

Benson (1964) shows a tendency towards a longer bill in Madagascar specimens of *P. p. intermedia* (Hermann) (of which he regards *P. p. obscura* Neumann as a synonym) than in African. Four from that island in the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, not included in his measurements, all have culmen from base 19.0 mm., wing in one 84 mm., the other three not measurable.

## References:

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 Rand, A. L. 1936. The distribution and habits of Madagascar birds. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, 72(5).

## The southern forms of *Miraфра africanoides* Smith

by C. M. N. WHITE

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In 1961 in Revised Check List of African Broadbills, Pittas, Larks, etc., at pages 21-24, I dealt with the forms of *Miraфра africanoides* Smith. In 1965 in *L'Oiseau*, 35, No. Spécial: 163-174 Professor Winterbottom has reviewed the southern subspecies of the species, and in 1966 Mr. P. A. Clancey in *Arnoldia*, 2, no. 20, 1-8 has provided yet another review of the southern subspecies. These two most recent reviews are divergent in a number of respects although both are evidently based upon much the same material in South African and Rhodesian museums. Of the two Clancey's conclusions are much nearer to my own. It is obviously most unsatisfactory to have several diverse views about the treatment of geographical variation in this species and the present note seeks to show that Clancey's and my own views can be reconciled. The points involved are as follows:—

i. The application of the name *africanoides* Smith. In *Bull. B.O.C.* 1960, 80: 10-11 I gave reasons for accepting Litakun, near Kuruman as the restricted type locality. Clancey (*op. cit.* 102-103) considered that Macdonald's later restriction to Colesberg should be accepted as more in keeping with the facts. It had been generally considered that birds from Colesburg were darker and more heavily streaked than those from Kuruman but Winterbottom now reports that some birds from Kuruman are of the dark type, and others of the lighter type. This may be due to the unstable population or may be due to nomadism. At any rate it shows that even if Kuruman were accepted the name *africanoides* might be based on light or dark birds. In view of this and the fact that most recent writers have used *africanoides* for the darker birds, I propose that *africanoides* should be restricted to the dark birds. Since Kuruman is an unsatisfactory restriction of type locality in view of the instability of the population there, I would now avoid uncertainty by accepting Colesburg as the type locality. Thus *africanoides* replaces *austin-robertsi* White in my Check List. I do not consider the slight size difference mentioned by

Winterbottom sufficient to justify the retention of the latter name if *africanoides* is used for the dark birds.

ii. The application of the name *harei* Roberts. In my Check List I used this for birds from Windhoek to the Kaokoveld. Macdonald, 1957, Contribution to the Ornithology of Western South Africa, and Clancey have used it for the birds to which I applied *africanoides*, i.e. the population from south of Windhoek to Gordonia and Kuruman. Actually the difference between birds from south and central South West Africa and those from the north-west is very slight, and Winterbottom and Clancey do not agree in their assigning of material from the Okahandja, Outjo and adjacent areas just north of Windhoek. The type locality of *harei* is in fact situated in an area of transition between two rather similar forms. *Harei* as a population is presumably an intergrade about its type locality, and if most writers prefer to use it for the southern birds and *omaruru* for those from further north, I have no difficulty in following them.

iii. The status of *rubidior* White. Clancey, who did not see the original and only specimens doubts that this is a distinct form and suggests that it is probably founded on wandering birds of a darker form from further south. Winterbottom did examine the original series and confirmed its characters. I suspect that Clancey will prove correct but only further collecting at the type locality can settle the question.

The result of the above shifts in the application of three names reconciles the views of Clancey and myself on the treatment of infraspecific variation in the species.

## The eggs of the Giant Cowbird

by F. HAVERSCHMIDT

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Friedmann (1963) devotes a chapter to the Giant Cowbird *Scaphidura oryzivora* (Gmelin) and makes the somewhat startling statement that although this bird is intermediate in size between two of its frequent victims, *Psarocolius decumanus* (Pallas) and *Cacicus cela* (Linnaeus), it lays an egg considerably smaller than either of them.

He further states that *Scaphidura* eggs average 28.6 x 19.2, those of *P. decumanus* 33.8 x 24.1 and those of *C. cela* 32.5 x 24.5 mm. The source of these data is not mentioned. However, neither the data in the literature nor my own records assembled in Surinam corroborate this statement.

*Scaphidura* is intermediate in size between its two hosts. Three female *Scaphidura* collected by me in Surinam weighed 120–140 grms. (mean 129 grms.), 8 female *P. decumanus* 148–167 grms. (mean 157 grms.) and 10 female *C. cela* 62–72 grms. (mean 65 grms.). In all three species the male is considerably larger than the female.

In the literature the following records are available.

The Penard brothers (1910) devote a long section in their book to these three birds and the parasitism of *Scaphidura*.

They state that the eggs of *Scaphidura* found in the nests of *P. decumanus* are of quite a different type than those laid in the nests of *C. cela* which, if true, would be a most interesting fact.