

The 'golden weaver' *Ploceus (subaureus) holoxanthus*: a need for a full systematic review

The name '*holoxanthus*', when applied to the ploceine weavers of Africa, has long disappeared from the ornithological literature. It was the name originally given by Hartlaub (1891) to a type of 'golden weaver' collected in early 1890 by Friedrich Bohndorff along the Ruvu River near Bagamoyo, Tanzania. The type specimen (an adult male) is currently housed in the American Museum of Natural History in New York along with one female specimen (LeCroy 2014); earlier, Shelley (1905) had described two males and females then held in the British Museum collection, although Hartlaub (*op. cit.*) only mentioned the holotype.

While clearly a bird of considerable interest, it has sadly long been relegated to the realm of simply being considered a synonym of *Ploceus subaureus aureoflavus* Smith 1839. Other than in Moreau & Greenway (1962), it has not been deemed worthy of a mention in any of the recent regional or world checklists (Dickinson 2003, Craig 2004, 2010, Dickinson & Christidis 2014, and del Hoyo & Collar 2016).

The critical reference to it was that of Hartert (1907) who closely examined Hartlaub's bird during his tenure at Lord Rothschild's Museum at Tring, where he referred to *holoxanthus* as being, "not at all the same as *aureoflavus*. Its wing is considerably shorter, measuring only 65–69 mm (compared to 75–76 mm in *aureoflavus*), the tail is canary-yellow and shorter, measuring only 4.5 mm instead of 5 mm (in *aureoflavus*)." Hartert (*op. cit.*) further commented that the back was almost pure yellow, the remiges quite canary-yellow, and that only the secondaries were washed with olive on the outer webs. Later, Hartert (1919) reluctantly referred to comments by Zedlitz (1916) who, having examined further specimens, commented that in his view the "so-called *holoxanthus* were only extreme yellow males."

Meanwhile, recent visitors to the Bagamoyo area and the Selous Game Reserve have been puzzled by the presence of a 'golden weaver' type bird that simply does not fit the descriptions given in current field guides. Figure 1, a photo taken by ASK in the Selous Game Reserve in October 2008, amply highlights the confusion that currently exists, and which would appear to agree entirely with the comments by Hartert (1907).



Figure 1. The un-named golden weaver, *Ploceus* species discussed here. (photo: Adam Scott Kennedy).

Clearly, this form of 'golden weaver' warrants further field and molecular study so that its true systematic position *vis-à-vis* the Golden Palm Weaver *Ploceus bojeri* can finally be determined.

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