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A New Subspecies of Forest Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas leucosticta* from West Africa

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Summary

Specimens of *Cercotrichas leucosticta* from Mt Nimba (Liberia) and Ivory Coast differ from the Ghanaian Type of *C. leucosticta* and are described as a new subspecies.

Résumé

Des spécimens de *Cercotrichas leucosticta* du Mt Nimba (Libéria) et de la Côte d'Ivoire se distinguent du Type (de Ghana) de *C. leucosticta* et sont décrits comme nouvelle sous-espèce.

Introduction

The Forest Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas (Erythropgyia) leucosticta* was originally described by Sharpe (1883, p. 44 and plate 1) from a single skin of an adult bird, whose label bears the locality 'Accra'. The skin was presented to the British Museum (Natural History) (BMNH) by Sharpe, but no other information regarding its provenance is available. The species has rarely been collected since, probably on account of its forest habitat and shyness, although it occurs widely but discontinuously in Africa, in Sierra Leone/Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, NE Zaïre and Angola (see Hall & Moreau 1970).

Bannerman (1936) knew of the existence of only one specimen from West Africa, other than the type, a juvenile collected in Liberia by Stampfli (Büttikofer 1888). More recently, two males were collected in the Ivory Coast (now in the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago) and Forbes-Watson collected a series of ten males and eight females (according to the BMNH accessions register, not 11 males and seven females as stated by Colston & Curry-Lindahl 1986) on the Liberian side of Mt Nimba, of which nine males and seven females are in the BMNH. These birds differ from the Type of *C. leucosticta* in coloration and I propose to name them

C. l. colstoni subsp. nov.**Holotype**

BMNH no. 1977.20.1361, adult male, collected at Grassfield, Mt Nimba, Liberia on 3 Aug 1967 by A.D. Forbes-Watson (collector's no. FWNB 645).

Diagnosis

Males, including the Holotype, differ from the Type of *C. leucosticta* in the following respects. The upperparts are darker, especially the rump and uppertail-coverts, which are rufous brown rather than bright chestnut. Sharply defined from the white chin and throat, there is a broad breast-band of brownish grey, with a mottled appearance caused by pale shaft-streaks and dark feather-edgings; the Type of *leucosticta* has only a poorly-defined narrow band of greyish buff on the upper breast. In *colstoni*, the lower breast, belly and flanks are dirty white, washed with dull grey-brown, and tinged rufous-buff only on the flanks; the underparts of the Type of *C. leucosticta* are whiter and strongly washed with rufous-buff over much of the under-surface (see plate 14 in Bannerman 1936). The overall appearance of Nimba birds is darker and duller, less colourful, than the Type of *leucosticta*.

Females from Nimba differ from the males in being more rufous-tinged on the upperparts (forehead to back) but not noticeably brighter on the rump. They are thus more rufous on the upperparts than the Type of *leucosticta* but darker, less bright chestnut on the rump. The underparts of Nimba females are darker, dirtier brown than the males, but perhaps slightly more rufous on the flanks, still not, however, approaching the Type of *leucosticta* in the extent of the rufous.

The Nimba birds also differ from the NE Zaïrean *C. l. collsi*, which has the rump and upper tail-coverts of a more olive tint (rufous-olive) and has the breast-band pure grey (not mottled). This race also has the flanks olive-grey (not tinged rufous-buff) and the rest of the underparts purer white. *C. l. reichenowi* of NW Angola resembles *collsi* but is rather paler.

Measurements of Holotype (mm): wing 77, tail 67, bill 18, tarsus 25; weight (as recorded by collector) 27.3g.

Measurements of all Nimba birds examined: males (n=9) wing 76-83 (mean 78.7), tail 66-71 (68.0), bill 18-20 (18.6), tarsus 25-28 (26.4), weight (as recorded by collector) 23.2-31.2g (26.6); females (n=7) wing 71-75 (72.9), tail 59-64 (61.6), bill 17-19 (18.1), tarsus 24-27 (25.3), weight 21.5-28 (24.3).

Measurements (taken by M.A. Traylor) of two Ivory Coast males: wing 82, 82; tail 67, 72; bill 18, -; tarsus 26, 27.5.

Paratypes

Paratypes of *colstoni* include all specimens examined at the BMNH, as follows: eight males 1977.20.1362-1364, 1370-1372, 1374, 1376; seven females 1977.20.1365-1368, 1373, 1375, 1377.

Distribution

C. l. colstoni is presently known for certain only from Mt Nimba and Abidjan, although it is likely that Sierra Leonean birds and those from elsewhere in Liberia and western Ivory Coast form part of this subspecies. In this respect it is noteworthy that the colour of the underparts of Sierra Leonean birds described by Field (1974) and the colour of the underparts of the juvenile collected by Stampfli in Liberia (as described by Bannerman 1936) match that of adult *colstoni* rather than that of the nominate. The eastern limit of *colstoni* in relation to the nominate form is not known; birds from eastern Ivory Coast may belong to one or other race, or there may be a break in distribution within that country, or the two races may be linked by clinal change.

Etymology

I name this race in honour of Peter Colston, in recognition of his careful work on the specimens collected by the Nimba expedition.

Remarks

The sex of the Type of *C. leucosticta* was not determined by its collector, but a comparison of its measurements (wing 84, tail 70, bill 18, tarsus 26) with *colstoni* suggests that it is probably a male. If so, the colour differences between the Ghana bird and *colstoni* are striking. However, if the Ghana bird is a female, the Nimba females approach it more closely in colour. However, in this case there would be a great difference in size between the two populations. In either case the difference seems sufficient to warrant naming the western population. The differences quoted above, between *colstoni* and the Type of *leucosticta*, apply to the whole of the Nimba series, with the Type of *leucosticta* lying outside the range of variation exhibited by the Nimba birds in several characteristics. However, the Type of *leucosticta* was the only specimen of this population available to me and there remains a possibility that it is an aberrant individual, and that the Ghana population may overlap the western one in its range of variation, in which case *C. l. colstoni* would become a synonym of *C. l. leucosticta*.

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