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The range of *Malimbus ibadanensis*

by J. H. Elgood

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The rediscovery of *Malimbus ibadanensis* by J. S. Ash in November 1987 (Elgood 1988) has resulted in a need for reconsideration of the species' probable range. Although Ash's rediscovery was also at Ibadan and only *c.* 5 miles from the type locality (Elgood 1958), recent sight records of males only of *M. cassini* in Ghana (Grimes 1987) raise the question of the true identity of these Ghana birds. Males of *M. cassini* and *M. ibadanensis* are thought to be indistinguishable in the field, though the females are quite distinctive: that of *cassini* being entirely black, while that of *ibadanensis* has conspicuous red on head and throat. Bannerman (1949) mentions sight records of "*cassini*" from Nigeria by S. Marchant in Owerri Province (east of the Niger) and by H. F. Marshall at Ibadan.

With the establishment of *ibadanensis* as a distinct species (Elgood 1958), it seems likely that Marshall had earlier discovered this new species

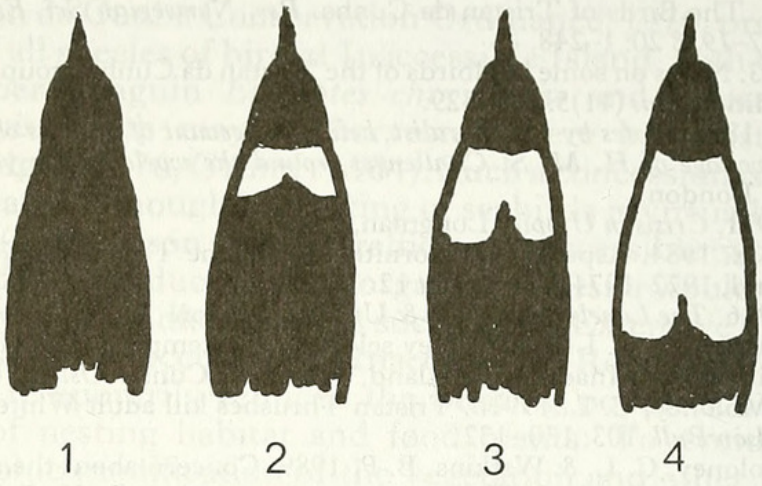

Figure 1. Diagram to show the extent of the red and black areas, as seen in ventral view, in both sexes of *Malimbus cassini* and *M. ibadanensis*.
1. Entirely black ♀ *M. cassini*.
2. ♀ *M. ibadanensis* with red "collar" originally inappropriately called red "bridle".
3. ♂ *M. cassini* with red "throat" or "breast" that would seem to vary somewhat in depth (possibly related to age).
4. ♂ *M. ibadanensis* with extensive red "apron"; also subject to some variation in extent. The posterior black area usually shows some anterior extension in the mid-ventral line.

but misidentified it as *cassini*. This view was accepted by Marshall himself, who, in any case, had only encountered the male. Later when both Hall & Moreau (1970) and Louette (1981) gave the western limit of *cassini* as the Sanaga River in Cameroun, I excluded *cassini* from the Nigerian Check List (Elgood 1982). But *ibadanensis* has only been positively identified in a small area centred on Ibadan (west of the Niger), though Field (1979) in his review of the genus *Malimbus* shows Marchant's Owerri bird as *ibadanensis* in a distribution map. Marchant's Owerri record of *cassini* now needs reconsideration especially if the identity of the Ghana records is finally confirmed with specimens as *cassini*.

However, the possibility that the Ghana birds were *ibadanensis* cannot be ruled out, since only males have been sighted. I have recently been in touch again with G. D. Donald, whose duties in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the West African Cocoa Research Institute required him to divide his time between Ibadan and Tafo, the locality of the recent Ghana sightings of *cassini*. Donald knew *ibadanensis* well in the Ibadan area and in 1960, while in Ghana, invited me to visit him at Tafo as he was convinced he had sightings there of *ibadanensis*. During my brief visit, however, we had no contact with *ibadanensis*; Donald subsequently shot a red-breasted male *Malimbus*, but unfortunately the corpse lodged in an oil palm and was not recoverable. Donald was convinced he had found evidence of a significant range extension of *ibadanensis*; nevertheless the bird could equally well have been a ♂ *cassini*.

Unfortunately too few specimens of *ibadanensis* have been available for examination for a clear idea of the variation in the width of the red area, in both sexes, to emerge. Nevertheless, as Figure 1 shows, ♂ *cassini* has a red area, variously called "bridle", "collar" or "apron", intermediate between the red areas of ♀ *ibadanensis* and ♂ *ibadanensis*. It is concluded

that ♂ *cassini* cannot be certainly distinguished in the field from *ibadanensis*, probably not from either sex, and certainty of identity must rest on observing a ♂ consorting with the all-black ♀ while breeding. Because there are other similar sized all-black ploceids in West Africa this may prove a very difficult task. Examination of museum specimens suggested that no other differences (e.g. tail length, bill length or bill shape) could be of any value as field characters for separating the two species. It seems that a specimen must be collected (or photographed) at Tafo (or elsewhere in Ghana) to resolve the important question of the western range limit of one or other of these rare malimbe species.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Bregulla, H. L. 1992. *Birds of Vanuatu*. Pp. 294. 24 coloured plates, 34 black-and-white photographs, map. Anthony Nelson Ltd (PO Box 9, Oswestry, Shrophsire SY11 1BY). ISBN 0 904614 34 4. £25.00. 23 × 16 cm.

Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides), a group of about 100 volcanic islands, has a known avifauna of 121 species, and much of it is still densely forested. Heinrich Bregulla has lived for over 20 years in the tropical Pacific, mostly in Vanuatu, and is uniquely qualified to write an account of its bird life. The main part of this book consists of species accounts, which draw on the author's extensive field experience as well as the earlier literature. Dr Marcus Chambers, formerly environmental adviser to the government of Vanuatu, contributes a long introductory chapter dealing with the geography, fauna and flora of the islands, conservation, and other environmental matters. Of the 24 coloured plates, 15 are reproductions of paintings mainly by Hilary Forster, illustrating most of the native birds and some introduced species, 7 are photographs (mainly by the author) of 20 species, and 2 show Vanuatu landscapes.

This is a valuable contribution to the ornithology of the western Pacific.

Fry, C. H., Fry, K. & Harris, A. 1992. *Kingfishers, Bee-eaters and Rollers: a Handbook*. Pp. xi+324, 40 coloured plates, maps and text-figures. Christopher Helm. ISBN 0 7136 8028 8. £27.99. 24 × 16 cm.

The most obviously striking feature of this new addition to the growing number of handbooks dealing with bird families is the superb collection of 40 coloured plates by Alan