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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS LVI

by

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VARIATION IN *Nicator gularis* HARTLAUB AND FINSCH

The eastern representative of the Afrotropical bulbul pair *Nicator chloris* (Valenciennes) and *Nicator gularis* Hartlaub and Finsch (*N. gularis*) extends from south-western Somalia and the interior of Kenya, south to eastern Swaziland and north-eastern Zululand. It is currently not known to exhibit any subspecifically significant geographical variation, even though Van Someren, *Novit. Zool.*, vol. xxix, 1922, p. 114, drew attention to the possible existence of such when he commented that six specimens in his collection from Sagala, Lamu, Mombasa and Bura, in Kenya, were not as "green on the back" as the bird depicted in Shelley, *Birds of Africa*, vol. v, part 2, 1906, pl. lv.

While many authors maintain that *N. chloris* and *N. gularis* are conspecific, Rand, in the continuation of Peters' *Check-List Birds of the World*, vol. ix, 1960, p. 274, treats them as specifically discrete. The eastern *N. gularis* differs from the western *N. chloris* in having the forepart of the pileum brownish grey and not concolorous with the rest of the dorsum, which latter is also greener. On the face, the supra-loral spot in males is yellow rather than whitish, and the lateral head is pinkish buff and not citrine. Ventrally, the entire fore-throat and upper breast are pale pinkish buff and not light grey as in *chloris*, and

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findings. I am also grateful to Mr. Bryan G. Donnelly, Ornithologist of the National Museum of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, for lending a series of fifty specimens from the collection under his control.

THE AUSTRAL RACES OF THE REDBILLED FIREFINCH *LAGONOSTICTA SENEGALA* (Linnaeus)

In a revision of the southern populations of *Lagonosticta senegala* (Linnaeus) of the Afrotropical Region in *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, vol. lxxxi, 1, 1961, pp. 17-19, I admitted two subspecies for the South African Sub-Region, these being *L.s.rendalli* Hartert, 1898: upper Shiré R., southern Malawi, and *L.s.pallidicrissa* Zedlitz, 1910: Humpata, Huila, southern Angola. Recently, in *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. xii, 5, 1979, pp. 60, 61, a third race was added to the Sub-Region avifauna in *L.s.confidens* Clancey, 1979: Glen, Modder R., near Bloemfontein, Orange Free State. This latter communication was in the form of a brief racial description published to make the name available for use in the new *S.A.O.S. Checklist of Southern African Birds*, scheduled to be published in June, 1980. The new subspecies was based on a critical study of much of the material of this species of firefinch available in southern African museums, the National Museum of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, the Museum Alexander Koenig, Bonn, the British Museum (Nat.Hist.), Tring, and the American Museum of Natural History, New York. At the same time, much new data on the phenetic variation and the ranges of the subspecies in southern Africa was revealed, necessitating a revised arrangement of the species in southern Africa and this is presented below.

Subspecifically relevant variation in this species affects the intensity of the rose colour in males, the colouration of the dorsal surfaces, the degree to which these are overlaid with dull rose, and the distribution of the rose over the venter. Variation in females is relatively slight, being in the nature of minor shifts in dorsal colouration and the degree to which the breast is speckled. In his treatment of the subspecies of *L. senegala* in the continuation of Peters' *Check-List* (vol. xiv, 1968, pp. 327, 328), Traylor recognised only *L. s.rendalli* for all southern Africa, placing *L. s.pallidicrissa* as a synonym. This latter taxon is, however, relatively well-differentiated from topotypical *rendalli*, the red in males much more dilute, the back without red overlay, while in the case of the female the throat and breast are greyer, the spotting on the whole finer. In not recognising *pallidicrissa* I believe the presence of significant variation is unnecessarily obscured and, accordingly, the subspecies concerned is admitted in the formal arrangement of the southern populations presented below.

Three subspecies of the Redbilled Firefinch may be admitted for southern Africa, the names, criteria and ranges of these being as follows:

1. **Lagonosticta senegala pallidicrissa** Zedlitz

L. [agonosticta] s. [enegala] pallidicrissa Zedlitz, *Ornith. Monatsber.*, vol. xviii, 1910, p. 173: Humpata, Huila, southern Angola.

Lagonosticta senegala dilutior White, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, vol. lxvii, 1946, p. 10: Balovale, western Zambia.

Male with dorsal surface about Saccardo's Umber (*Ridgway* (1912), pl. xxix); sides of crown, face and breast about Old Rose (pl. xiii), this diffused laterally to the flanks; red of lateral head tending to meet across the hind neck.

Female with dorsum pale Saccardo's Umber. Below, breast about Light Grayish Olive (pl. xlvi), or more buffy, spotted with off-white.

Wings of 20 ♂♂ of *L. s. pallidicrissa* 48-51 (49.4), SD 0.76, SE 0.17 mm.

Range: Northern South West Africa, east to the Caprivi Strip and northern and eastern Botswana, dry western borders of the Transvaal and Zimbabwe Rhodesia, the northern Cape, particularly along the course of the Orange R., and with an isolated pocket in the dry country of the Fish R. valley, eastern Cape. Extraliminally in southern Angola and western Zambia.

2. **Lagonosticta senegala rendalli** Hartert

Lagonosticta senegala rendalli Hartert, *Novit. Zool.*, vol. v, 1898, p. 72: upper Shiré R., southern Malawi.

Male much as in *pallidicrissa* but red surfaces deeper, more saturated (near Eugenia Red (pl. xiii)); rose of the sides of the head and frons more extensive, restricting the brown coronal patch, and meeting extensively across the hind neck to form a collar; mantle and scapular feathers fringed with dull rose, this latter sometimes also present on the basal surfaces of the said feathers.

Female slightly warmer, less earthen or greyish, brown above than in *pallidicrissa*. Below, less greyish, more buffy, the spotting about the same.

Wings of 15 ♂♂ 47.5-51 (49.0), SD 1.04, SE 0.27 mm.

Range: North-eastern Botswana and northern Zimbabwe Rhodesia, east to Tete and northern Manica e Sofala, southern Moçambique, extending north to southern and eastern Zambia, much of Malawi, northern Moçambique and south-eastern Tanzania. Intergrades with both *L. s. ruberrima* Reichenow, 1903, Bukoba, western Tanzania, and *L. s. kikuyuensis* van Someren, 1919, Nairobi, Kenya, to the north of its range.

Remarks: Named for Dr P. J. Rendall (1861 — 1948). Several of Rendall's original specimens were examined during the course of this research.

3. *Lagonosticta senegala confidens* Clancey

Lagonosticta senegala confidens Clancey, *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. xii, 5, 1979, p. 60: Glen, Modder R., near Bloemfontein, Orange Free State.

Male differs from that of *rendalli* in having the upper-parts plain ochraceous olive-brown (Dresden Brown (pl. xv)) with no red overlay, and with the red of the sides of the head-top more laterally constricted and with no red hind neck bar. Below, rose on whole much paler, and not extended caudad laterally, and with the lower flanks, belly and crissum more extensively pale ochraceous-tawny. In wings, coverts less extensively tipped with rose.

Female with upper-parts colder, less warm, brown. Below, with breast spotting on whole coarser on a lighter, less saturated, buffish ground compared with Malawi topotypes of *rendalli*.

Wings of 22 ♂♂ 46,5-51 (49,1), SD 1,21, SE 0,26 mm.

Range: The plateau of Rhodesia, and Moçambique south of the Save R., south to the Transvaal (except extreme west), the Orange Free State, Swaziland, and Natal and Zululand.

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