

Range extension of the White-headed Buffalo Weaver *Dinemellia dinemelli* in central Afar, Ethiopia

The White-headed Buffalo Weaver is known from South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Dickinson & Christidis 2014), but there are few published accounts of its natural history. It is a common bird of dry bush and savanna in the Horn of Africa, found in the Rift Valley and east to the Arabian Sea (Ash & Atkins 2009, Redman *et al.* 2009). I encountered the species at a field camp along the Mille River in the central Afar, Ethiopia (11°50'N, 40°49'E; elevation 625 m) at a site dominated by dry bush habitats, and fairly heavily grazed by livestock. Five birds, all in adult plumage, were seen well and photographed at 16:00 on 20 January 2015. They were feeding on the ground and perching briefly; no breeding-related behaviours were noted, and the birds were silent.

The species is divided into two subspecies, *boehmi* in Tanzania and southern Kenya and the nominate form further north. The nominate subspecies is characterized by browner (rather than deep black) tones in the mantle feathers and more substantial white margins to the scapulars, tertials and greater coverts (del Hoyo *et al.* 2010). Based on the back colour and white edging (Fig. 1), the Afar individuals are assigned to the nominate subspecies, as would be expected geographically.



Figure 1. One of five White-headed Buffalo Weavers observed in the central Afar, Ethiopia on 20 January 2015 (photo A. W. Jones).

White-headed Buffalo Weaver is thought to be a resident species, but it may move seasonally on a local scale (del Hoyo *et al.* 2010). It is known from southern Ethiopia, and is routinely recorded from sites in the Rift Valley north through Awash National Park and Aledoghi Wildlife Reserve (eBird 2015). The present record lies well north of the mapped range in other published works (Fry & Keith 2004, Ash & Atkins 2009, Redmond *et al.* 2009, del Hoyo *et al.* 2010), and is over 200 km north of all correctly placed eBird reports. It may represent local movement outside of the breeding

season, but considering the dearth of observers in this region it probably represents a new northernmost population of White-headed Buffalo Weaver.

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Andrew W. Jones

Department of Ornithology, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, 1 Wade Oval Drive - University Circle, Cleveland, Ohio 44106, USA. Email: ajones@cmnh.org

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