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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS LVIII

by

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THE MAINLAND AFROTROPICAL SUBSPECIES OF THE LITTLE SWIFT *APUS AFFINIS* (GRAY)

The Afrotropical forms of the Little Swift were recently reviewed by Brooke, *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. ix, 7, 1971, pp. 93-103, in the course of his study of the species in the Afrotropics, the Palaearctic and southern and south-eastern Asia. This specialist admitted three mainland races for Africa: *A. a. galilejensis* (Antinori), 1855: Sea of Galilee, Israel, *A. a. aerobates* Brooke, 1969: Mbandaka, Equateur, Zaïre, and *A. a. theresae* Meinertzhagen, 1949: Brandvlei, north-western Cape, and an insular one, *A. a. bannermani* Hartert, 1928: São Tomé, from the Gulf of Guinea islands. In Brooke's study of 1971, *A. a. aerobates* was accorded an immense range, extending from far West Africa, east to Ethiopia and Somalia, south to Angola in the west and Natal in the south-east of the continent. For some time now it has been evident that *aerobates*, as defined in 1971, was composite, as East African and Natal and southern Mozambique samples in the Durban Museum collection appeared to differ subspecifically between themselves and, moreover, both did not agree with the characters laid down by Brooke as diagnostic of his *aerobates*.

A re-examination of the variation in the Little Swift in the Afrotropics indicates that *A. a. aerobates* is very largely a subspecies of the

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forested regions of both Upper and Lower Guinea, and that the eastern littoral populations, extending from south-western Somalia and Kenya to Natal and the Transkei were incorrectly assigned by Brooke, *loc. cit.*, to it. East African birds are found to be subspecifically indistinguishable on both colour and size grounds from nominate *A. affinis* of India and adjacent territories, and the presence of this taxon in the eastern Afrotropical Region is re-affirmed. The dark population found in the humid south-eastern littoral from the Transkei and Natal and Zululand to southern Mozambique is not nominate *affinis*, but rather shows in its very saturated appearance affinity to and probably a common origin with *A. a. aerobates*. As it differs, however, from the latter in being much less washed with metallic blue-black over the upper- and under-parts, is less darkly coloured over the face, and is not in contact with it, I have decided to recognise the said population as an additional race. My findings suggest that four mainland races of the Little Swift can be recognised within the Afrotropics, with a fifth (*galilejensis*) just impinging on the region along its northern and north-eastern borders.

Variation in the present *Apus* sp. in Africa is relatively slight and often difficult to assess as much of it is soon modified to a greater or lesser extent by wear and insolation and from the outset by skin make. Generally speaking, large-sized birds with extensive white over the fore-throat and rump inhabit desertic or semi-arid parts in the north and south of the region (*A. a. galilejensis* and *A. a. theresae*). More saturated populations characterized by smaller white patches over the fore-throat and rump, and with wings which often tend to be shorter, are indigenous to the forested equatorial belt, with an isolate resident along the humid coastlands of the south-east (*A. a. bannermanni*, *A. a. aerobates* and *A. a. gyrator*). East African birds are rather like the first (xeric) grouping in colouration, but differ in showing less white over the fore-throat and rump, and are short winged. As they are subspecifically indistinguishable from Indian examples of *A. a. affinis*, they are almost certainly descendants of a fairly recent secondary or tertiary invasion of Africa from the East.

The names, characters and ranges of the five races of the Little Swift occurring on the mainland of Afrotropical Africa will now stand as follows:

***Apus affinis affinis* (Gray)**

Cypselus affinis J. E. Gray, in Gray and Hardwicke's *Illustr. Indian Zool.*, vol. i, 2, 1830, pl. 35, fig. 2: no locality = Ganges R., restricted to Cawnpore (Stuart Baker).

In fresh dress with pileum about Brownish Olive (Ridgway (1912), pl. xxx), lightening, largely as a result of wear, towards the frons and

over the supercilia; mantle dull blackish with muted bluish black sheen; rump creamy white, the patch medially below 14 mm deep. Below, fore-throat off-white, often with some fine brownish streaking over chin; rest of venter dark Fuscous (pl. xlvi) with some blue-black overlay to medio-ventral plane; lower flanks white.

Wings of 6 ♂♀ from the Punjab, Pakistan, and Madh Pradesh, India 125-129 (127,1), SD 1,86, 10 ♂♀ from Kenya and coastal Tanzania 126,5-131,5 (128,4), SD 1,57 mm.

Range: Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, south through peninsular India, merging with *A. a. singalensis* Madarász, 1911: Sri Lanka, in the far south. In the north-west it merges with *galilejensis* in parts of Pakistan. Also East Africa from south-western Somalia and Kenya to eastern Tanzania and probably northern coastal Mozambique.

Remarks: Tails of Asian birds measure 39-43, East African examples 41-45 mm. Relatively small size and narrow white rump patch distinguish this mesic subspecies.

***Apus affinis galilejensis* (Antinori)**

Cypselus abessynicus Streubel, *Isis von Oken*, 1848, col. 354: Ethiopia = Massawa, Ethiopia (see Brooke, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, vol. lxxxix, 6, 1969, pp. 166, 167).

Cypselus Galilejensis? Antinori, *Naumannia*, 1855, p. 307: Sea of Galilee, Israel.

Micropus koenigi Reichenow, *Ornith. Monatsber.*, vol. ii, 1894, p. 191: Djebel el Meda, Tunisia.

Much as in *A. a. affinis*, differing subspecifically in having the white over the rump more expansive (above 15 mm deep medially), and becoming paler (largely as a manifestation of wear and insolation) over the frons and supercilia. Ventrally, with rather more white over the fore-throat, and with the upper tail-coverts with paler apical fringes, and under tail-coverts and ventral surfaces of the rectrices still lighter than in *A. a. affinis*. Size larger.

Wings of 7 ♂♀ 132-138,5 (135,5), SD 2,37 mm. Tails 37-43 mm.

Range: The Maghreb and the massifs of the Sahara, east to the Red Sea area and northern Somalia, the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, Transcaspia, Iran, and Baluchistan in western Pakistan. A xeric race, best distinguished from nominate *A. affinis* by the larger white rump patch and greater size.

Remarks: The population ‘*koenigi*’ of the Maghreb averages a little greener, less blue-black over the mantle than in the case of Middle East birds and is on the whole paler, with little or no blue-black sheen to the venter, *contra* Brooke, *loc. cit.*, 1971, p. 98, who states that “there is a clinal increase in the intensity of colour in the west of the range, the

Maghreb." As far as the British Museum (Nat.Hist.) material before me goes, the very reverse appears to be the case. Peters, *Check-List Birds of the World*, vol. iv, 1940, p. 251, places *koenigi* as a synonym of *galilejensis*, a view supported by Brooke and the present author.

Antinori's *galilejensis* of 1855 is actually antedated by Streubel's *abessynicus* of 1848 but has been conserved in the interest of stability in nomenclature by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (see Opinion 1011, *Bull.Zool.Nomencl.*, vol. xxx, 1974, pp. 167, 168).

***Apus affinis gyrator*, subsp.nov.**

Type: ♂, adult, breeding. Gorge of the Umpambinyoni R., near Scottburgh, Natal South Coast, South Africa. 21 October, 1970. Collected by Durban Museum personnel. In the collection of the Durban Museum, D.M.Reg. No. 26 229.

Diagnosis: Similar to East African elements of nominate *A. affinis*, but distinguishable on the basis of the darker pileum and hind neck (*Chaetura* Drab (pl. xlvi)), the mantle darker, more saturated, with more purplish tinged blue-black overlay. On the venter, with the white fore-throat colder, and rest of the underside blacker, the bases of the feathers appearing less brownish or vinaceous, and with virtually no blue-black wash. Under tail-coverts darker, and ventral surface of tail darker and more greyed. Size ranging larger than in nominate *affinis*.

Wings of 14 ♂♀ 128-138 (131,2), SD 2,96 mm. Tails 39,5-46 mm.

Material examined: 14 (Natal, 12; southern Mozambique, 2).

Range: Coastal Transkei, Natal, Zululand, probably Swaziland, and southern Mozambique to about the Limpopo R.

Measurements of the Type: Wing (flattened) 132, tail 44 mm.

Remarks: This new humid coastal form is clearly derived from the same stock as *A. a. aerobates* of the equatorial forested regions from which it differs in having the blue-black overlay to the mantle duller and less developed, the face paler distally, and the dark ventral surfaces without the marked metallic blue-black sheen present in *aerobates*. A hygric subspecies characterized by saturated condition and lack of blue-black sheen to mid- and lower venter in comparison with *A. a. aerobates*.

The name given is descriptive of the swirling aerial congregations formed by and so characteristic of this small swift.

***Apus affinis aerobates* Brooke**

Apus affinis aerobates Brooke, *Bull.Brit.Orn. Club*, vol. lxxxix, 6, 1969, p. 167: Mbandaka (Coquilhatville), Equateur, Zaïre.

As *A.a.gyrator*, but differing in having the distal facial surfaces darker, and the mantle more heavily shot with blue-black sheen. Ventrally, the dark surfaces are strongly washed with metallic blue-black, this lacking in *gyrator*. Wings and tail still darker. Size relatively large.

Compared with *A.a.affinis* of East Africa, the pileum is darker, more fuscous, less brownish olive, and the hind neck is markedly invaded with blue-black, resulting in a more uniform dorsum; mantle more heavily overlaid with blue-black sheen. Below, the venter is blacker, with much more blue-black overlay. Wings, tail and upper and under tail-coverts darker. Size greater.

Wings of 10 ♂♀ from Zaïre (Equateur and Shaba) 129-138 (132,9), SD 3,3 mm. Tails 39-44,5 mm.

Range: West Africa from Senegal and the Gambia, east to the southern Sudan, parts of Ethiopia, and Uganda, south in the west to Angola north of *A.a.theresae*, northern and north-eastern Zambia and western and south-western Tanzania. Probably also northern Malawi.

Remarks: A hygric race of the forested regions of the African tropics, characterized by relatively large size, saturated general colouration and strong wash of metallic blue-black to the dark dorsal and ventral surfaces.

***Apus affinis theresae* Meinertzhagen**

Apus affinis theresae Meinertzhagen, *Bull.Brit. Orn. Club*, vol. lxxix, 10, 1949, p. 105: Brandvlei, north-western Cape.

The southern xeric race. Remarkably similar to *A.a.galilejensis*, differing in being rather duller, less lustrous over the mantle, but taxonomically separable only in that the under tail-coverts and the ventral surface of the tail are consistently darker, and the upper tail-coverts are less sharply edged with whitish. White rump patch similarly broad. Distal pileum and supercilia not fading or wearing to such a pale colour as in *galilejensis*. Size equally large.

Wings of 12 ♂♀ 130-138 (134,2), SD 2,49 mm. Specimens with wings to 141 mm are on record. Tails 41,5-45 mm.

Range: The race of the South West Arid District and adjacent regions. Extends from western and southern Angola, South West Africa and the north-western and central Karoo regions of the Cape, east to south-western and southern Zambia, Zimbabwe, the Transvaal (recent marked range expansion), the Orange Free State and the eastern Cape, reaching the coast at Port Elizabeth. Precise eastern limits currently uncertain.

Remarks: Like *galilejensis*, *A.a.theresae* is a dry country race characterized by large size and broad white rump patch. The diagnostic criteria of this population group were first adequately defined by the

present writer in *Ostrich*, vol. xxiv, 2, 1963, p. 113, a reference not alluded to by Brooke (1971).

In the course of dealing with the status of *theresae*, Macdonald, *Contr. Orn. West. S. Afr.*, 1957, p. 86, declined to consider any of the Afrotropical populations (apart from those of *galilejensis*, which was not mentioned) separable from nominate *affinis* of India. On the other hand, years before Macdonald wrote, Bannerman, *Ibis*, 1932, pp. 686, 687, after studying 49 African and 24 Indian specimens, had found that the Afrotropical representatives of the species were on the whole darker and larger than the Indian ones and recommended they should be kept in a separate race (*A. a. abessynicus* (Streubel), which now in the main equals *A. a. aerobates* Brooke).

Compared with nominate *affinis*, *theresae* is a larger and heavier subspecies with longer wings; mantle duller, less washed with metallic bluish lustre, and with a much broader white rump patch. The white on the fore-throat is more extended caudad. Development, largely bridge-building, has resulted in a steady increase and eastward spread of this subspecies in recent times, particularly in the Transvaal.

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THE STATUS OF *CAMPETHERA LOVERIDGEI* HARTERT, 1920

In my revision of the races of the Little Spotted Woodpecker in *Ostrich*, vol. xlii, 2, 1971, pp. 119-122, I recognised three forms, two distributed along the East African coastlands from coastal Kenya, south to the Limpopo R. in southern Mozambique, these being *Campethera cailliautii cailliautii* (Malherbe), 1849: Mombasa, coastal Kenya, and *C. c. loveridgei* Hartert, 1920: Morogoro, eastern Tanzania. In the said revision, *loveridgei* was separated from the nominotypical subspecies on the basis of having the upper-parts greener, less citrine coloured, the pale yellowish spotting coarser and more in the form dappling, the wings and particularly the tertials more barred, the tail yellower, with bright yellow rather than brownish shafts to the rectrices. Ventrally, *loveridgei* was also found to be rather less yellowish, the black spotting on the whole coarser with the individual spots more massed on the breast. *C. c. loveridgei* was determined as ranging from about the Morogoro district of eastern Tanzania, south to eastern Zimbabwe and southern Mozambique on the lower Limpopo.