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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS

XXXIV

by

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THE NORTHERN NON-BREEDING RANGE LIMITS OF *ISPIDINA PICTA NATALENSIS* (SMITH)

Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Birds Eastern and North Eastern Africa*, vol. i, 1952, p. 573, fix the northern range limits of *Ispidina picta natalensis* (Smith), 1831: Natal, as Tanzania. Chapin, *Birds of the Belgian Congo*, part ii, 1939, p. 286, lists it on singletons from as far north in the eastern Congo (Zaire) as Kisenyi, near Lake Kivu, and the Rutshuru Plain, also mentioning Gyldenstolpe's single February record from Lake Chahafi, Rwanda (*vide* Gyldenstolpe, *Kungl. Svenska Vetenskap. Handl.*, 3rd ser., vol. i, 3, 1924, pp. 276, 277). That *I.p.natalensis* winters in numbers still further north in central equatorial Africa has recently come to light as a result of the study of a series of thirteen *I.picta* (Boddaert) from Bwamba Forest, western Uganda, brought together, mainly in 1967, by collectors operating on behalf of the Los Angeles County Museum. In their interesting joint paper on the birds of the lowlands of Bwamba, Toro, Uganda, Friedmann and Williams, *Los Angeles County Mus.Contr.Sci.*, No. 211, 1971, p. 25, place the series concerned as being applicable to *I.p.picta* (Boddaert), 1783: Senegal, whereas in fact it is composite, comprising three nominate *picta* and no less than ten *natalensis*. Of the sample from Bwamba Forest (localities: Nkarara, Rwansenge and Ntandi, at 670–700 m. a.s.l.), 77 per cent. is applicable to *natalensis*, the balance of 23 per cent.

The characters and ranges of the two South African races of the Redwinged Starling are as follows:

- (a) ***Onychognathus morio morio*** (Linnaeus), 1766:
Cape of Good Hope, Cape.

Wings of ♂♂ 142.5–157, of ♀♀ 137–147 mm.

Range: South-western and southern and eastern Cape, Natal and Zululand, the Orange Free State, Lesotho, the Transvaal, Swaziland, and southern Moçambique in the Lebombo Range.

- (b) ***Onychognathus morio shelleyi*** (Hartert), 1891:
Ugogo, Tanzania.

Larger than last, particularly in the female: wings of ♂♂ 156–164, of ♀♀ 148–160 mm. Tail longer and bill heavier. Female also somewhat more blotched on upper breast.

Range: Rhodesia from the Matopos in the west, east to the Eastern Highlands, adjacent highland Moçambique and on Mt. Gorongosa. Extra-limitally in the mountains of Malawi, eastern Zambia, northern Moçambique, Tanzania, and the highlands of Kenya.

Note: *Amydrus morio shelleyi* Hartert, 1891, is now generally treated as a synonym of *O.m.rueppellii* (Verreaux), 1865: Ethiopia, but my findings coincide with those of Sclater, *Syst.Av.Aethiop.*, part ii, 1930, p. 665, in that *rueppellii* and *shelleyi* are separate taxa. In the event of Ethiopian and Ugogo birds being treated as taxonomically similar, a name will have to be proposed for the Rhodesian, Moçambique, Malawi, and, presumably, the southern Tanzanian populations, as they are clearly subspecifically distinct from South African *O.m.morio*.

I am grateful to Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin, Ornithologist, National Museum of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, and Mr. A. C. Kemp, Ornithologist, Transvaal Museum, for the loan of the material in their charge.

THE CHARACTERS AND RANGES OF THE RACES OF THE REDHEADED FINCH *AMADINA ERYTHROCEPHALA* (LINNAEUS)

When I demonstrated that the Redheaded Finch *Amadina erythrocephala* (Linnaeus) of southern Africa was polytypic by naming *A.e.dissita* Clancey, 1958: Bergville, Natal, I had but two specimens of the latter, and believed it was restricted to East Griqualand,

eastern Cape, and Natal, which view was followed by Traylor, in the continuation of Peters' *Check-list Birds of the World*, vol. xiv, 1968, p. 388. New material brought together in recent years shows that *A.e.dissita* has a much more extensive and interesting range than at first believed, and that the characters upon which races are founded in this finch need revision and expansion.

For the loan of material to augment that already in the Durban Museum, I am grateful to the following: South African Museum, Cape Town (Professor J. M. Winterbottom), East London Museum (Mr. C. D. Quickelberge), the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria (Mr. A. C. Kemp), the State Museum, Windhoek (Mr. P. J. Buys), and the Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola, Sá da Bandeira (Dr. A. A. da Rosa Pinto). Just under two hundred specimens were examined in Durban in furtherance of this enquiry.

Variation of subspecific import in males affects the colour of the head, the degree of lunulation over the under surface and the colour of the ventral ground; also to a certain extent the colour of the dorsum. In females (both adult and juvenal), variation affects the colour of the upper-parts, and the degree to which the underside is suffused with buff. There is no variation in size. Elucidation of geographical patterns to the variation is complicated by the effects of solar bleaching and wear, this finch being an inhabitant of harsh, arid regions; also by the fact that much of the material in museum collections is insidiously soil-stained, and that some populations of nominate *A.erythrocephala* are somewhat migratory. Seasonal movement takes elements of the typical race to the northern and eastern Transvaal and occasionally south-western Rhodesia (Bulawayo; Plumtree), the Transvaal specimens examined dated July. Elements of *dissita* are also certainly migratory, as information assembled from the western Transvaal (Swartruggens, Rustenburg, Northam) (1969 *et seq.*) indicates that the species is a dry season breeder (April–July) in this region, and is very largely or entirely absent from its breeding grounds during the main rains from October onwards.

This study shows that nominate *A.erythrocephala* is a xeric form and an element of karoo and semi-desert country from coastal south-western Angola, south through South-West Africa to the northern Cape, the valley of the Orange R., and the central and eastern districts of the Karoo south of the same river, thence to the western Orange Free State and south-western Transvaal. This

form is characterized in that the male has the head-top scarlet and the upper-parts with a brownish tinge. Below the white spotting is relatively small, the fringing black reduced, and the ground to the breast is about cinnamon. In the female, the upper-parts are brownish grey, and the ground to the underside is buffish.

A.e.dissita, described in the first instance from Bergville, Natal, is probably a recent colonist of the bushveld regions of the Transvaal and the interior of Natal, as breeders from both these territories agree exactly with other elements of *dissita* from Botswana and adjacent north-eastern South-West Africa, notably from De Hoek at 21° 55' S., 20° 59' E., from which locality a long series of birds has been available for study. It probably evolved in the Kalahari and adjacent regions of Botswana, and is an endemic of mesic acacia- and bushveld savanna. *A.e.dissita* is well-differentiated from nominate *erythrocephala*, the male having the head-top crimson rather than scarlet, and the upper-parts are distinctly greyer, less brownish; below with larger and whiter spotting, the black fringing broader, and the ground to the breast is wood brown rather than cinnamon. In the female, the red tipping to the head-top feathers is darker, and the upper-parts are greyer and colder, less brown, and below, the ground is whiter, not buffish as in *A.e.erythrocephala*. There is no difference in size. The east- and south-eastward spread of *A.e.dissita* is probably another result of the comparatively recent opening up of southern Africa and the introduction of European farming methods, as seems to be the case in the recent range expansion in the allied Cut-throat Finch *Amadina fasciata* (see Clancey, *Zool.Abhandl.Tierkunde Dresden*, vol. xxxi, 5, 1970, pp. 51-54; Clancey, *Bull.Brit.Orn.Club*, vol. xci, 3, 1971, p. 88). Variation of subspecific import is now seen as describing a western and south-western-north-eastern, rather than a simple west-east pattern as believed heretofore.

The characters and ranges of the two races of the Redheaded Finch are as follows:

(a) ***Amadina erythrocephala erythrocephala* (Linnaeus)**

Loxia erythrocephala Linnaeus, *Syst.Nat.*, 10th edition, i, 1758, p. 172: Africa=Angola (*ex* Edwards). Here formally restricted to coastal Benguela.

Loxia maculata Burchell, *Trav.Int.S.Afr.*, vol. ii, 1824, p. 269: "Knecht's Fountain" and the country about Litakun=Kuruman district, northern Cape.

Male (adult) with head scarlet or orange-red; rest of upper-parts greyish brown. Under-parts with ground to breast clear cinnamon, the lower fore-throat, breast and sides lunulated with crescentic white, black edged apical spots, which scaling and spotting scarcely extends up over the fore-throat, which surface is whitish.

Female (adult and juvenal) with tipping to head-top pale red, and upper-parts about light brownish olive. Below, with ground to the fore-throat, breast and sides buffy.

Measurements: Wings of ♂♂ 71–76, of ♀♀ 71,5–74,5 mm. (14 Angolan topotypes measured).

Material examined: 139. *Angola*, 14 (Caraculo, Baia Farta, Lucira, Chitado, Cahamã); *South-West Africa*, 61 (Sanitatas, Otjivasandu, Leeubron, Ohopoho, Kuiseb Canyon, Namutoni, Gobabis, Okahandja, Karibib, Windhoek, Maltahöhe, etc.); *Cape*, 51 (Witdraai, Upington, Olifantshoek, Kuruman, Kimberley, Kakamas, Prieska, Murraysburg, Beaufort West, Graaff-Reinet, Somerset East, Queenstown, Colesberg, Hopetown, etc.); *Orange Free State*, 6 (Tweespruit, Vredefort); *Transvaal*, 7 (Potchefstroom, Pretoria, Mokeetsi, Groot Spelonken (29 July), confl. Klaseri/Olifants Rivers (16 July)).

Range: The arid coast of western Angola from about Luanda, south to the Cunene and in southern Huila district, South-West Africa, the northern Cape and middle reaches of the Orange R., south to the central and eastern Karoo districts (east to about Queenstown), the dry western Orange Free State and adjacent south-western Transvaal. Some elements of this race are migratory, when, towards the end of the dry season and presumably after breeding, ranging to eastern and northern Transvaal, and occasionally south-western Matabeleland, Rhodesia (? this race).

Remarks: *A.e.erythrocephala* is a xeric race, characteristic of karoo associations. It inhabits regions with an annual rainfall of c. 350 mm. and less.

(b) ***Amadina erythrocephala dissita*** Clancey

Amadina erythrocephala dissita Clancey, *Durban Mus.Novit.*, vol. v, 10, 1958, p. 142: Bergville, Natal.

Adult male similar to *A.e.erythrocephala*, but differs in having the head a darker, more crimson, red, the dorsum colder and

greyer, the white spots on the ventral surface rather larger and more snowy, the black fringing and barring broader, imparting a more heavily scaled effect, and the scaling also carried further up over the fore-throat, thereby restricting the gular white; ground to breast more vinaceous, nearer wood brown than cinnamon. Wings and tail darker and greyer, the apical spotting in former rather whiter.

Upper-parts in female (adult and juvenal) darker and greyer, less warm brown (about Hair Brown (Ridgway, pl. xlv), *versus* Light Brownish Olive), and with the red tipping to the head-top feathers darker, more purplish. Below, whiter, the ground less suffused with buff over the throat, breast and sides.

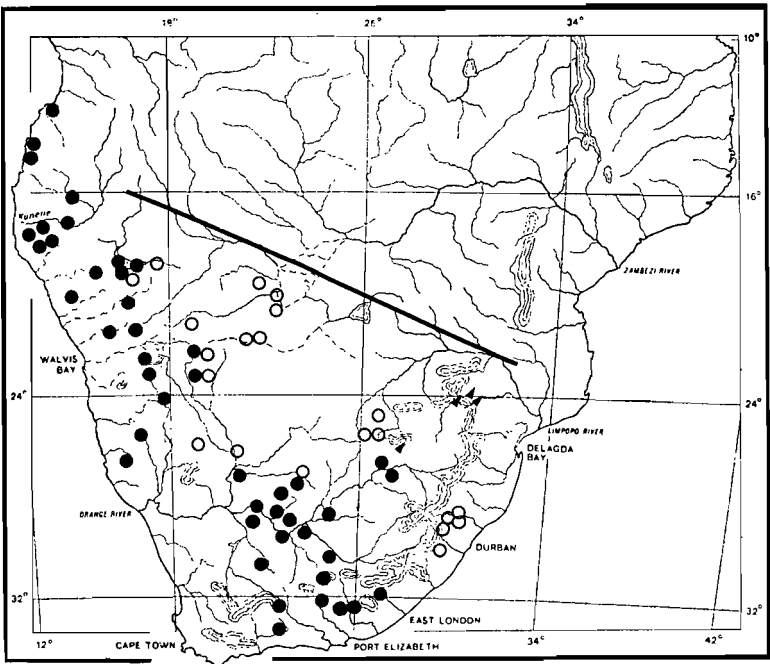
Measurements: Wings of ♂♂ 72–77, of ♀♀ 72–77 mm. (20 measured).

Material examined: 59. *Natal*, 9 (Bergville, Elandslaagte, Colenso, Frere, Weenen); *western Transvaal*, 9 (Northam, Rustenburg, Swartruggens); *Botswana*, 3 (S.W. of Sehitwa, Kai Kai, Cungcna); *north-eastern and eastern South-West Africa*, 37 (Rietfontein, De Hoek, Perdepan, Wilhelmsruhe, Onguma, Gobabis district, etc.); *northern Cape*, 1 (Kuruman district).

Range: East Griqualand (? status), the Midlands and upper districts of Natal, the lowlands of northern Lesotho, the Orange Free State east of the last race, the bushveld regions of the Transvaal highveld to Botswana and adjacent northern Cape, the eastern border of South-West Africa in the Kalahari Sandveld, and north-eastern South-West Africa, west to the eastern Etosha Pan region (Onguma) and south-eastern Ovamboland.

Remarks: Some elements of this taxon also appear to be migratory, as the species is very largely if not wholly absent from known breeding grounds in the western Transvaal during the rains, and in this region it is a dry season (winter) breeder. In Natal, it is also largely a dry season breeder. Dean, *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. ix, 6, 1971, p. 90, gives Natal breeding records as February–September.

A.e.dissita is a mesic savanna race, characteristic of acacia- and bushveld facies. Mainly in regions with a rainfall in excess of 350 mm. p.a.



MAP II

Map showing the disposition of the two races of the Redheaded Finch *Amadina erythrocephala* (Linnaeus) based on specimens examined.

- *Amadina erythrocephala erythrocephala* (Linnaeus).
- *Amadina erythrocephala dissita* Clancey.
- ▲ Migrant *A. e. erythrocephala*.