

27 October. The adult bird in both cases would freeze on the nest and could easily be missed because of the speckled patterning of the plumage merging with the leaf-litter.

It is possible that this species could be censused using playbacks of its call as it always seems to respond to calls from other individuals. It is commonly heard in areas where the understorey is fairly dense between 1–4 m above the ground making it difficult to see the bird unless another one calling attracts it out. There also seem to be higher numbers in swampy areas but this is only a subjective impression. As this dense understorey vegetation tends to occur where logging has taken place it is not thought that the current logging would be very detrimental to this species. It is hoped that funds can be raised to employ

a Ugandan researcher to try to census this species in Budongo Forest and to collect data on its habitat requirements, possibly by employing radiotracking techniques.

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*Budongo Forest Project. PO Box 362, Masindi, Uganda.*

## Note on the field identification of Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes neglectus*

Tom D. Evans

Following some apparently anomalous observations in the East Usambaras, Tanzania, I examined skins of *Anthreptes* sunbirds in the Natural History Museum Bird Section at Tring, Hertfordshire, UK. This showed that the immature plumage of Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes neglectus* is misleadingly described by Moreau and Moreau<sup>4</sup> and Mackworth-Praed and Grant<sup>3</sup>. The latter represents the only widely available and otherwise reliable guide to identifying this species, which is restricted to the forests of East Africa.

Immature *neglectus* can show a bold white supercilium running from the lores to at least 5 mm behind the eye. This is present on both the immature females and one of the two immature males in the collection. Also, the iridescent feathers (which cover the upperparts of adults of both sexes) can be limited to the upper tail coverts, tail and bend of the wing of immature birds. These two features would traditionally be considered to indicate a female or immature of either Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird *A. orientalis* or Violet-backed Sunbird *A. longuemarei*.

I twice saw individuals showing these features in the East Usambaras in 1994. Since they were not begging for food from the accompanying adult *neglectus* and did not have prominent pale gape lines, I did not initially suspect that they were immatures. The habitat, range and other plumage features suggest that they were *neglectus*, as does the fact that

*neglectus* occurred commonly at the site. However, as discussed below, it can be virtually impossible to identify such individuals with confidence.

The three species are largely allopatric, with their ranges and habitat requirements well defined, at least in East Africa<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless it would be preferable to rely on plumage features, since identifications based solely on range or habitat may lead to the loss of interesting extra-limital records and conceal cases of sympatry or unusual habitat choice. They are also considered unacceptable by committees vetting records of rarities.

Several features remain for separating those immature *neglectus* showing a supercilium from females and immatures of the two confusion species. As far as I can determine, none is reliable for all individuals of all species. All are difficult to assess on these small, active arboreal birds. Many individuals with this type of plumage will be impossible to identify with certainty in the field, and perhaps even in the hand, without considering range. Eliminating the form *A. longuemarei angolensis* is the most difficult aspect.

The features are given below:

1. Immature *neglectus* and immature or female *longuemarei* are bright lemon-yellow on the belly and vent. Female and young *orientalis* show at most a faint yellow or buff wash. This should make it easy to eliminate *orientalis* given good views.



2. In *neglectus* and *longuemarei* the crown, mantle and wing coverts are dusky brown, (sometimes with a violet metallic wash<sup>3</sup>). On *orientalis* these areas are a lighter, greyer brown. This feature varied widely on the specimens examined and there was some overlap, including particularly dark *orientalis* and some paler individuals of the other two

3. The yellow-green fringes on the flight feathers of *neglectus* are generally lacking in the other two species, although most birds have narrow buffy fringes. This is a useful feature on skins or in the hand, but I have found it impossible to detect on *neglectus* in the field. Though I have no field experience of the other two species, it seems likely that views would have to be very good to be sure that no such fringing was present and thus eliminate *neglectus*. Furthermore, the south-central African race *A. longuemarei angolensis* does show extensive yellow-green remige fringes and may be all but impossible to separate from immature *neglectus*, even in the hand. The ranges of *A. longuemarei angolensis* and *A. neglectus* are thought to be separated by the Shire-Nyasa Rift (M. P. S. Irwin pers comm 1995). *A. l. nyassae*, whose range overlaps widely with *neglectus* in the coastal belt from Dar-es-Salaam into Mozambique, does not have yellowy fringes.

4. The underparts of *longuemarei* and *orientalis* are reported to be bright white or buffy white, rather than the sullied grey-white of *neglectus*<sup>3</sup>. (The statement by Williams<sup>6</sup> that *neglectus* is 'dusky brownish-grey' below is extraordinarily misleading.) This feature varies widely in the specimens and, although the great majority of *neglectus* conform, a few are markedly whiter (this is particularly a feature of juvenile *neglectus*<sup>3</sup>). The other two species show a range of whiteness, overlapping in this feature with typical *neglectus*. The colour could easily be altered if the bird is dirty or has old, worn feathers. It should be used with great caution.

5. The colour of the iridescent tail and rump may also differ. This is not clearly explained by Mackworth-Praed and Grant<sup>3</sup>, who stated, for example, that *A. l. angolensis* is violet, but later that another race is 'violet, rather than the blue-violet of the Angola race'. In general, *neglectus* is thought to be a bluer shade of purple than most races of the other two species. Great care is required in the field, since this feature is strongly affected by the angle of illumination. In the hand a specimen of any form can be made to switch from blue to violet by rotating it.

As far as is known, the carpal patch of immature *neglectus* is always iridescent (pers obs and<sup>3</sup>). It is often plain brown (though occasionally iridescent) in

brown-backed plumages of the other two species. However, it is quite possible that if more immature *neglectus* were examined, some would be found to lack this feature too.

The remaining plumages (male and female *neglectus*, male *orientalis* and male *longuemarei*) all of which show wholly iridescent upperparts and no supercilium, can still be separated with the help of Mackworth-Praed and Grant<sup>3</sup>. These iridescent feathers are developed gradually and may be found as patches on birds with predominantly immature plumage. The distinguishing features of male *neglectus* (yellowy remige fringes, blue rather than blue-violet gloss above, grey-white rather than creamy white underparts, reaching right to the vent) can be very difficult to detect under field conditions. Only the female plumage of *neglectus* is easy to identify, with its combination of no supercilium, iridescent (blue-violet) upperparts and extensive yellow on the lower belly. Unfortunately, female *neglectus* is wrongly drawn in the most recent field guide to East African birds<sup>5</sup>. The illustration (Plate 79) shows a bold supercilium and yellow wash below, neither of which can be seen either in the field or on skins.

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11a Yeoman Lane, Bearsted, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 4BX, UK.





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