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MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS

XLV

by

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THE RACES OF THE WHITETHROAT *SYLVIA COMMUNIS* LATHAM REACHING THE SOUTH AFRICAN SUB-REGION

Following the findings of Stresemann and Stresemann, *Journ.f. Ornith.*, vol. cix, 3, 1968, pp. 303 - 314, nominate *Sylvia communis* Latham, 1787: Kent, England, is currently not considered to reach the South African Sub-Region during its non-breeding sojourn in Ethiopian Africa, the two races wintering in the Sub-Region being *S.c. volgensis* Domaniewski, 1915: Saratov, Volga R., U.S.S.R., and *S.c. icterops* Ménétries, 1832: Talych=Talyshskiye Gory, south-eastern Azerbaydzhan, U.S.S.R. I have recently researched the races of *S.communis* to be admitted to the South African list and conclude on the basis of material from Rhodesia and Botswana, in addition to specimens from Zambia and southern-western Tanzania, that while it is true enough that most specimens are clearly attributable to both *volgensis* and *icterops*, some elements of *S.c.communis* do reach the drier interior of southern Africa during their non-breeding stay in Africa, where they moult, and that the exclusion of this taxon from the list is indefensible.

While much of the material available is in a seriously abraded and insolated condition, a sufficiency of moulting or completely moulted

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Bradypterus bedfordi Ogilvie-Grant, *Ibis*, 1912, p. 382: Mbabe= Mabase Flats, northern Botswana.

Darker and more saturated on the dorsum than in the case of *B.b.transvaalensis*, especially over the vertex, hind neck and mantle centre (near to *Sepia* (pl. xxix)), the rump and upper tail-coverts also darker red-brown. Below, darker over the sides and flanks, but otherwise much as in *transvaalensis*, though somewhat greyer white medio-ventrally. Wings and tail darker.

Juvenile generally darker, more strongly yellowish below, and with darker sides and flanks. Size closely similar to *transvaalensis*.

Wings of 20 ♂♀ 54,5 - 61 (57,9), SD 1,75, SE 0,39, culmens 15 - 17, (15,9), SD 0,62, SE 0,14, tails 60 - 71,5 (66,3), SD 3,08, SE 0,69 mm.

Material examined: 29 (*Botswana*: Shorobe, Maun, Chanokhe Drift (Botletle R.), Kasane; *Caprivi*: Linyanti; *Zambia*: Shangombo, Nasiongo, S. Kasiji R. (Balovale), L. Mwanze (Balovale), Lungwebungu R. (Balovale), Nkulwashi R. (Balovale), Kabeti (Mongu), Kabompo Boma, Mutangini (Kabompo), Manyinga R. (Angola border), Luamala R. at 27° 08' S., 14° 06' E., L. Lusiwashi (Kabwe), Chambeshi/Lubansenshi R. confl., Monongwa (Luwingu), mouth of Luapula R., opposite Kasenga (Luapula), Bulaya (Mporokoso)).

Range: The Okavango Swamp and Botletle R. of Botswana, north to Angola east of the range of *B.b.benguellensis* (Traylor, *Check-list of Angolan Birds*, 1963, p. 145, lists it only from Macondo in the extreme east of Angola), Zambia from Barotseland north to Mwinilunga, and east across the north of the territory to the Luapula and Northern Districts, Shaba, Zaïre, and, probably, south-western Tanzania. Intergrades with *B.b.tongensis* to the south-east of its established range.

Remarks: *Sepia* top of head, hind neck and mantle centre distinguishes this race from all others here considered, which taxon appears to be mainly an endemic of papyrus swamp. Ventrally, the colouration is much as in *transvaalensis*, being medially whiter than in nominate *baboecala* and *tongensis*. The lower fore-throat is usually distinctly streaked with dusky in contrast to the condition present in *tongensis*.

THE SUBSPECIES OF THE BLACKCHESTED PRINIA *PRINIA FLAVICANS* (VIEILLOT)

The Blackchested Prinia *Prinia flavicans* (Vieillot) of much of the South West Arid District and some adjacent areas of the Ethiopian

Region was first demonstrated as polytypic by Sclater, *Bull.Brit. Orn.Club*, vol. xlviii, 1927, p. 18, when he described *Prinia ansorgei* from the arid coast of south-western Angola, and later by Boulton and Vincent, *Bull.Brit.Orn.Club*, vol. lvii, 1936, p. 7, when they named *P.f.bihe* from the mesic highlands of the same territory. Variation in the species was again dealt with by me in a short communication in *Durban Mus.Novit.*, vol. v, 4, 1957, p. 46, in which *P.f.nubilosa* was described from the highveld of the Transvaal. Shortly after this, Irwin, *Bull.Brit.Orn.Club*, vol. lxxix, 7, 1959, pp. 127, 128, reviewed the variation as then understood, in the process synonymizing the name *nubilosa* with the resurrected *P.f.ortleppi* of Tristram, 1869, described from Colesberg in the north-eastern Cape (*Drymoica ortleppi* Tristram). More recently, Traylor, *Pub.cult.Comp.Diam.Ang.*, Lisboa, No. 58, 1963, pp. 88, 89, commented on the Angolan subspecies of this prinia and gave consideration to the geographical variation of the species as a whole. Consensus reached by these various systematists suggests that four subspecies are to be admitted in the formal arrangement of the populations.

A critical re-examination of *P.flavicans* recently carried out in the Durban Museum, utilizing a series of some 470 specimens drawn from the collections of the Durban, East London and Transvaal Museums and the National Museum of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, reveals that five, not four subspecies, need to be recognised. The populations of the Transvaal from about Johannesburg northwards are both brighter and much clearer yellow below than those of the karoo regions of the north-eastern Cape, the Orange Free State and the lowlands of Lesotho when in freshly moulted condition, and both my *P.f.nubilosa* of 1957 and the *P.f.ortleppi* of Irwin, 1959, are clearly composite taxa of two subspecies. Fortunately, the type-locality of *P.f.nubilosa*: Kendal, near Witbank, Transvaal, and that of *ortleppi*: Colesberg, north-eastern Cape, are both so situated as to obviate the need to introduce a new name. For the northern elements of the present *P.f.ortleppi* the name *nubilosa* can be conveniently resuscitated, with the revised range of *P.f.ortleppi* restricted to the north-eastern Cape, the Orange Free State, the lowlands of Lesotho and the south-western Transvaal.

Subspecifically significant variation in *P.flavicans* affects the hue of the upper-parts, the degree of brown speckling over the lower fore-throat in non-breeders, the yellowness of the underside from breast to vent, and size, particularly the length of the tail. In breeding birds the geographical correlated variation is apparently reduced, this affecting the shade of the earthen brown upper-parts, the

yellowness of the venter and the degree to which the black breast cincture is developed in males. The palest birds are essentially xeric elements, extending from the arid coast of Angola south to the north-western Cape and south-east to the northern Cape and much of Botswana. Two subspecies are admissible in this complex, based mainly on variation in the tail-length. Birds with darker dorsal surfaces replace such xeric representatives in a sequence of populations which become increasingly more suffused with lipochrome ventrally, these extending in a south—north—north-west gradient from the north-eastern Cape and the Orange Free State (and lowland Lesotho), north to the Transvaal, western Rhodesia, northern Botswana, western Zambia, and parts of Angola. This complex of mesic elements can be arranged in three subspecies.

Variation in *P. flavicans* is normally difficult of analysis owing to the fact that much of the material in the general run of museum collections was not collected with this aim in view in the first instance, and is both sun affected and worn. The arrangement of the populations adopted hereunder was arrived at on a study of freshly moulted birds taken between the months of late March and the end of June only. The delicate yellows of the under-parts of this prinia and downy plumage are singularly prone to rapid leaching and erosion by the harsh environmental factors to which it is subject.

The following subspecies may be accepted, their characters, and ranges being as hereunder detailed.

Prinia flavicans ortleppi (Tristram)

Drymoica ortleppi Tristram, *Ibis*, 1869, p. 207: Colesberg, north-eastern Cape.

Differs from nominate *P. flavicans* (see immediately below) in being darker, redder and more saturated over the upper-parts, this marked over the vertex (forehead Saccardo's Umber (Ridgway (1912), pl. xxix), grading to Tawny-Olive over the mantle and scapulars and Clay Color on the lower rump and upper tail-coverts). Ventrally with the fore-throat duller white, and rest of venter duller and less lucid yellow, more invaded with buffish; lower fore-throat more heavily speckled with blackish brown in series. Size ranging a little greater in the wing-length.

Breeding adult with upper-parts darker earthen brown, especially over the head-top.

Measurements: Wings of 10 ♂♂ 53 - 58 (56.1), SD 1.39, SE 0.44, tails 78.5 - 93 (85.2), SD 4.60, SE 1.46 mm.

Wings of 10 ♀♀ 50 - 55,5 (53,1), SD 2,40, SE 0,76, tails 73 - 86,5 (82,1), SD 4,01, SE 1,27 mm.

Material examined: 38 (north-eastern Cape: Hopetown; Orange Free State and adjacent Transvaal: Bloemfontein, Glen (Modder R.), Excelsior, Potchefstroom; Lesotho: Mamathe's (Teyateyaneng)).

Range: North-eastern Cape north of 31° S. and west to 24°E., Orange Free State west of c. 29° E., and extreme south-western Transvaal. Intergrades to the west of its range with *P.f.flavicans*.

Remarks: Rather darker and redder upper-parts and duller yellowish to venter distinguish this subspecies.

Prinia flavicans flavicans (Vieillot)

Sylvia flavicans Vieillot, *Tabl.Encycl.Méthod.Ornith.*, ii, 1820,p. 438; South Africa=Great Namaqualand (*ex* Levaillant).

Synonyms: *Sylvia limonella* Lichtenstein, 1842;

Drymoica pallida Smith, 1842;

Drymoica pectoralis Smith, 1843.

Forehead dull Tawny-Olive (pl. xxix), merging to Isabella Color (pl. xxx) over the dorsum and Honey Yellow on the lower rump and upper tail-coverts. Below, fore-throat white, rest dilute Straw Yellow (pl. xvi), the lower fore-throat spotted with brown in many. In nuptial dress, upper-parts dull earthen brown, and tail shorter than in non-breeding plumage. Below, fore-throat off-white; across the upper breast a broad, dull black cincture; rest of venter pale yellow or yellowish white.

Measurements: Wings of 12 ♂♂ from South West Africa and Botswana 53 - 56 (54,5), SD 1,10, SE 0,32, tails 79 - 90 (86,0), SD 2,91, SE 0,84 mm.

Wings of 12 ♀♀ 50 - 54,5 (52,5), SD 1,37, SE 0,40, tails 74 - 85 (80,0), SD 3,32, SE 0,96 mm.

Material examined: 179 (North-western and northern Cape: Pofadder, Bladgrond, Kakamas, Kenhardt, Upington, Swartmodder (N. of Upington), Prieska, Niekerkshoop, Rietfontein, Witsand, Olifantshoek, Kuruman, Molopo/Nossob confl., Kimberley, River-ton, Barkly West, Vryburg; Botswana: Tshabong, Lehututu, Tshane, Kang, Kukong, Murwamusa Pan, Sekhuma Pan, Dikgomo di Kae, Nhane, E. of Kanye, Kweneng, Lephepe, Letlaking, Tsepe, Chukutsa Pan, Lothlekane, Kedia, S. of L. Ngami, Ghanzi, Aha Hills, Cunqna; South West Africa: Ariamsvlei, Seeheim, Maltahöhe,

Rehoboth, Windhoek, Okanjande, Okahandja, Gobabis, Otjiwarongo, Waterberg, Otavi, Erongo Mts, Usakos, Gobabeb, Sossus Vlei (Namib), Outjo, Onguati, E. of Warmquelle, Kaoko-Otavi, Ohopoho, Ondangua, Tsumkwe).

Range: North-western Cape from Bushmanland and northern Kenhardt, south to about Brandvlei and Van Wyks Vlei, northern Cape, Botswana from west of the Okavango Swamp south to the Kalahari, east to about 25° E. south of Lake Ngami and the Makgadikgadi Salt Lake complex, South West Africa except Namib from Walvis Bay northwards, and southern Huila, Angola.

Remarks: Pale isabelline upper-parts, dilute yellow from breast to vent, and virtual absence of brown spotting over the lower fore-throat distinguish nominate *flavicans* in the non-breeding season.

Sharpe, *Cat.Birds Brit.Mus.*, vol. vii, 1883, p. 186, gives the date of publication of *Sylvia flavicans* Vieillot as 1823.

***Prinia flavicans ansorgei* Sclater**

Prinia ansorgei W. L. Sclater, *Bull.Brit.Orn.Club*, vol. xlviii, 1927, p. 18: Huxe=Uchi, Benguela, Angola.

In non-breeding dress slightly lighter and redder dorsally than *P.f.flavicans*. Below whiter, more dilute yellow from breast to vent, the lower fore-throat usually unmarked with brown spots. Tail much shorter. Sexes a little more dissimilar in size. In nuptial dress perhaps a little greyer above than *P.f.flavicans*. Male with less developed pectoral band, and whiter, less yellowish, from mid-breast to vent. Tail with more fully developed blackish subterminal spots to rectrices, the tipping whiter. Tail not palpably shorter in this dress.

Measurements: Wings of 12 ♂♂ 50 - 54,5 (52,1), SD 1,33, SE 0,38, tails 54 - 66 (61,1), SD 3,69, SE 1,07 mm.

Wings of 8 ♀♀ 47,5 - 51 (49,1), SD 1,36, SE 0,48, tails 57 - 68 (62,3), SD 4,03, SE 1,42 mm.

Material examined: 28 (Angola: Baia Farta, Porto Alexandre, Caracul; South West Africa: Kaoko-Otavi, Ohopoho, Orupembe, Warmquelle, Sesfontein, Swakopmund, Walvis Bay).

Range: The Namib from about Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, north to the Kaokoveld and the desert coast of Angola in Moçamedes and Benguela (to about Lobito). Stated by Traylor to intergrade with *P.f.bihe* in north-western Huila, and does so with *P.f.flavicans* to the east of its range in South-West Africa, as shown by composite samples from Kaoko-Otavi, Ohopoho and Warmquelle in the Kaokoveld.

Remarks: Whiter venter, poorly developed black pectoral band in breeding male, and shorter tail distinguish this xeric race from the nominate subspecies. The greater size difference between the sexes is also significant.

***Prinia flavicans nubilosa* Clancey**

Prinia flavicans nubilosa Clancey, *Durban Mus. Novit.*, vol. v, 4, 1957, p. 46: Kendal, near Witbank, Transvaal,

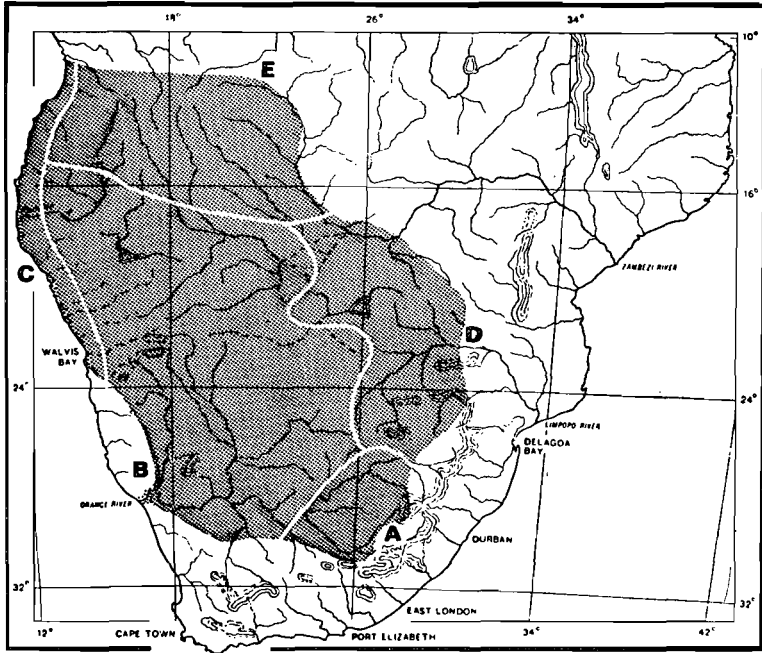
Similar in the main to *P. f. ortleppi* over the upper-parts but rather more greyish vinaceous, less red, in series. Differs taxonomically in having the fore-throat clearer white, and the rest of the venter much brighter and purer yellow when newly moulted (mid-breast Pinard Yellow (pl. iv)), the lower forethroat in adults generally with heavier and blacker spotting. Tail averaging shorter and darker, and rectrices somewhat narrower and usually with more fully developed dark sub-terminal surfaces.

Measurements: Wings of 12 ♂♂ from the Transvaal 53 - 57 (54,5), SD 1,51, SE 0,44, tails 70 - 90 (78,9), SD 6,87, SE 1,99.

Wings of 12 ♀♀ 48 - 52,5 (51,3), SD 1,47, SE 0,42, tails 65 - 77 (72,2), SD 3,59, SE 1,04 mm.

Material examined: 207 (*Transvaal:* Kendal, Johannesburg, Irene, Pretoria, Hammanskraal, Pienaar's River, Rustenburg, Zeerust, Groot Marico, Swartruggens, Boshhoek, Northam, Warmbad, Nylstroom, Goud R. (Waterberg), Marabastad, Loskop Dam, Woodbush, Derdepoort, 75 km W. of Messina; *Rhodesia:* Sentinel Ranch (Limpopo R.), Semokwe R., Shashi R., Matopos Hills, Grant's Siding, Bulawayo, Cyrene Mission, Redbank, Nyamandhlovu, Gwaai Reserve, Bongola Igusi, Umguza, Wankie Game Reserve; *Zambia:* Sesheke; *Botswana:* Molepolole, Francistown, Nata, Nkate, Mump-swe, Ramutsamusa Plain, Nthane, Sukwane, Khutse, Musu, Mopipi, Nxai Pan, Toromoja, Botletle R., Bushman Pits, L. Ngami, Makalamabedi, Mothlatlogo, Mababe Flats, Tsotsoroga Pan).

Range: Plateau of the Transvaal north from about the latitude of Johannesburg (in east to western aspects of the Drakensberg), dry western Rhodesia from Wankie Game Reserve south to Tuli, eastern districts and north-east of Botswana (in north from eastern Okavango, east to the Rhodesian border, south to Lake Ngami and the southern limits of the Makgadikgadi Salt Lake complex), Zambia at Sesheke, and probably extreme eastern Caprivi. Intergrades to the south-west of its range in Botswana with nominate *P. flavicans*.



MAP II

Sketch-map showing the disposition of the five subspecies of the Blackchested Prinia.

- a. *Prinia flavicans ortleppi* (Tristram)
- b. *Prinia flavicans flavicans* (Vieillot)
- c. *Prinia flavicans ansorgei* Sclater
- d. *Prinia flavicans nubilosa* Clancey
- e. *Prinia flavicans bihe* Boulton and Vincent

Note: The ranges of the subspecies *flavicans*, *nubilosa* and *bihe* in south-eastern Angola are tentative.

Remarks: Darker upper-parts and deeper yellow from breast to vent, the lower fore-throat usually more heavily spotted, distinguish *nubilosa* from *P.f.flavicans*. Whiter fore-throat and clearer, deeper yellow underside characterise *nubilosa* in a comparison with the vicinal *P.f.ortleppi*. Both it and *bihe* are the most yellowish of the five subspecies of the present prinia.

***Prinia flavicans bihe* Boulton and Vincent**

Prinia flavicans bihe Boulton and Vincent, *Bull.Brit.Orn.Club*, vol. lvii, 1936, p. 7: Vouga, Bié, Angola, at 1 767 m. a.s.l.

In non-breeding dress darker and greyer over the vertex and hind and sides of the neck than in *P.f.nubilosa*, and dorsum darker and more olivaceous (Light Brownish Olive (pl. xxx)). Below more

saturated Pinard Yellow from breast to vent, and black spotting over lower fore-throat generally denser and more extensively distributed; sides and flanks more dusky olivaceous. Nuptial dress: not readily distinguishable from *P.f.nubilosa*, but pectoral band apparently poorly developed, as in the case of *ansorgei*, judging from the few breeders seen. Sexes almost alike in size.

Measurements: Wings of 7 ♂♂ 50,5 - 56 (54,7), SD 2,00, SE 0,75, tails 68 - 78 (71,0), SD 3,79, SE 1,43 mm.

Wings of 6 ♀♀ 51 - 55 (53,4), SD 1,74, SE 0,71, tails 70 - 74 (71,7), SD 1,47, SE 0,60 mm.

Material examined: 18 (*Angola:* Cuito-Canavale (Cuando-Cubango), Longa (Cuando-Cubango); *Zambia:* Lungwebungu R., S. Kasiji R., S. Lueti R.).

Range: Huila north of the range of nominate *P.flavicans* to northern Bié, east to Cuando-Cubango and Moxico, Angola, and western Zambia on the Lungwebungu and South Kasiji Rivers, western Balovale, south the Liuwa Plain and S. Lueti R., Kalabo.

Remarks: Very dark upper-parts, the back strongly tinged olive, and the poorly developed pectoral band in nuptial dress characterise this mesic subspecies.

ON THE VALIDITY OF *PRIONOPS TALACOMA* SMITH, 1836

Roberts, *Ann.Transv.Mus.*, vol. x, 2, 1924, p. 86, was the first author to suggest that the southern *poliocephala* group of populations of the helmet-shrike *Prionops plumata* (Shaw) could be arranged in two mensural races: *P.p.poliocephala* (Stanley), 1814: Mozambique, along the eastern coastal lowlands of Africa from Tanzania to Zululand, with a rather longer-winged and -tailed form, *P.p.talacoma* Smith, 1836: "between Latakoo and the Tropic" = western Transvaal at about 25° S., replacing it over the interior plateau. While Sclater, *Syst.Av.Aethiop.*, part ii, 1930 p. 597, disregarded Roberts' findings, this latter author again affirmed the discreteness of *talacoma* in *Ann.Transv.Mus.*, vol. xvi, 1, 1935, p. 151. In proposing *P.p.angolica* from Malanje, Angola, Grote, *Ornith.Monatsber.*, vol. xlvii, 1939, p. 182, arrived at virtually the same conclusion as Roberts, *viz.*, that a valid mensural difference exists between eastern coastal and high level interior and western elements. While the validity of *angolica* has been discussed on several occasions in the literature, and it is currently considered by most workers to be synonymous with *P.p.poliocephala*, Roberts' findings *per se* have not been re-assessed since the publication of his *Birds of South Africa*, 1940.