

Short communications

Two new records of the Grey Greenbul *Eurillas gracilis ugandae* at Kakamega Forest, Western Kenya, with a review of its vocal repertoire

In western Kenya, the Grey Greenbul *Eurillas gracilis* is a rarely reported inhabitant of the Kakamega Forest, being represented there by the East African subspecies *ugandae* (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). However, while Kakamega Forest is frequently visited by birders, no adequately documented records of the species have been published to support its continued presence there since eight specimens were obtained between 1959 and 1967 (Turner 2010). Moreover, both the song and call of *gracilis*, as they are known in West Africa, are absent from the audio soundscape at Kakamega, as determined by extensive field experience and review of audio material from Kakamega by many observers (JB unpubl.).

However, two well documented records of the species at Kakamega have recently come to light through the online bio-inventory database eBird. Furthermore, both the call and song of *ugandae*, the latter being rather different from that of the nominate and the *extrema* subspecies in West Africa, are now documented by way of an extensive set of recordings made by C. McBride and D. Moyer at Minziro Forest in north-west Tanzania.

The two unpublished records from Kakamega are documented here, along with descriptions of the vocalizations of *E. g. ugandae*. Media references with the prefix ML can be accessed at the Macaulay Library (www.macaulaylibrary.org).

New Kenyan records of E. g. ugandae

1. An individual photographed on 11 July 2021 by J. Kashangaki (Fig. 1; left) in the north-eastern parts of the forest at Chirobani (0°16'2"N, 34°55'29"E) is separable from the very similar and much commoner Ansorge's Greenbul *E. ansorgei* (Fig. 1; right) by its extensively yellow-washed underparts.
2. A bird audio-recorded on 10 September 2000 by C. McBride in the northern part of the forest at Buyangu (0°20'58"N, 34°51'50"E) was correctly identified as this species. The vocalization recorded (Fig. 2A) represents the call, and is identical to that recorded in Minziro Forest, Tanzania (Fig. 2B). Field observations transcribed by the recordist detail a bird in the canopy of a tree at approximately 10 m in height.



Figure 1. Grey Greenbul *Eurillas gracilis ugandae* at Kakamega Forest, 11 July 2021 (left: James Kashangaki; ML355436021) compared with Anson's Greenbul *E. ansorgei* at the Impenetrable Forest, Uganda (right: Raphael Lebrun; ML122562851).

The call and song of E. g. ugandae

The call of *ugandae* comprises a distinctive and rather forceful series of 'schwikk' notes (Fig. 2A–B) with a full-bodied resonance and covering a frequency range of 2–6 kHz. These notes can also be rapidly strung together in doublets to form a husky chatter, transcribed here as 'cherrit-cherrit-cherrit-cherrit'. It therefore differs slightly from the higher pitched and much thinner sounding "schwikk" of *E. g. extrema* at 3–7 kHz, (e.g., see XC792352) or the similar sounding nominate subspecies, as well as the very different dry rattle given by Anson's Greenbul (Fishpool *et al.* 1994).

Meanwhile, unlike the sprightly rising and falling four-to-five note song of *extrema* (Fishpool *et al.* 1994) or the similar sounding nominate *gracilis* in West Africa, the subspecies *ugandae* utters a sombre 3-part refrain (rarely 4 notes) of ascending notes that successively descend in pitch, rendered here as 'weet-wurt-woot' (Fig. 2C). Among the field references for the region, this is correctly described only by Fishpool in Zimmerman *et al.* (1996), who render the song in Uganda as 'HWEET-hwet-hwut', while also drawing attention to its similarity with the song of Anson's Greenbul. It is distinguishable with practice, however, as the 3-part song of *ansorgei*, is delivered more rapidly and has a terminal note that is always higher pitched than the middle note (Fig. 2D). The song of *ugandae* has been reported from Kakamega (C.F. Mann, pers. comm., January 2022) but as of yet, there are no known recorded examples from Kenya.

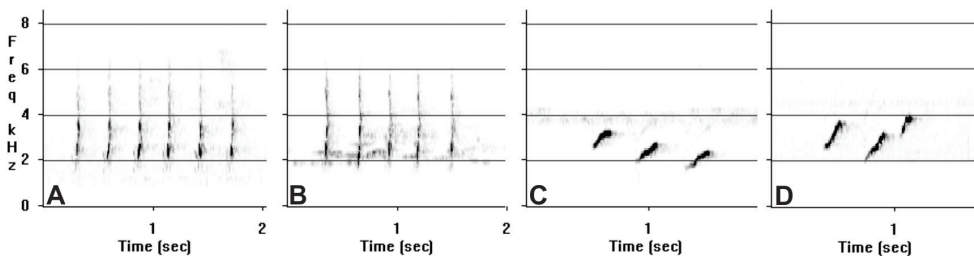


Figure 2. Call of Grey Greenbul *Eurillas gracilis ugandae* at Kakamega Forest, 10 September 2000 (A: Carolyn McBride; ML107878) compared with that at Minziro Forest, Tanzania (B: David Moyer; ML94112), alongside the song from Minziro Forest (C: David Moyer; ML94119) compared with song of Anson's Greenbul *E. ansorgei* from Kakamega Forest (D: Jennifer Horne; ML51545).

That *E. g. ugandae* remains so infrequently reported at Kakamega may result from a combination of factors: firstly, the species may be genuinely rare there, or both rare and overlooked. Secondly it may be local within the wider forest, being largely absent from the southern portions where the majority of historic and recent birding effort has been focussed. The two records presented here from more northern parts of the forest support this suggestion. Thirdly, that the vocal repertoire of *ugandae* is largely unknown among field observers has surely been an impediment to field detection, with some descriptions in literature accounts to date being variously confused or inaccurate.

With greater observational effort in northern parts of the forest, and with steadily improving knowledge of the song and calls of *ugandae* among field observers, it is likely to be documented at Kakamega with increasing regularity henceforth. It should also be sought at the Malaba Forest to the north of Kakamega, from where there are unsubstantiated sight records.

Acknowledgements

I thank the credited recordists and photographers for making their material available courtesy of the Macaulay Library. I thank Lincoln Fishpool for some helpful comments while the late Clive Mann described to me his recollection with *ugandae* song at Kakamega.

References

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Scopus 44(1): 1–3, March 2024

Received 10 October 2023