Short communications

The status and habitats of two closely related and sympatric greenbuls: Ansorge's *Andropadus ansorgei* and Little Grey *Andropadus gracilis*

Ansorge's and Little Grey greenbuls are two very similar looking species occurring in the equatorial forests of Africa from Guinea and Liberia east to Uganda and western Kenya. *Andropadus a. ansorgei* ranges in the West African lowland forests, and *A. a. kavirondensis* in western Kenya. *Andropadus g. gracilis* similarly occupies the West African region, with *A. g. ugandae* in Uganda and western Kenya (White 1962, Keith *et al.* 1992, Dickinson 2003).

Fishpool *et al.* (1994) describe *ansorgei* as being less widespread than *gracilis* in West Africa, and being more restricted to mature forest, and *gracilis* as a common bird of forest edge, secondary habitats and gallery forest. Also, that both inhabit the upper middle stratum, being most frequent in the crowns of low trees, with *ansorgei* more often seen at greater heights than *gracilis*.

In East Africa it would appear that the situation is somewhat reversed, at least for *ansorgei* which is fairly common and easily seen in pairs or mixed flocks at forest edges, and in areas of secondary growth in the Kakamega Forest of western Kenya. Furthermore despite extensive collecting in all Uganda forests *ansorgei* remained unrecorded there until recent sight records from the Impenetrable Forest of Bwindi National Park (Borrow & Demey 2002). On the other hand, *gracilis* is a common resident of Ugandan forests up to 1550 m (Carswell *et al*. 2005), yet is only rarely recorded with any degree of certainty from western Kenya. To date it is known only from eight specimen records collected between 1959 and 1967, besides a handful of unsubstantiated sight records (1981-1992) at medium and lower levels between 8 and 12 m above the ground in more mature parts of the Kakamega Forest (Zimmerman 1972).

That *ansorgei* and *gracilis* represented two separate species was at one time questioned by several authorities, with Jackson & Sclater (1938) and later Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1955) both treating Van Someren's *kavirondensis* as a race of *gracilis*. Chapin (1953) asserted that both he and others had been unable to find anything in the haunts, behaviour or voice that would distinguish *A. ansorgei* from *A. gracilis*. Similarly Zimmerman (1972) following his extensive studies in the Kakamega Forest from 1963 to 1966 felt that it was difficult to understand how two such similar species as *gracilis* and *ansorgei* could co-exist in the same stratum, with no apparent food differences, and with very similar calls.

When observed carefully and at close range *ansorgei* is best distinguished by its warm rufous-olive or ginger-brown flanks with little or no trace of yellow on the underparts. This is in contrast with *gracilis* which at all times will show distinctly pale olive-grey underparts becoming pure yellow on the belly. Head colour is greyish olive in *gracilis* but more olive-brown in *ansorgei*. A narrow white eye-ring is present in both and is generally easily visible. Tail

and upper tail-coverts are generally brownish washed with rufous in both species.

Greenbuls however are generally notoriously difficult to obtain good views of, and with light conditions in forested habitats seldom ideal, it has become essential to obtain quality sound recordings of both in order to safely and confidently separate the two in the field. Fishpool *et al*. 1994 describe the call of *gracilis* (in West Africa) as consisting of five rapid, jaunty notes, that may be transcribed as "wheet wu-wheet wu-wheet"; they also describe a second short "tyuc" call. They describe *ansorgei* also having two calls, one that resembles the first of *gracilis* in quality but lacks its sprightliness and consists of only three notes that may be transcribed as "wheet whuut whit" or "tiu wheet tweet", although the final syllable may be dropped. Its second call is a rapid trill—"rititit" or tchitchitchitchitchi", which is harsh and flat in tone. Zimmerman *et al.* (1996) describe the call of *ansorgei* from Kakamega as an infrequent thin three-note whistle—"weet-wurt-eet", the last note highest; the species also has a descending chatter or rattle. Borrow & Demey (2002) described hearing a dry rattling call in the mid-canopy of the Bwindi Forest, Uganda. Both observers were familiar with the calls of both *ansorgei* and *gracilis* in the Ivory Coast and elsewhere in West Africa, and reported that in their experience the dry rattle call is never made by *gracilis*. The Bwindi birds did however respond vigorously to playback of a distinctive three-note whistle (of *ansorgei*) recorded by Chappuis (2000) in West Africa.

Why their niches are reversed in Kakamega remains unknown. It is also puzzling why *gracilis* remained undetected there until 1959, as well as why *ansorgei* was not recorded by the numerous collecting expeditions that worked in the Ugandan forests during the 1960's. Clearly where one is relatively common, the other is scarce and rarely recorded. It would be of interest to know is whether they ever come in contact with one another in East Africa. If so, it would then be interesting to document the vocal responses of each species towards the other. With both the Kakamega and Bwindi Forests now regularly visited by both resident and visiting ornithologists, it is hoped that more detailed information will be forthcoming concerning these two very similar species whose habits and ecological preferences still remain largely unknown.

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Comments concerning Ostrich *Struthio camelus* populations in Kenya

The Ostrich *Struthio camelus* is currently regarded as comprising four subspecies largely confined to sub-Saharan Africa. This distribution is disrupted by a belt of miombo woodland in south-central Africa that effectively divides the species into northern and southern populations with the former incorporating *S. c. camelus, S. c. molybdophanes* and *S. c. masaicus,* while *S. c. australis* is confined to southern Africa (Freitag & Robinson 1993).

Molecular work based on mitochondrial DNA has revealed that *molybdophanes* appears to have diverged from the common ancestor to the other three subspecies approximately 3.6 to 4.1 million years ago (Freitag & Robinson 1993). This, coupled with morphological and ecological differences, in addition to reported interbreeding difficulties, suggests that separate species status may possibly be warranted for *molybdophanes* (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). However, without conclusive evidence, opinions are divided, and so it remains the most distinct of the four subspecies.

Given that the three forms of the northern population occur in Kenya, a closer look at their status and distribution is worthwhile. *S. c. massaicus* extends from central and northern Tanzania north to the Masai Mara National Reserve, Amboseli, Nairobi and Tsavo West National Parks and along the main