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## MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS XXXIX

by

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### ON THE RACES OF THE COMMON TERN - *STERNA HIRUNDO* LINNAEUS OCCURRING IN SOUTH AFRICAN WATERS

In a note to *Sterna hirundo* Linnaeus in my "Catalogue of Birds of the South African Sub-Region" in *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. vii, 1965, p. 313, I showed that more than one race of the Common Tern occurred seasonally along the coasts of southern Africa. In addition to the nominate race, one of the shorter billed and rather darker central and eastern Palaeartic races also occurs regularly, mainly in the east from Durban northwards.

Recent re-examination of the now larger Durban Museum series of South African-taken *S. hirundo* enables me to take the question of the races occurring in South Africa a stage further. Thirty-six specimens from the eastern Cape (from Cape Recife and Port Elizabeth), north-east to Natal and Zululand obtained almost throughout the year reveal little or no colour variation consonant with the subspecific variation defined in standard works on the basis of material obtained on the Palaeartic breeding grounds, and owing to the abraded and moulting condition of the wings and tails of most skins no variation of moment is discernible in the measure-

THE CHARACTERS AND RANGE OF  
*URAEGINTHUS ANGOLENSIS NATALENSIS* ZEDLITZ,  
1911

In a short communication on subspecific variation in the Blue Waxbill *Uraeginthus angolensis* (Linnaeus) of the acacia and associated mesic woodland savannas of the southern half of Africa in *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. iv, 1, 1952, pp. 17 - 19, I recognised four races, in the process resuscitating *Uraeginthus bengalus natalensis* Zedlitz, 1911: Natal, which taxon had been synonymized with *U.a.niassensis* Reichenow, 1911: Songea, Southern Province, Tanzania, by Sclater, *Syst. Av. Aethiop.*, part ii, 1930, p. 805, and ignored by Roberts, *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 357. While *U.a.natalensis* is recognised in both my *Catalogue Birds South African Sub-Region*, 1966, p. 594, and the *S.A.O.S. Check List Birds South Africa*, 1969, p. 311, it was again synonymized with *U.a.niassensis* by Traylor, in the continuation of Peters' *Check-List Birds of the World*, vol. xiv, 1968, p. 332. In *Peters'*, Traylor admits only three subspecies in *U.angolensis*.

The range of *U.angolensis* lies generally to the south of that of *U.bengalus* (Linnaeus) subspp. and *U.cyanocephala* (Richmond), though there is some confusing ecological range interdigitation in the first two species in the southern parts of Zaire and probably elsewhere. Benson *et al.*, *Birds of Zambia*, 1971, p. 346, state, however, that *U.bengalus* and *U.angolensis* have entirely mutually exclusive ranges in Zambia with no evidence that they ever meet or hybridise. *U.angolensis* and *U.bengalus* and their respective races appear to be in the main allopatric and to form a superspecies.

Variation in this waxbill affects the degree of saturation of the dorsum, the intensity of the ventral blue, the presence or absence of blue over the sides and flanks in adult females and wing- and tail-lengths. The level of individual variation in the intensity of blue in males is high in most populations, and as the species has an extended and irregular breeding season, much museum material is comprised of moulting and juvenile and transitional specimens which are unsatisfactory for critical work on subspeciation.

A re-examination of adequate material of the populations occurring over the eastern half of the South African Sub-Region confirms the validity of *U.a.natalensis*, but indicates the desirability of extending the use of this name to the populations of the entire Transvaal, and the plateau of Rhodesia, thereby obviating the basic cause of the doubt as to its validity in some centres. I believe it desirable

to admit four and not three subspecies in the Blue Waxbill, the characters and ranges of these being as hereunder given:

(a) ***Uraeginthus angolensis natalensis*** Zedlitz

*Uraeginthus bengalus natalensis* Zedlitz, *Journ.f.Ornith.*, vol. lix, 1911, p. 607: Natal.

Dorsum from frons to lower back dark Saccardo's Umber (Ridgway, pl. xxix). Facial and ventral blue of adult ♂♂ dull greenish Bremen Blue (pl. xx); medio-ventral streak Light Ochraceous-Salmon (pl. xv). Size large.

Wings of 18 ♂♂ 52 - 56,5, m 53,4, SD 1,16, tails (of 16) 51,5 - 57,5, m 53,7, SD 2,30mm.

Wings of 10 ♀♀ 52 - 54,5, m 53,0, SD 0,90, tails 50 - 54, m 51,7, SD 1,75mm.

*Range:* Natal, Zululand (except north-eastern lowlands), Swaziland (eastern birds intergrades towards *niassensis*), the Transvaal (eastern lowveld populations intergrades), south-eastern Botswana, and the plateau of Rhodesia.

(b) ***Uraeginthus angolensis niassensis*** Reichenow

*Uraeginthus bengalus niassensis* Reichenow, *Mittl. Zool. Mus. Berlin*, vol. v, 1911 (January), p. 228: Songea, Southern Province, Tanzania.

*Uraeginthus bengalus mikindaniensis* Grote, *Ornith.Monatsber.*, vol. xix, 1911 (October), p. 162: Mikindani, Southern Province, Tanzania.

Paler, more ochraceous, brown over dorsum than in *natalensis* (Buffy Brown (pl. xl)). Face and venter in male a little clearer, less greenish, Bremen Blue. Size smaller, the tail distinctly shorter.

Wings of 12 ♂♂ 48 - 52, m 50,0, SD 1,15, tails 46 - 51, m 47,2, SD 1,91mm.

Wings of 12 ♀♀ 49 - 52,5, m 50,6, SD 1,07, tails (of 11) 45 - 50, m 46,5, SD 2,06mm.

*Range:* Extreme north-eastern Zululand, Moçambique, south-eastern and northern Rhodesia (west to Kariba), Malawi, Zambia

east of *cyanopleurus* and south of *Uraeginthus bengalus katangae* Vincent, 1934: Lubumbashi (Elizabethville), Katanga, Zaire, Malawi, south-eastern Katanga, Zaire (Kasai records of *U.angolensis* are placed here by Traylor), and southern, south-eastern and eastern mainland Tanzania (north to Dar es Salaam and the Usambaras), and Zanzibar (introduced).

*Remarks:* Traylor, *loc. cit.*, extends the range north in the east to Kilimanjaro, though this is not indicated in Hall and Moreau, *Atlas of speciation in African Passerine Birds*, 1970, map 391.

(c) ***Uraeginthus angolensis cyanopleurus*** Wolters

*Uraeginthus angolensis cyanopleurus* Wolters, *Journ.f.Ornith.*, vol. civ, 1963, p. 250: Tsotsoroga Pan, northern Botswana, at 18° 40' S., 24° 08' E.

Dorsum from frons to lower back paler, more vinaceous, than in either *natalensis* or *niassensis* (Wood Brown (pl. xl)). In males, face and venter near Calamine Blue (pl. viii); medio-ventral streak lighter (Pale Ochraceous-Buff (pl. xv)) than in *natalensis*. Similar to *U.a.niassensis* in tail-length.

Wings of 12 ♂♀ 51 - 54, m 52,2, SD 0,86, tails of 6 ♂♂ 47 - 52, m 50,1, SD 1,72mm.

*Range:* North-western Rhodesia in Wankie and the western Sebungwe, northern Botswana (south in the west to Lake Ngami and in the east to Makarikari and Lake Dow), Zambia in Barotse Province and the western parts of the Southern Province, the Caprivi Strip and Okavango, north-eastern South-West Africa, and southern Cuando-Cubango, Angola.

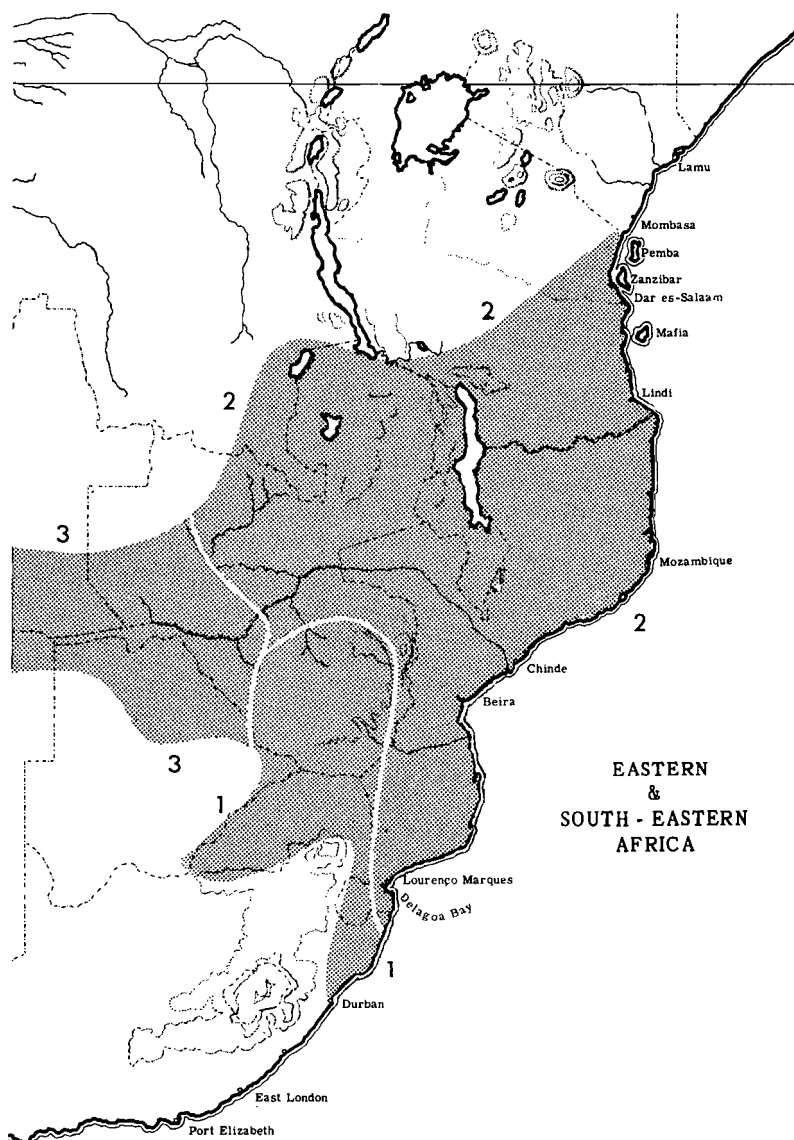
(d) ***Uraeginthus angolensis angolensis*** (Linnaeus)

*Fringilla angolensis* Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae*, 10th ed., i, 1758, p. 182: Angola.

*Uraeginthus bengalus damarensis* Reichenow, *Die Vögel Afrikas*, vol. iii, 1904, p. 209: Damaraland.

Very similar to *U.a.cyanopleurus* but differs in being slightly paler, and significantly in that the adult female has the ventral blue restricted to the fore-throat and upper breast, and not extended caudad laterally over the sides and flanks. Size as in *cyanopleurus*. *Range:* South-West Africa in Damaraland and Ovamboland, and western Angola from Huila and Moçamedes, north to the lower Congo R. (upstream to Bolobo) and Cabinda.

Intergrades with *cyanopleurus* to the south-east of its range.



MAP II

*Uraeginthus angolensis* (Linnaeus)

Sketch-map showing the racial mosaic of the Blue Waxbill in Central, East and south-eastern Africa.

1. *Uraeginthus angolensis natalensis* Zedlitz
2. *Uraeginthus angolensis niassensis* Reichenow
3. *Uraeginthus angolensis cyanopleurus* Wolters