

Short communications

Status of the Golden Palm Weaver *Ploceus bojeri* in Tanzania

As part of an on-going review of the status of all species occurring in the East African region, we feel it necessary, following a critical re-examination of *bojeri* specimens in Vienna and Berlin, to comment in some detail on the occurrence of the Golden Palm Weaver *Ploceus bojeri* in Tanzania. The earliest recorded Golden Palm Weavers were those collected by Wenzel Bojer from Zanzibar in August 1824. However Cabanis (1869) named and described *P. bojeri* from a bird collected by Baron Claus von der Decken at Mombasa in September 1862, just a few months before Hartlaub & Finsch (1870) named *Hyphantornis bojeri* from one of Bojer's 1824 birds collected on Zanzibar. Recent re-examination of Bojer's birds in Vienna has indicated that they appear more likely to be examples of the African Golden Weaver *P. subaureus* (Bauernfeind pers.comm.).

A few years later, Fischer & Reichenow (1878) reported Golden Palm Weavers (*bojeri*) as being fairly common on Zanzibar, though less so than *aureoflavus* (early name for African Golden Weaver, now known as *P. subaureus*). They reported on a male *bojeri* collected at Maurui (near Korogwe) on 24 January 1883, along with others from Zanzibar. However recent re-examination of Fischer's birds in Berlin suggests that his claimed *bojeri* specimens from Tanzania may in fact refer to *subaureus*, though he did collect *bojeri* at Mombasa (Frahner pers.comm.).

Meanwhile in January 1890 Borhndorff collected the type of *P. holoxanthus* from Mtoni (near Bagamoyo), considered at the time different to both *bojeri* and *aureoflavus* (Hartlaub 1891). However, Sclater (1930) treated *holoxanthus* as synonymous with *aureoflavus* (Golden Weaver). Sadly this collection in the Bremen Museum was lost during World War II. Later Voeltzkow (1923) also reported *bojeri* from Zanzibar during his visits there in 1903-05.

During the 1930's, Sclater & Moreau (1933) and Moreau & Moreau (1937) reviewed the status and identification of all golden weavers in inland NE Tanzania. Much of the confusion at the time concerned the status of *castaneiceps* (Taveta Golden Weaver) then treated by some as a race of Golden Weaver. Much discussion centred around birds in the Mkomazi Valley, which Sclater considered *castaneiceps* but which both Van Someren & Moreau felt were *bojeri*, though Moreau commented that the males closely resembled *P. holoxanthus*. Recent field observations from the Mkomazi Valley have shown that only *subaureus* and *castaneiceps* occur there (Tanzania Bird Atlas Data Base www.tanzaniabirdatlas.com).

Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1955) followed Moreau in assigning *bojeri* to northeastern Tanganyika, and their comment that it was confined to coastal

areas further south clearly referred to Fischer's comments that *bojeri* was fairly common on Zanzibar, also from Bagamoyo to Lamu. Fry & Keith (2004) further confused the issue by referring to *bojeri* nesting in Tanzania in *Typha* and *Phragmites* (undoubtedly copying Moreau's 1937 description of nests in the Mkomazi Valley).

The first authority to lay doubt to *bojeri* occurring on Zanzibar was Pakenham (1979) who stated that neither Vaughan (1930) nor Moreau (1944) mentioned the possibility of *bojeri* occurring there, and that if indeed it was at all common, then surely it would have been detected by both Vaughan and himself who spent so much time on the island. With early museum specimens of claimed *bojeri* now re-identified as *subaureus*, considerable doubt has emerged regarding the occurrence of *bojeri* from any locality in NE Tanzania. All records on the Tanzania Atlas database have been re-examined, and to date we can trace no positive evidence that *bojeri* has ever occurred in NE Tanzania. Meanwhile recent field work around Tanga and Bagamoyo suggests that all golden weavers there are simply *subaureus* (African Golden Weaver) (NEB unpubl. data). Current atlas maps for both *subaureus* and *castaneiceps* are available on the Tanzania Bird Atlas website.

In Kenya however, while *bojeri* is largely coastal, ranging south to Shimoni, it does breed at several inland sites, one of which being alongside *subaureus* at Hunter's Lodge some 200 miles inland from the coast (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). The statement in Britton (1980) that it ranges south to Tanga cannot now be confirmed, and we know of no true records of *bojeri* south of Shimoni. Similarly V.G.L.van Someren and his collectors made extensive collections along the Kenya coast during the 1920's and even then they did not record *bojeri* south of Rabai (just north of Shimoni), despite their extensive collections from Vanga situated close to the current Kenya-Tanzania border. In light of the above we feel that without any confirmed specimen evidence or any confirmed sight records from Tanzania, the Golden Palm Weaver should now be deleted from the Tanzanian list.

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Donald A. Turner

P O Box 1651, Nairoasha 20117, Kenya. Email: mat@wananchi.com

Neil E. Baker

P O Box 1605, Iringa, Tanzania

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A Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus fuscus* ring recovery from Tanzania

Considered by some to be a discrete population and named the Baltic Gull *Larus fuscus* (Olsen & Larsson 2003) the Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus fuscus* is well known to winter in East Africa with 10 ringing recoveries prior to 1980: Backhurst 1970 (four recoveries), 1972 (three), 1973 (one), and 1977 (two). It can be quite common on Lake Victoria and along the NE coast of Africa, scarce south of East Africa and an irregular visitor to southern Africa (Hockey *et al.* 2005). Dowsett *et al.* (2008) mention that as many as 16 individuals have been seen on Lake Tanganyika, the only annual wintering