5) mm. 22 specimens measured.

Type: ♀, adult. Embotyi, Lusikisiki district, Pondoland, eastern Cape Province. Sea level. 8th August, 1954. Durban Museum Expedition. In the collection of the Durban Museum.

Measurements of the Type: Wing 48, culmen 10+, tarsus 14.5, tail 52.5 mm.

Range: Districts of the eastern Cape Province to the east of the Great Kei River through Pondoland, East Griqualand and Basutoland to Natal and southern Zululand, the eastern Orange Free State, and the highveld of the Transvaal and western Swaziland.

Note: As recorded above, two specimens from Essex Vale Road, near Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, taken in July and August, 1955 (National Museum of Southern Rhodesia collection), resemble *E. a.*

tenebridorsa in the colouration of the upper-parts and tail-length. It is submitted that these may be migrants from the south.

5. *Estrilda astrild cavendishi* Sharpe

Estrilda cavendishi Sharpe, *Ibis*, 1900, p. 110: Mapiicuti, Cheringoma district, southern Portuguese East Africa.

Usually rather similar in colouration to *E. a. tenebridorsa* but more coarsely barred on the dorsal surfaces, the head-top clearer grey and the back and rump often redder. Ear-coverts whiter, and on the under-parts paler and less greyish, particularly on the throat and upper breast, which are more whitish or pinkish white by comparison. Rose-pink on the centre of the lower breast and abdomen usually rather deeper in tone, and flanks more strongly washed with buffish. Smaller in size and with an appreciably shorter tail than either *E. a. tenebridorsa* or *E. a. astrild*, but similar to *E. a. ngamiensis* in this respect.

Measurements: ♂♀ wings 45–49 (51) (47.2), tails 44–50.5 (48.8), culmens 9.5–10.5 (10.0) mm. 30 specimens measured.

Type: In the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), London.

Range: From the lowlands of north-eastern Zululand, eastern Swaziland (intermediate) and the eastern Transvaal “lowveld” northwards through southern Portuguese East Africa to the Zambesi Valley, and throughout most of Southern Rhodesia, in the west of which territory it merges into *E. a. ngamiensis*. Extralimitally *E. a. cavendishi* ranges throughout most of Northern Rhodesia to the east of the range of *E. a. ngamiensis*, and in the upper Katanga, south-eastern Belgian Congo, southern and south-western Tanganyika Territory, Nyasaland and northern Portuguese East Africa.

Note: Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa*, vol. 2, 1955, p. 1020, extend the range of *E. a. cavendishi* north to the interior of Kenya Colony, in so doing rejecting *E. a. massaica* Neumann, *Journal für Ornithologie*, 1907, p. 596: Njoro, Kenya Colony. It is doubtful if such an extension of range to the northward is truly tenable and the “lumping” of dissimilar populations under a single trinomen serves any valid purpose. *E. a. massaica* is generally recognised by workers on East African birds, for instance by Sclater, *Systema Avium Æthiopicarum*, part ii, 1930, p. 795, but *E. a. nyassae* Neumann, *loc. cit.*, New Helgoland, north of Lake Nyasa, is almost consistently placed as a synonym of *E. a. cavendishi*. The East African populations of the Common Waxbill are clearly in need of careful revision.