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### MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS XXI

by

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#### GEOGRAPHICAL VARIATION IN THE GOAWAY BIRD *CORYTHAIXOIDES CONCOLOR* (SMITH)

The Goaway Bird was first introduced to science by Dr. Andrew Smith as *Corythaix concolor* in the *South African Quarterly Journal*, 2nd series, Oct.-Dec. 1833, p. 48, and was stated to "inhabit South Africa, inland of Port Natal". Overlooking his prior description, Dr. Smith redescribed the species in his *Report of the Expedition for Exploring Central Africa*, 1836, p. 54, under the name *Coliphimus concolor*, the species then stated to "inhabit the country from Kurrichaine to the Tropic" at about 25° 24' S. lat. The Goaway Bird does not occur in Natal, and must have been encountered by Smith during the course of his political visit to Zululand in 1832, and the Umfolozi R. may be fixed as the restricted type-locality.

In addition to the nominate race, several other subspecific divisions of the species have been proposed by workers over the years, these being in chronological order: *C.c.pallidiceps* Neumann, 1899: Angola and Benguela; *C.c.bechuanae* Roberts, 1932: Gaberones, south-eastern Bechuanaland Protectorate; *C.c.chobiensis* Roberts, 1932: Kabulabula, Chobe R., northern Bechuanaland Protectorate; and *C.c.cuanhamae* Rosa Pinto, 1962: Pereira d'Eça, Huila, Angola. There is no measure of agreement among workers on the number of races to be admitted in our formal subspecific arrangement of the

in the Kaokoveld and in northern and north-eastern Damaraland, South-West Africa.

*Note:* *T.e.ngamiensis* (Roberts), 1932: Maun, Ngamiland, Bechuanaland, based on an allegedly longer bill, is invalid and a synonym of *T.e.rufirostris*.

(c) ***Tockus erythrorhynchus damarensis*** (Shelley), 1888: Otjimbingwe, Damaraland, South-West Africa.

Still larger than *T.e.rufirostris*. Wings of ♂♂ 186-203, ♀♀ 181-186 mm. (after Sanft). Rather whiter over the face and frons, and whiter throughout below, less variegated or marmorated on the throat and upper breast with black. Basal surface of outermost rectrices with reduced blackish grey, and inner secondaries (not tertials) largely plain white.

*Range:* Restricted to western and central Damaraland, South-West Africa.

The nominate race from further north in Africa lacks the sub-terminal black bar to the outer tail-feathers and is plain white below, lacking the black marmorations to the lower throat and upper breast, in addition to other differences. It does not occur in South Africa, *contra* Macdonald, *Contr.Ornith.West.South Africa*, 1957, pp. 79-81, and Macdonald and Hall, *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, vol. xxiii, 1, 1957, p. 13.

#### THE GEOGRAPHICAL RACES OF THE YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW *PETRONIA SUPERCILIARIS* (BLYTH)

Current opinion is divided as to the extent to which the populations of the Yellow-throated Sparrow *Petronia superciliaris* (Blyth), 1845: Cape Town, Cape Province, South Africa, are divisible into named subspecies, and most conservative workers treat the species binomially. Roberts, *Journ.S.Afr.Ornith.Union*, vol. viii, 1, 1912, p. 46, in proposing *P.s.bororensis* Roberts, 1912: Villa Pereira, Boror, northern Moçambique, was the first worker to demonstrate geographical variation in the species. Later, the same worker in *Ann.Transv.Mus.*, vol. xvi, 1, 1935, p. 170, and *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 335, admitted a third race, namely, *P.s.flavigula* (Sundevall), 1850: Hamanskraal, north of Pretoria, Transvaal. Other workers have consistently refused to follow Roberts' lead, admitting no races, though Chapin, *Birds of the Belgian Congo*, part iv, 1954, p. 293, with his usual perspicacity, appreciated that the species showed quite marked variation, though he, too, followed the lead of others, tentatively admitting no races. Recently, the S.A.O.S. List Committee, *Ostrich*, vol. xxxiii, 1, 1962, p. 19, admitted *P.s.*

*flavigula*, following on the findings of Clancey, *Ostrich*, vol. xxiv, 3, 1953, pp. 128, 129.

A critical study of the variation exhibited by *P.superciliaris* recently carried out in the Durban Museum, utilizing the pooled specimen resources of the East London, Durban, Natal and Transvaal Museums, as well as the large holdings of the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo, when 318 specimens were studied in great detail, shows that four good races of this sparrow can be admitted. Variation in *P.superciliaris* affects the depth of the brown colouration of the upper-parts and wings, the colouration of the lower breast, abdomen and flanks and general size. Large-sized and saturated populations occur in the extreme north and far south of the species' range, interposed between which are populations of markedly lighter birds. The pale birds themselves are divisible into two racial taxa on the basis of size, the populations of the humid, hot coastal lowlands of eastern Africa being significantly smaller than those resident on the plateau of the interior. Much of the doubt which has arisen as to the validity of races in this sparrow stems from the condition of much of the material in our collections. This arboreal sparrow wears rapidly, and the plumage becomes seriously eroded in the breeding season. This wear is irregular in that populations resident in moist regions retain much of their dark colouration and the feathers do not erode to the same extent as in birds living in dry districts, while the species' habit of dust-bathing also results in serious discolouration of specimens in some areas. Late breeding material is often also badly stained over the head and under-parts with insect and larval juices. In the face of these obstacles, I have arrived at the findings detailed below using material only in fresh plumage, taken mainly between February-June, and of recent collecting (since 1950).

The four subspecific taxa it is proposed to recognise in the Yellow-throated Sparrow are as hereunder detailed:

(a) ***Petronia superciliaris superciliaris*** (Blyth)

*Gymnorhis superciliaris* Blyth, *Journ.Asiatic Soc. of Bengal*, vol. xiv, 1845, p. 553: "South Africa". Type-locality restricted to Cape Town, Cape Province, by Grant and Clancey, *Ostrich*, vol. xxiv, 2, 1953, p. 128.

Head-top Fuscous (pl. xlvi), grading into Olive-Brown (pl. xl) on the hind-neck; mantle streaked with dull black, the feathers edged Buffy Brown (pl. xl); rump Olive-Brown (same pl.). Supercilium pale buffy white; lores and broad post-ocular streak dark fuscous. Underparts with breast and lateral surfaces dull buffish grey, faintly

streaked with buff; gular spot lemon chrome; lower breast and abdomen greyish white.

*Measurements:* Wings of 18 ♂♂ 94-99 (96.6), tails 58-65 (61.2), wings of 5 ♀♀ 89-92 (90.6), tails 57-60 (58.1) mm.

*Material examined:* 27 (Eastern Cape Province, 17; Pondoland, 1; Natal, 8; Zululand, 1).

*Type:* No longer in existence (see Grant and Clancey, *loc.cit.*).

*Range:* The southern Cape (stated by Stark, *Birds of South Africa*, vol. i, 1900, p. 158, to occur in the neighbourhood of Cape Town, cf. Winterbottom, *Ostrich*, vol. xxx, 3, 1959, pp. 139, 140), eastwards to East Griqualand and Pondoland, Natal and southern Zululand, north of which it grades into *P.s.bororensis*.

*Remarks:* Winterbottom, *loc.cit.*, has argued against the restriction of the type-locality of this sparrow to the Cape Town district on the grounds that there are no recent records of it from that locality, and he has recommended that the type-locality be changed to Port Elizabeth. Actually, the argument is purely a legal one and, fortunately, does not affect the subspecific taxonomy of the species, but as both Stark and Sclater were satisfied that it had occurred in the Cape Town area, I prefer to leave the type-locality as it was originally fixed in 1953.

(b) ***Petronia superciliaris flavigula*** (Sundevall)

*Xanthodira flavigula* Sundevall, *Oefv.K.Sv.Vet.-Akad.Förhandl.*, vol. vii, 1850, p. 98: "Caffraria superiore". Type from Hamanskraal, N. of Pretoria, Transvaal, *vide* Gyldenstolpe, *Ibis*, 1934, p. 292.

Similar to *P.s.superciliaris*, but lighter, less dark brown, more buffy above. Head-top about Olive-Brown (pl. xl), hind neck Buffy Brown (same pl.); mantle with dark brown, not black, streaks, edged laterally with Light Brownish Olive (pl. xxx); rump Buffy Brown. Post-ocular streak narrower and paler. On under-parts, much lighter, less brown, over the breast and lateral surfaces, and with the lower breast, abdomen and flanks markedly whiter; yellow throat-spot, paler and duller. Averaging a trifle smaller.

*Measurements:* Wings of 20 ♂♂ 94-98 (95.8), tails 57-62 (59.4), wings of 10 ♀♀ 88-93 (89.9), tails 55-59 (56.8) mm.

*Material examined:* 156 (Barotseland and southern Northern Rhodesia, 25; Bechuanaland, 9; Caprivi and South-West Africa (Tsumkwe), 2; Southern Rhodesia, 100; Transvaal 20).

*Type:* In the Naturhistoriska Riksmuseum, Stockholm.

*Range:* From southern Angola and north-eastern South-West Africa, including the Caprivi Strip, Bechuanaland, Barotseland and the southern district of Northern Rhodesia eastwards to the plateau of Southern Rhodesia, the western and northern Transvaal, the western Orange Free State and northern Cape. Intergrades with *P.s.bororensis* to the east of its established range.

(c) ***Petronia superciliaris bororensis*** Roberts

*Petronia superciliaris bororensis* Roberts, *Journ.S.Afr.Ornith. Union*, vol. viii, 1, 1912, p. 46: no *Type* designated, but Villa Pereira, Boror, northern Moçambique, is mentioned in the field notes.

*Synonym:* *Petronia superciliaris oraria* Grote, *Ornith.Monatsber.*, vol. xxxviii, 1930, p. 57: Magagoni, Rufu R., Tanganyika.

Compared with *P.s.superciliaris* rather lighter on the upper-parts in freshly moulted condition, more buffy, less dark brown, and in this respect like *P.s.flavigula*, but inclined to be colder, less warm. On under-parts differs from the nominate race in being lighter over the breast, and with the lower breast, abdomen and flanks much whiter, i.e., as in *P.s.flavigula*. Ranging markedly smaller in size than either *P.s.flavigula* or *P.s.superciliaris*.

*Measurements:* 14 ♂♂ wings 88-95 (90.7), tails 53-58.5 (55.0), wings of 8 ♀♀ 83.5-88 (85.9), tails 52-55 (53.2) mm.

*Material examined:* 59 (Portuguese East Africa, 26; southern Nyasaland, 7; south-eastern Northern Rhodesia, 6; south-eastern Southern Rhodesia, 2; eastern Swaziland, 14; north-eastern Zululand, 4). Eastern Transvaal lowveld birds, which are *P.s.bororensis*  $\simeq$  *P.s.flavigula*, included in the latter race.

*Type:* In the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria.

*Range:* Eastern Tanganyika, Portuguese East Africa, central and southern Nyasaland, south-eastern Northern Rhodesia and the Luangwa R. valley, south-eastern Southern Rhodesia in the valleys of the Sabi, Nuanetsi and Limpopo Rivers, eastern Transvaal lowveld (mainly intergrades towards *P.s.flavigula*), eastern Swaziland, and apparently the flats of north-eastern Zululand, south of which it grades into *P.s.superciliaris*.

*Remarks:* Roberts, *loc.cit.*, described this race on the basis of two specimens from Boror, which were stated to be much paler than those from South Africa, especially on the under surface of the body, but in his *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 335, separated the form on the basis of pale colouration and shorter wing-length, the wings in ♂♂ not above 95 mm.

(d) *Petronia superciliaris rufitergum*, subsp.nov.

*Type*: ♂, 1st. winter. Kabompo Boma, western Northern Rhodesia. 2 April, 1959. Collected by W. F. H. Ansell. In the collection of the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia. Nat. Mus.Reg.No.39348.

*Diagnosis*: Similar to *P.s.flavigula*, as defined above, but with the upper-parts distinctly darker and more saturated reddish olivaceous, the reddish colour most marked over the rump, which is pure Cinnamon-Brown (pl. xv), as against Buffy Brown (pl. xl) in *P.s.flavigula*. On the mantle, the feathers are blackish, edged with Dresden Brown (same pl.), as against brown striae, edged Light Brownish Olive (pl. xxx) in *P.s.flavigula*. In series more saturated and ochraceous tinged over the sides of the head and neck, the supercilia quite buffish, less white, and in the wings the secondary-coverts and tertials have the pale edging redder. Ranging slightly larger in size.

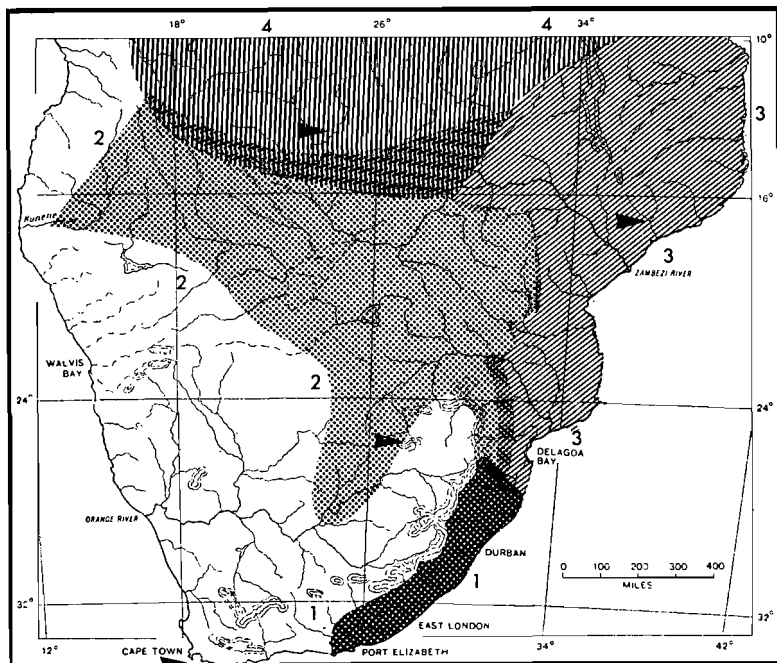
*Measurements*: Wings of 15 ♂♂ 95-100.5 (97.2), tails 58-64 (60.3), wings of 5 ♀♀ 89-94 (90.3), tails 54-59 (55.8) mm.

*Material examined*: 76 (Congo, 1; Northern Rhodesia, 75), and typically from Mwinilunga, Kabompo, Kasama, Chiengi, Fort Rosebery and Abercorn, in Northern Rhodesia.

*Range*: The grasslands of the former French Congo, and the southern Congo from Leopoldville and the Kasai, eastwards to the western shores of Lake Tanganyika, central and northern Angola, Northern Rhodesia in northern Barotseland, and the western and northern districts, northern Nyasaland, and the western and southern highland districts of Tanganyika. Intergrades to the south of its range with *P.s.flavigula*, and to the east with *P.s.bororensis*.

*Measurements of the Type*: Wing 89, culmen from base 15, tarsus 19.5, tail 56 mm.

*Remarks*: The saturated dorsal colour characters of *P.s.rufitergum* are not lost as a result of wear, and series in breeding dress show the features as lucidly as birds in pristine condition.



Sketch-map showing the approximate ranges of the four geographical races of the Yellow-throated Sparrow occurring in southern Africa.

1. *Petronia superciliaris superciliaris* (Blyth)
2. *Petronia superciliaris flavigula* (Sundevall)
3. *Petronia superciliaris bororensis* Roberts
4. *Petronia superciliaris rufitergum* Clancey

Type-localities are indicated by black arrowheads.

NEW SUBSPECIES OF THE GREATER SPARROW  
*PASSER IAGOENSIS* (GOULD) and BLACK-CHEEKED  
 WAXBILL *ESTRILDA ERYTHRONOTOS* (VIEILLOT)  
 FROM SOUTH AFRICA

A great many polytypic species of birds which are largely confined to the dry interior and arid west of southern Africa have darker coloured populations in the moister eastern parts of their ranges. Studies of the populations of the Greater Sparrow *Passer iagoensis* (Gould) and Black-cheeked Waxbill *Estrilda erythronotos* (Vieillot) in South Africa recently carried out in the Durban Museum reveal that these species, too, conform to this rule, and it now seems desirable as a result of these detailed researches to recognise two races of the sparrow and waxbill from zoogeographical South Africa.