Short communications

The rediscovery of the *colomanni* von Madarász subspecies of the Grey Penduline-tit *Anthroscopus caroli*

On 25 August 1909 a specimen of Grey Penduline-tit *Anthoscopus caroli* was collected on the Ngare Dowash (the Mara River in modern-day northern Tanzania) by Kálmán (Koloman) Kittenberger, and was subsequently described as a new subspecies, named *colomanni* (von Madarász 1910: 177). It was described as being 'grey on the upper parts; forehead, cheeks and throat cloudy white, the latter washed down to a yellowish cream colour, gradually becoming pale yellowish-brown on the lower under parts; wings and tail grey-brown; under wing white with slight rusty colour; wing 57 mm'. Twenty years passed before mention of *colomanni* appeared in the literature again, when Sclater (1930) reported that *colomanni* 'appears to be indistinguishable from *A. c. sylviella*', and subsumed it into the latter taxon. Subsequently, the type specimen, housed in the Budapest Natural History Museum, was destroyed by fire during the Soviet invasion there in 1956 before further study was possible (Horváth 1970). To this day, only Sclater (1930) has commented on the form, the description of the type has been almost universally forgotten, and no observers have reported or knowingly identified *colomanni* in the field since its initial collection together with a description of its nest (Kittenberger 1959). The nest itself was photographed (von Madarász 1910), this now comprising the sole extant "evidence" of the type.

However, a photograph of an adult Penduline-tit taken by Mr. B. Hofstetter on 12 June 2019 along the Mbalagati River in the southern part of Serengeti National Park, Tanzania (02º37'24" S 34º44'23" E), appears to match the description of *A. c. colomanni* exactly, and is provisionally regarded as representing the taxon here (Fig. 1). Contrary to Sclater (1930), who felt *colomanni* to be indistinguishable from *sylviella*, it differs by way of a complete absence of rusty-clay tones below, the cream-yellow wash on the throat grades to pale yellow-brown lower underparts, with cheeks and forehead white. Further evident are very pale grey upperparts. In *A. c. sylviella* (and *A. c. sharpei*), by contrast, the underparts (breast to vent) are consistently a rich rusty-clay to tawny-cinnamon, with the throat, cheeks and forehead slightly paler, if differing in tone at all (Fry *et al*. 2000), while the upperparts are a darker grey, faintly washed olive. Photographs of the type specimen of *sylviella* alongside a more recent specimen of the similar *A. c. sharpei* from the Tabora region, confirm these differences (Fig. 2).

Figure 1. Image of the largely unknown taxon *Anthoscopus caroli colomanni* from the Mbalagati drainage, Serengeti National Park, Tanzania, 12 June 2019, showing the characteristic whitish forehead and cheeks, with cream-yellow throat grading into pale yellow-brown lower underparts (Macaulay Library #169436451: B. Hofstetter).

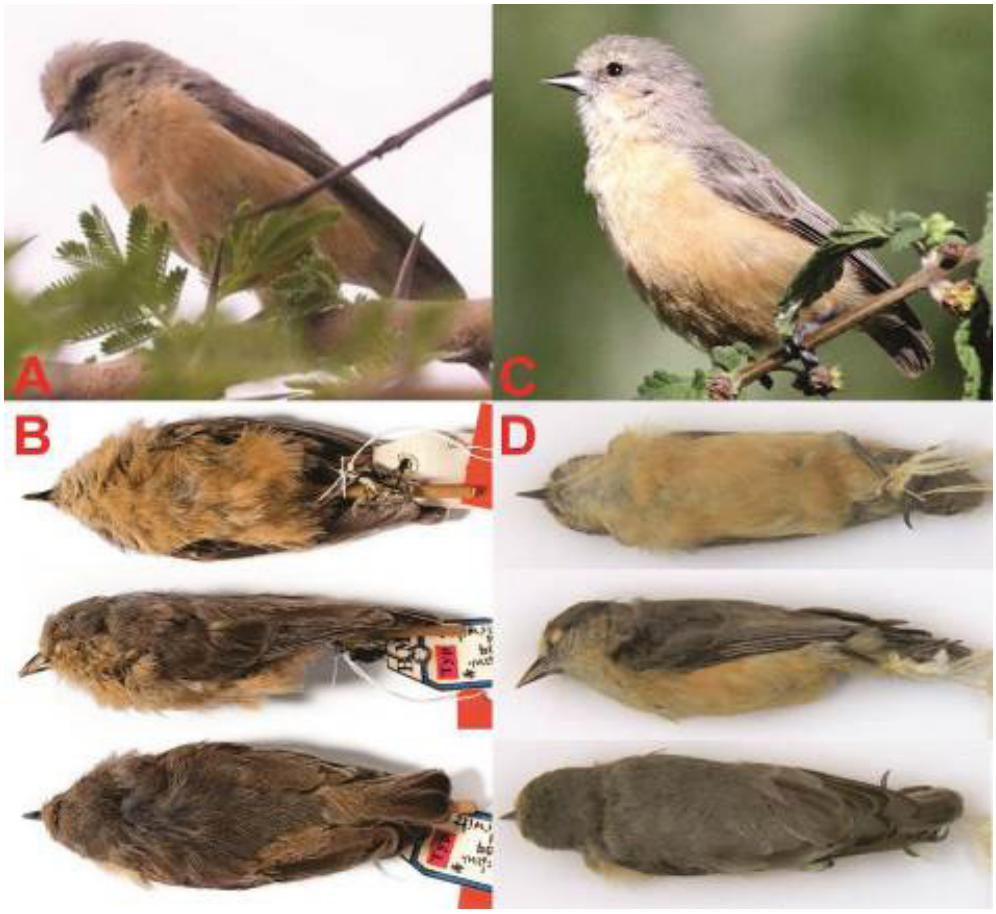

Figure 2. Field and specimen images of *Anthoscopus caroli sylviella* (A–B) and *A. c. sharpei* (C–D) from Tanzania showing typical, near-uniform rusty-clay to tawny underparts. A: Ruaha National Park (R. Glen); B: Malangali (ZMB 48/68; holotype of *sylviella*); C: Maswa Game Reserve (P. Oliver); D: Tabora area (UWBM 95720 (MBM 5909)). For acronyms, see Acknowledgements.

That such a distinctive taxon, described more than 100 years ago, appears to have been overlooked in such a well-visited area as the Serengeti National Park may seem unlikely. However, a putative but plausible explanation concerns the specific locations from where the recent photograph was obtained and the type specimen collected. In both cases the locations are riverine, and more specifically, in notably arid sections of mid-river drainages. In the case of the type locality, the Ngare Dowash in northern Tanzania, this section of the Mara River is locally arid, being distant from the high-rainfall areas at its source in the Mau Highlands, as well as from the high-humidity region at the river's outflow into Lake Victoria. The difference in habitat between this middle section of the Mara River, and the moister surrounding savannah occupied by *A. c. sylviella*, may be inferred from satellite imagery (Fig. 3) and the description of the nest site by Kittenberger (1959:70). A similar, but less stark difference in aridity, is also evident on the middle Mbalagati River, where the recent observation of *A. c. colomanni* was made.

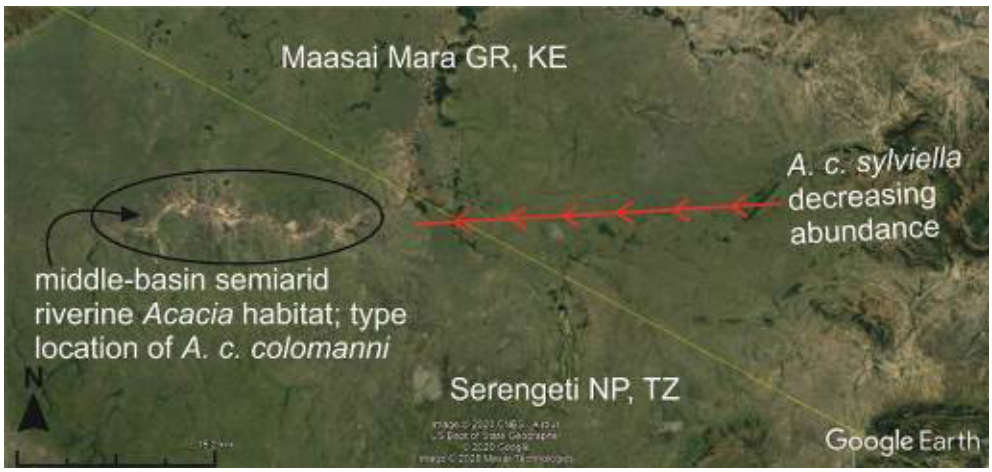

Figure 3. Satellite imagery of the middle Mara River (Ngare Dowash) in northern Tanzania, showing the steep aridity gradient from the river to surrounding plains (map source: Google Earth).

In this light, the possibility that *colomanni* persists as a distinct form closely tied to locally arid riverine habitats, and therefore ecologically separated from *A. c. sylviella/sharpei* (of moister plains-*Acacia* associations), should be investigated further. Reflecting on another form of *A. caroli*, extralimital to the East Africa region, some comparisons with subspecies *rankinei* are also appropriate. This taxon is known from specimens collected in *Acacia* woodland along an arid section of the middle Zambezi River in northern Zimbabwe (Irwin 1963). Like *colomanni*, *rankinei* is characterised by nearly all-white underparts, cheeks and forehead, albeit with very dark slate-grey vs. pale grey upperparts. As appears to be the case with *colomanni*, which is known from two sites within a broader region inhabited by another subspecies (*sylviella*), *rankinei* also persists in a very small range with particular habitat isolated among the ranges of other subspecies (*caroli*, *hellmayri* and *robertsi*).

Even in light of the limited material presented here, we believe the name *colomanni* was validly established, and that this taxon should be resurrected from synonymy. Field workers should be alert to the presence of birds matching the description of *colomanni* in Serengeti National Park, in particular when sampling arid riverine habitats.

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