

**The southern African races of the
Whitebrowed Scrub Robin**
Erythropygia leucophrys (Vieillot)
— some further considerations

By

P. A. CLANCEY

Durban Museum, Durban

The complex infraspecific variation in the Whitebrowed Scrub Robin *Erythropygia leucophrys* (Vieillot) of central, north-eastern, eastern and south-eastern Africa was last dealt with by me in 1964 (Clancey, 1964), when I admitted five subspecific groupings of populations as occurring within the South African Sub-Region. Over the past ten years much additional freshly moulted material has been collected, and a recent study of this in the Durban Museum indicates that six subspecies as opposed to the present five should be recognised from southern Africa, and that the characters by which some of them are differentiated require to be adjusted in the light of the new taxon it is proposed to erect in this communication.

It is rewarding to compare the two arrangements of the southern African populations of *E. leucophrys* published more or less simultaneously in 1964, namely my work alluded to above and in the treatment of the species as a whole by Ripley in the continuation of Peters' Check-list (Ripley, 1964). For the South African Sub-Region, Ripley recognises nominate *leucophrys*, *pectoralis*, *limpopoensis*, *makalaka*, *munda* and *zambesiana*, whereas I admit after having studied some 550 specimens in great detail nominate *leucophrys*, *pectoralis*, *simulator* mihi subsp. nov., *ovamboensis* and *zambesiana*. It is difficult to reconcile Ripley's arrangement in Peters with the facts furnished by the ample material now available in museum collections, because it was found that both *E. makalaka* Neumann, 1920, named from „Makalaka Land, north of the Limpopo“, and *E. l. limpopoensis* Roberts, 1932: Buby R., south-eastern Rhodesia, were originally based on intergrades between *pectoralis* and *ovamboensis* on the one hand and *pectoralis* and *zambesiana* on the other, and are best placed as synonyms of *E. l. pectoralis*. In dealing with the South West Arid District elements, which he refers to the saturated and relatively heavily striated *E. l. munda* (Cabanis, 1880): Malanje, Angola, Ripley appears to follow Sclater (1930), who was also convinced that *E. l. ovamboensis* Neumann, 1920, described from a

minor affluent of the lower Okavango R., in north-eastern South-West Africa, is a synonym of the hygric *munda*. There is no question, now that ample material is available in southern African museums, that *ovamboensis* and *munda* are names given to two quite discrete population complexes, one (*ovamboensis*) xeric, the other (*munda*) hygric.

I have recently examined afresh the southern African populations, using mainly freshly moulted material taken in the Cape in 1965, the western Transvaal in 1969, Rhodesia in 1967 and 1973, and southern Moçambique in 1967 and 1971, and arrived at virtually the same conclusions as enumerated in my paper of 1964; with the exception that I now feel that the coastal population resident in Natal and Zululand, north to the south-eastern Transvaal corridor and southern Swaziland are better separated from *E. l. pectoralis* Smith, 1836: Zeerust, western Transvaal, than merged with it, which course of action was followed by me in 1964. Sclater, in the *Systema*, placed Natal, Zululand and southern Moçambique birds to about Coguno — a Claude Grant collecting locality in the interior of the Inhambane district of Sul do Save — as *E. l. leucophrys* (Vieillot, 1817): Gamtoos R., eastern Cape, which is even less satisfactory than my own merging of such populations with *E. l. pectoralis*, described from the eastern periphery of the South West Arid District.

Eastern Cape topotypes of *E. l. leucophrys* are relatively dull greyish vinaceous above and large sized, whereas Natal and Zululand specimens are much more saturated and richer brown dorsally, and ventrally the ground to the breast and lateral surfaces is warmer buffy, and the wing- and tail-lengths are distinctly shorter. These differences are correlated with the marked divergence in the ecological backgrounds of the two populations, the Natal and Zululand representation, compared against that of the Cape, inhabiting a region characterised by higher daytime temperatures and relative humidity levels during the breeding season. There is also a distributional hiatus between the eastern Cape population and that of Natal and Zululand northwards, as can be confirmed by reference to map 137 in Hall and Moreau (1970), though one Natal specimen in the Durban Museum collection is in agreement with eastern Cape samples, and would appear to be a migrant.

Subspecific variation in *E. leucophrys* in southern Africa affects the colouration of the upper-parts, the colour of the basal surface of the tail, which is blackish in southern and western elements and tawny in north-eastern ones, the intensity of the buffy wash to the venter, the extent of the streaking over the lower fore-throat and breast, the amount of white in the wings and general size. This ground or near-ground stratum dweller of acaciaveld and rank growth and thickets in relatively open and frequently dry savanna wears and fades rapidly. Insolation tends to yellow the dorsal

browns, and ventrally the streaking over the breast becomes coarser through wear. In association with the description of the Natal and Zululand population as a new subspecies, I have revised the racial criteria of the immediate vicinal forms in the light of data derived from a critical study of the freshly moulted material brought together since 1965. In so far as the southern African populations are concerned, it seems desirable to restrict subspeciation studies to material shot between March and late June, when the birds are in immaculate plumage.

Resulting from this further work on the southern subspecies of the Whitebrowed Scrub Robin, the South African Sub-Region races will now stand as hereunder listed:

(a) *Erythropygia leucophrys leucophrys* (Vieillot)

Sylvia leucophrys Vieillot, 1817, Nouv. Dict. Hist. Nat., Nouv. Ed., 11, p. 191: Gamtoos R., eastern Cape (ex Levaillant).

Vertex and hind and sides of neck Hair Brown (Ridgway 1912 pl. xlvi); mantle and scapulars greyer than Buffy Brown (pl. xl); rump and upper tail-coverts Sayal Brown (pl. xxix). Below white, washed across the breast and sides with Pale Pinkish Buff (pl. xxix), the flanks flushed with warm buff; lower fore-throat and breast streaked with brownish black, the streaking extending variably to the flanks.

Wings of ♂ 72—75, tails 67—72 mm.

Wings of ♀ 65—70, tails 61—64,5 mm.

Range: Southern Cape from about George, north-east to the valley of the Great Kei R. and the southern Transkei. A single specimen of the present subspecies from Natal suggests there is some non-breeding season movement.

(b) *Erythropygia leucophrys strepitans*, subsp. nov.

Type: ♀ adult. Shongweni Dam, Hillcrest, Natal. Altitude c. 460 m. a. s. l. 27 June 1960. Collected by Durban Museum personnel. In the collection of the Durban Museum, D. M. Reg. No. 3787.

Darker and more saturated, less greyish, dorsally than nominate *leucophrys* (vertex, hind and sides of neck Mummy Brown [pl. xv], the mantle and scapulars Dresden Brown [pl. xv]; rump and upper tail-coverts Ochraceous-Tawny [same pl.]). On face, superciliary and malar streaks pale buff rather than white. Ventrally, with more buffy white throat, deeper buff ground to breast, sides and flanks, and breast streaking on the whole finer and browner. Size smaller.

Wings of 12 ♂ 65—71, m 67,5, SD 1,96, tails (of 11) 59—64, m 62,0, SD 1,47 mm.

Wings of 11 ♀ 64—67, m 65,5, SD 1,16, tails (of 10) 56—59, m 57,8, SD 1,14 mm.

Material examined: 74 (Natal, 40; Zululand, 18; south-eastern Transvaal, 7; southern Swaziland, 9).

Measurements of the Type: Wing (flattened) 63,5, culmen from base 17,5, tarsus 24, tail 58 mm.

Range: Natal, Zululand, south-eastern Transvaal (Pongola), and southern Swaziland.

(c) *Erythropygia leucophrys simulator* Clancey

Erythropygia leucophrys simulator Clancey, 1964, *Arnoldia* 1, No. 11, p. 7: Panda, Inhambane, Sul do Save, Moçambique.

Less saturated, somewhat paler and more earthen or vinaceous brown above than *strepitans* (vertex, hind and sides of neck Drab [pl. xlvi], mantle and scapulars dull Buffy Brown, and rump and upper tail-coverts Buckthorn Brown [pl. xv]). Face with whiter superciliary and malar streaks. Below, with whiter fore-throat and belly and markedly paler buff ground to breast, sides and flanks; breast streaking again darker. Tail rather blacker. Size ranging a little smaller in the female.

Wings of 10 ♂ 66—70,5, m 68,1, SD 1,33, tails 60—66,5, m 63,0 SD 2,55 mm.

Wings of 7 ♀ 61,5—67,5, m 64, SD 1,90, tails 52—57, m 55,5, SD 1,74 mm.

Range: Eastern Swaziland in the Lebombo Range, extreme north-eastern Zululand (east of the Lebombos), and Sul do Save, southern Moçambique.

Remarks: This interesting race exhibits the dorsal colouration of the xeric *ovamboensis*, but is less buffish and more heavily striated below, in this resembling *pectoralis*. It appears to be one of the several Sul do Save forms showing affinities with the arid interior and west of the Sub-Region.

(d) *Erythropygia leucophrys pectoralis* Smith

Erythropygia pectoralis A. Smith, 1836, Rep. Exped. Expl. centr. Afr., p. 46: „country between the Orange River and Kurrichaine“. Restricted to Zeerust, western Transvaal, by Clancey, 1964, *Arnoldia* 1, No. 11, p. 5.

Synonyms: *Erythropygia makalaka* Neumann, 1920

Erythropygia leucophrys limpopoensis Roberts, 1932

Both of these names are based on intergrades between *pectoralis* and *ovamboensis* and *zambesiana*, respectively.

Somewhat similar to *E. l. simulator*, but vertex, hind and sides of the neck warmer, more olivaceous, brown (Saccardo's Olive [pl. xxix]), and mantle and scapulars distinctly invaded with pale tawny; rump and upper tail-coverts near Ochraceous-Tawny (pl. xv). Wings with rather broader

white transverse bars, and rectrices variably suffused with dull tawny basally. Size ranging a little larger than in the case of *E. l. simulator*.

Wings of 11 ♂ 67—72, m 70,0, SD 1,58, tails 62—67,5, m 64,1, SD 1,86 mm.

Wings of 10 ♀ 64—67,5, m 66,5, SD 1,07, tails 55,5—61,5, m 58,9, SD 1,64 mm.

R a n g e : North-eastern Cape in Mafeking district, north-western Orange Free State, south-eastern and eastern Botswana, the Transvaal (except south-eastern corridor), and Rhodesia in southern Matabeleland, the Midlands and southern Mashonaland. Intergrades in depth with *E. l. ovamboensis* in western Rhodesia and adjacent Botswana, and with *E. l. zambeziensis* in south-eastern Rhodesia.

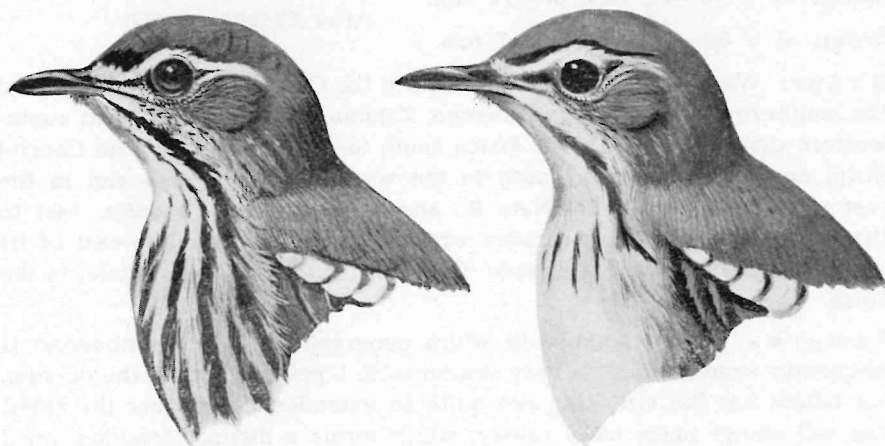


Fig. 1: Left, *Erythropgyia leucophrys pectoralis*. Right, *Erythropgyia leucophrys ovamboensis*. Note whiter malar streak, vestigial ventral streaking and paler colouration in *ovamboensis*.

(e) *Erythropgyia leucophrys ovamboensis* Neumann

Erythropgyia munda ovamboensis Neumann, 1920, J. Ornith. 68, p. 83: „Ombongo and Ovakenyama, in northern German South-West Afrika“ = Bongo R., Okavango, north-eastern South-West Africa (vide Mackworth-Praed and Grant, 1963, Birds Southern Third Africa 2, p. 182).

S y n o n y m : *Erythropgyia leucoptera permutata* Grote, 1930
Sometimes incorrectly given as *permuta* in the literature.

Dorsally similar to *E. l. simulator*, but often a little greyer over the head-top, hind and sides of the neck, these surfaces more contrasted against the back, and rather brighter over the rump and upper tail-coverts. Differs sharply from the other southern races of the Whitebrowed Scrub Robin in having the breast, sides and flanks warm vinaceous or Cinnamon-

Buff (pl. xxix), the streaking restricted to the lateral and caudad fore-throat. In wings, the white transverse bars are broader, and the outer vanes of the secondaries and tertiaries are paler. Bill longer and somewhat finer.

Compared with *E. l. pectoralis* differs in being more earthen, less warm olivaceous, brown over the dorsal head and neck surfaces, contrasted against the mantle and scapulars which are less invaded with tawny. Below, warmer and pinker buff across the breast and over the lateral surfaces, the streaking restricted to the sides and caudad surface of the fore-throat; the malar streak is also rather broader and whiter. Still more extensively white in the wings, and paler over the secondaries and tertiaries. Size ranging a little larger.

Wings of ♂ 70—76, tails 69—74 mm.

After Clancey (1964)

Wings of ♀ 66—70, tails 61—67 mm.

R a n g e: Western Angola from Luanda to the Cunene R. and in Huila and the southern part of Cuando-Cubango, Zambia in the southern and south-western districts, South-West Africa south to about Rehoboth, the Caprivi Strip, northern Botswana, south in the west to Lake Ngami and in the east to Lake Dow and the Nata R., and north-western Rhodesia, east to the Sebungwe sector. Intergrades with *pectoralis* in the south-east of its stated range and with *E. l. munda* (Cabanis, 1880): Malanje, Angola, to the north.

R e m a r k s: *E. l. munda*, with which geographical race *ovamboensis* is frequently synonymised, is very similar to *E. l. pectoralis* over the dorsum, but below has the streaking not quite so extended down over the sides. The tail shows much basal tawny, which forms a distinct tongue-shaped medial salient to the innermost rectrices. The size is again smaller, in this like *E. l. zambesiana*.

(f) *Erythropygia leucophrys zambesiana* Sharpe

Erythropygia zambesiana Sharpe, 1882, Proc. zool. Soc. London 1882, p. 588, pl. 45, fig. 2: Tete, lower Zambesi R., Moçambique.

S y n o n y m: *Erythropygia ruficauda iubilaea* Grote, 1927.

Very similar to *E. l. pectoralis*, but slightly paler, more vinaceous, brown over the vertex and neck, and mantle and scapulars still more invaded with tawny. Below, with ground to breast, sides and flanks paler but rather warmer buff, and streaking over breast finer, more sharply defined, and browner. Tail with rectrices bright Argus/Amber Brown (pl.iii) basally, the apical quarter blackish brown and the tip white (no white on innermost pair). Similar in size to *E. l. simulator*.

Wings of ♂ 65—69, tails 58—62,5 mm.

After Clancey (1964)

Wings of ♀ 61—68, tails 54—61,5 mm.

Range: Moçambique north of the Save R., eastern and northeastern Rhodesia (in the Zambesi R. valley, west to the eastern aspects of the Kariba Basin), Malawi, and the Southern Province of Tanzania. Grades into *E. l. soror* Reichenow, 1905: Klein Arusha, Tanzania, to the north, and with *E. l. pectoralis* and *E. l. simulator* to the south.

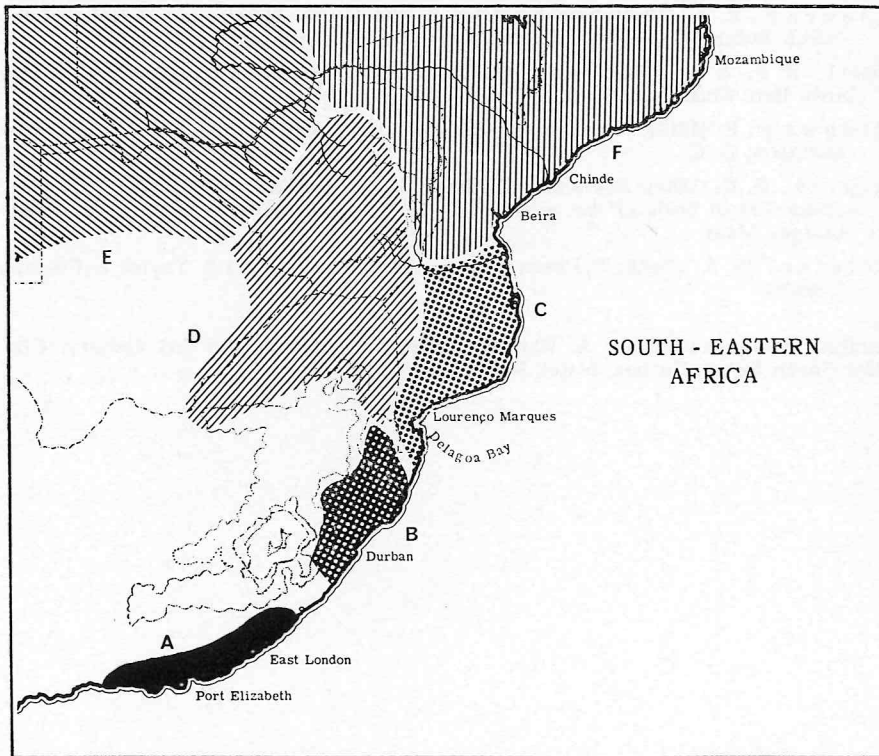


Fig. 2: Sketch-map showing the disposition of the south-eastern African races of the Whitebrowed Scrub Robin *Erythropygia leucophrys* (Vieillot). A, *E. l. leucophrys*; B, *E. l. strepitans*; C, *E. l. simulator*; D, *E. l. pectoralis*; E, *E. l. ovamboensis*; F, *E. l. zambesiana*.

Zusammenfassung

Zwei voneinander abweichende Darstellungen der Rassengliederung des Weißbrauen-Heckensängers, *Erythropygia leucophrys* (Vieillot), im südlichen Afrika wurden im Jahre 1964 veröffentlicht, die eine durch den Verfasser dieser Arbeit, die andere von Dr. S. Dillon Ripley in Band 10 der Petersschen Check-list. Eine auf umfangreiches, nach 1964 erhaltenes Material gegründete erneute Untersuchung der Rassengliederung der genannten Vogelart bestätigt die vom Verfasser 1964 in Arnoldia gegebene Darstellung, doch erscheint es nun geraten, die Population von Natal und Zululand der im Innern des östlichen Teiles der südafrikanischen Sub-

region lebenden *E. l. pectoralis* als hier neu beschriebene Rasse *E. l. strepitans* gegenüberzustellen. Damit erhöht sich die Zahl der im südlichen Afrika vorkommenden Rassen von *E. l. leucophrys* von fünf auf sechs.

References

- Clancey, P. A. (1964): Subspeciation in the South African populations of the Scrub Robin *Erythropygia leucophrys* (Vieillot). *Arnoldia* 1 (11): 1—12.
- Hall, B. P., & R. E. Moreau (1970): Atlas of speciation in African passerine birds. Brit. Mus. (nat. Hist.), London.
- Ridgway, R. (1912): Color standards and color nomenclature. The author, Washington, D. C.
- Ripley, S. D. (1964): Subfamily Turdinae. In the continuation of J. L. Peters' Check-list of birds of the world, Vol. 10: 13—227. Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Slater, W. L. (1930): *Systema avium aethiopicarum*, Part 2. Taylor & Francis, London.

Address of the author: P. A. Clancey, Director, Museum and Art Gallery, City Hall, Smith Street, Durban, Natal, Republic of South Africa.