

DURBAN MUSEUM

Novitates



ISSUED BY THE DURBAN MUSEUM, DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

VOL. IX, PART 16

ISSUED 1ST SEPTEMBER, 1972

MISCELLANEOUS TAXONOMIC NOTES ON AFRICAN BIRDS XXXV

by

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AN UNDESCRIBED RACE OF THE PINKBILLED LARK *CALANDRELLA CONIROSTRIS* (SUNDEVALL) FROM THE TRANSVAAL

Study of the pooled series of the Pinkbilled Lark from south-eastern South Africa in the collections of the Transvaal and Durban Museums shows that three races must be admitted for this region as against the two currently recognised. As a name is required for the undescribed taxon, it may be known as from the date of publication of this communication as

***Calandrella conirostris griseovinacea*, subsp. nov.**

Type: ♂, adult. Rustenburg, western Transvaal, at c.1370 m a.s.l. 30 October, 1970. Collected by E. L. Button. In the collection of the Durban Museum. D.M. Reg. No. 26 154.

Diagnosis: Broadly streaked with black over the upper-parts as in nominate *C. conirostris* (Sundevall), 1850: Vechtkop, north of Heilbron, northern Orange Free State, but differs in having the feather-edging pale greyish vinaceous rather than saturated rusty brown (Vinaceous-Buff (*Ridgway*, 1912, pl. xl), *versus* Sudan Brown (pl. iii)). Below more extensively and purer white over the entire fore-throat, and with the rest of the underside much paler (Pinkish Buff (pl. xxix), as against deep Cinnamon-Buff/Clay Color (same pl.)). Similar in size.

Material examined: 10. *Transvaal*: Pretoria, Hennops River, Rustenburg, and Groot Marico. For material of other races see below.

Range: Ranges from Ilorin, Nigeria, through Cameroon, Gabon and the Lower Congo, eastwards to the eastern Ituri, Zaire, and parts of adjacent Uganda. Taken Bwamba Forest, western Uganda (Durban Museum).

I am grateful to Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin, Ornithologist, National Museum of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, and Mr. C. D. Quickelberge, Ornithologist, East London Museum, for the loan of additional material.

VARIATION IN NOMINATE *EUPLECTES ALBONOTATUS* (CASSIN)

Euplectes albonotatus (Cassin), 1848, was described in the first instance from Durban, Natal. It has an extensive but local range in west-central and eastern Africa, extending from the Sudan and Ethiopia, south to Natal in the east, three races being admitted at the present time, though others have been proposed by Neunzig. The three races are based on the colour of the lesser wing-coverts, which are yellow in two (nominate *E.albonotatus* and *E.a.asymmetrurus*) and light cinnamon brown in the third (*E.a.eques*). The yellow epauletted complex is subdivided on the basis of variation in the length of the tail in males in breeding dress, *E.a.asymmetrurus* being markedly longer tailed than in *albonotatus*.

A recent study of the material of this widowbird from Natal and the Transvaal in the collection of the Durban Museum revealed that the specimens of breeding males could be readily sorted out by eye into two groups, one with short tails (*i.e.*, 70–80+), the other with the tail-length appreciably longer (81–92 mm and above). Of a series of 25 ♂♂ in breeding dress from Natal and the south-eastern Transvaal (Pongola), twenty-two have tails 75–80,5, three with tails 82,5–89 mm. In the sample from the western Transvaal highveld (Hartebeestpoort, Rustenburg), seven are small-sized, with tails 70,5–80,5, ten large, with tails 81–91 mm. Study of the series in the National Museum of Rhodesia shows that Rhodesian plateau birds are like those of the Transvaal highveld, with long-tailed birds slightly in excess of short-tailed ones in the populations. Of twenty-one Rhodesian breeding males, ten fall neatly into the small or short-tailed grouping with tails 72,5–79,5, eleven in the long-tailed grouping with tails 81–99 mm. In Zambia the situation obtaining in Natal and south-eastern Transvaal is completely reversed, with only four males out of a series of twenty-four having tails 76–78, the balance long-tailed with rectrices 81–90 mm. The small samples from Botswana and Malawi

suggests that a similar pattern of variation is present in the populations of these territories. Our southern Moçambique material of this widowbird is, unfortunately, in non-breeding plumage, but the adult males in the sample are short-winged, suggesting this population is in agreement with the contiguous ones of south-eastern Transvaal and Natal.

The tail-length variation in breeding male *E.a.albonotatus* demonstrated above is in the nature of a dimorph ratio cline in which the proportion of short- to long-tailed birds in a population decreases progressively from high in the south of the range (88%) to low in the north (16,7%), with no break in the population continuum which would render possible its formal taxonomic interpretation. Material of both *E.a.asymmetrurus* (Reichenow), 1892: Angola, and *E.a.eques* (Hartlaub), 1863: Tabora, Tanzania, is presently too limited in southern African museums for me to investigate the possible occurrence of comparable variation in either of these taxa.

Apart from *E.albonotatus*, two other wide-ranging euplectids have relatively short-tailed populations in the south of the range and longer tailed ones in the tropics or equatorial belt of the continent, these being *E.ardens* (Boddaert) and *E.progne* (Boddaert).

TABLE 1

Population	No.	Category	Tail-length range	PERCENTAGE	
				Small (70-80,5)	Large (81-99)
Natal and S.E. Transvaal	25	s	75 -80,5	88	12
		l	82,5-89		
Transvaal	17	s	70,5-80,5	41,2	58,8
		l	81 -91		
Rhodesia	21	s	72,5-79,5	47,6	52,4
		l	81 -99		
Botswana	2	s	78,5	—	—
		l	84		
Malawi	2	s	73	—	—
		l	88		
Zambia	24	s	76 -78	16,7	83,3
		l	81 -90		

Tail-length data of breeding male *Euplectes a.albonotatus* arranged in a south-north sequence to show shift of preponderance of long- to short-tailed birds in the said populations.

I am grateful to Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin, of the National Museum of Rhodesia, Bulawayo, for the loan of the material in his care.