

## A REVISION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SPECIES OF *CISTICOLA* (GRASS WARBLERS).

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IN attempting to determine the specimens of *Cisticola* in the Transvaal Museum, I was soon confronted with the difficulties attending the proper identification of the members of this none too easy group. As the series of many of the South African species are very long, I endeavoured to work the group out as best I could, and to try and reduce the existing chaos to something like order. When I had completed the separation of the species I forwarded the whole collection with my notes to Dr. Reichenow, requesting him to be good enough to compare our series with his own, and to revise and check my conclusions. With very few exceptions, Dr. Reichenow has agreed with me, and I wish to take this opportunity of expressing my great indebtedness to him for his ever-ready help and sympathetic interest.

The close relationship of many of the species of *Cisticola* renders a large series necessary for the correct identification of several of the species. As much confusion has hitherto existed amongst these said species, we think a full list of specimens with localities and dates will be useful.

A key of the South African species follows:—

1. Upper surface plainly, though sometimes obscurely, streaked. 2.  
Upper surface plain (unstreaked). 10.
2. Under surface pale brown-grey; back grey; tarsus under 21 mm.  
*C. subruficapilla*.  
Under surface washed with rusty yellow, yellowish or dusky-grey. 3.
3. Tarsus 25 mm. or over. 4.  
Tarsus under 25 mm. 5.
4. Entire upper surface yellow or tawny brown, thickly streaked with dark brown .. .. . *C. natalensis*.  
Entire upper surface grey-brown, thickly streaked with dark brown .. .. . *C. strangei*.
5. Rump yellowish or rusty-rufous; head not more rufous than back. 6.  
Rump not yellowish or rufous; head rufous. 7.  
Rump not more yellowish or rufous than back, head not, or only slightly more rufous than back. 9.
6. Back broadly streaked with dark brown; sides of breast streaked .. .. . *C. terrestris*.  
Back paler, streaked with dark brown; sides of breast unstreaked .. .. . *C. lavendulae*.  
Back paler, streaked with dark brown; sides of breast unstreaked, rump rusty yellow .. .. . *C.e. uropygialis*.
7. Tarsus under 20 mm. 8.  
Tarsus over 21. Feathers of back black, edged with grey .. .. . *C. lugubris*.
8. Back tawny-brown, streaked with dark brown; head unstreaked or only slightly streaked .. .. . *C. mülleri*.  
Back black, feathers edged with grey, head plainly and broadly streaked .. .. . *C. tinniens*.



9. Upper surface tawny-yellow, streaked black or dark brown ; upper tail-coverts unstreaked . . . . . *C. chiniana*.  
 Upper surface tawny-yellow, streaked black or dark brown, upper tail-coverts streaked . . . . . *C. magna*.  
 10. Underside grey and white, or greyish and tawny-white mixed. 11  
 Underside whitish, tawny, or dusky yellowish. 13.  
 11. Underside deep grey, centre of abdomen white . . *C. fulvicapilla*.  
 Underside tawny white or yellowish ; flanks and sides of breast greyish, or washed with grey. 12.  
 12. Tail over 55 mm., longer than wing . . . . . *C. ruficapilla*.  
 Tail under 55 mm., not longer than wing . . *C. cinnamomeiceps*.  
 13. Head rufous, defined from coloration of back. 14.  
 Head either coloured like the back, or greyer or yellower. 15.  
 14. Back dark earth brown . . . . . *C. pretoriae*.  
 Back grey brown . . . . . *C. semitorques*.  
 15. Wing over 54 . . . . . *C. sylvia*.  
 Wing under 54. 16.  
 16. Cheeks and forehead yellowish, wing 52 . . . . . *C. erythrope*.  
 Cheeks and forehead only slightly paler than crown, wing 44  
*C. rufa*.

(1) *Cisticola subruficapilla* (A. Sm.)

Following series examined :—

- 11 Specimens from Knysna, C.C. (Marais).  
 1 Specimen „ Uitenhage, C.C. (R. H. Ivy).  
 1 „ „ Grahamstown, C.C. (R. H. Ivy).  
 1 „ „ Pienaars River, Transvaal (F. V. Kirby).  
 2 Specimens „ Woodbush, Zoutpansberg, Transvaal  
 (F. V. Kirby).  
 1 Specimen „ Pretoria, Transvaal (A. Roberts).  
 1 „ „ Dargle, Natal (A. Roberts).  
 2 Specimens „ Bulawayo (*ex* Rhodesia Museum).

*C. subruficapilla* differs from *chiniana* in its smaller bill, shorter and more slender tarsus and toes (nails) ; is altogether a good bit smaller. Typical examples have the crown red-brown, the back grey, while in *chiniana* the difference in the coloration of head and back is not very pronounced.

The bird from Uitenhage, the one from Natal, and seven of the Knysna birds are obviously juvenile. The two former have the crown only slightly ruddier than the back, while three of the Knysna birds have this region considerably redder, but not so rufous as in typical adults, the remaining four having the crown of the same grey ground colour as the back. Most of the Knysna juveniles have the chest streaked with dark brown.

(2) *Cisticola mülleri* Alex.

Three specimens examined.

- 1 Transvaal (?).  
 1 Modderfontein, Transvaal (Haagner).  
 1 Matoppos (R. Williams).

These birds are referred to this species with some doubt, as the ground colour of the back is inclined to russet-brown, only the bases of the feathers and some of the inner webs being grey. In the plain chestnut-brown centre tail feathers, it agrees with Alexander's description of *mülleri*.



(3) *Cisticola strangei* (Fraser).

- 5 Pondoland (H. H. Swinney).
- 1 Beira, P.E. Africa (P. A. Sheppard).
- 1 Boror, P.E. Africa (Kirby and Roberts).

Differs from *chiniana* and *subruficapilla* in the crown and back, being of the same grey-brown tint, and from the latter also by its larger size.

All the examples above mentioned have a feint, but unmistakable, pale rusty collar on the nape.

This well-marked species has evidently been entirely overlooked by Dr. Stark and Mr. W. L. Slater.

(4) *Cisticola chiniana* (A. Sm.)

- 6 Bulawayo (*ex.* Rhodesia Museum).
- 1 Modderfontein, Transvaal (A. Haagner).
- 1 Pienaars River, Pretoria District (F. V. Kirby).
- 1 Brits, Rustenburg District (F. V. Kirby).
- 1 Barberton (A. J. Dreyer).
- 2 Klein Letaba, Transvaal (Marais).
- 1 Pretoria (A. Roberts).
- 1 N.W. Rhodesia (C. Wilde).

The distinguishing characters of this species are given in the previous species. It differs primarily from the next in the unstreaked upper tail-coverts. As the types of Smith's *chiniana* came from Kurrichaine, the northern form must bear this name.

(5) *Cisticola magna* Gould.

- 3 Specimens from Pondoland (Davies).
- 4 Specimens from Grahamstown (Ivy).

The southern representative of *chiniana* is less thickly streaked than the northern (typical) form, is not so brightly yellow beneath, and has the upper tail-coverts streaked.

This bird ranges as far north as North-East Africa. As this bird agrees very closely with Gould's description and figure of *Cisticola magna* it must bear this name in future. It has hitherto been confused with *natalensis* and *chiniana*.

(6) *Cisticola natalensis* (A. Sm.)

- 4 Umtamvuna River, E. Pondoland (Davies).
- 3 Ngqeleni, W. Pondoland (H. H. Swinney).
- 1 Matopos, Rhodesia (Rhodesia Museum).
- 1 Beira, P.S.E. Africa (P. A. Sheppard).
- 1 Boror, Mozambique (Kirby and Roberts).

This species is easily recognisable by its large size and tawny yellow colouring, the entire upper surface being of the same ground colour, broadly streaked with dark brown. Underside white; sides of body and flanks pale tawny yellow.

(7) *Cisticola tinniens* (Leht.)

- A long series in the Transvaal Museum.
- 5 Knysna, C.C. (v. O. Marais).
- 7 Ngqeleni, W. Pondoland (H. H. Swinney).
- 1 Lusikisi, E. Pondoland (C. Davies).
- 1 Honingspruit Station, Orange River Colony (D. Gunn).
- 1 Port Elizabeth, C.C. (?).
- 1 Grahamstown (Albany Museum).
- 5 Woodbush, Zoutpansberg (F. V. Kirby).



- 2 Pretoria, Transvaal (A. Roberts).
- 2 Belfast, Transvaal (A. Roberts).
- 2 Potchefstroom, Transvaal (A. Roberts).
- 2 Dargle, Natal (A. Roberts).

One of the Natal birds is a puzzle. It was collected on the 20th March, 1908, and is obviously a juvenile bird. It has, however, longer tarsi than the average *tinniens*, and has the rump and upper tail-coverts rusty-yellow. If *erythrogonis* was found in South Africa we would refer it unhesitatingly to that species.

(8) *Cisticola lugubris* Rüpp.

- 1 Beira, P.E. Africa (P. A. Sheppard).
- 4 N.W. Rhodesia (C. Wilde).

Easily recognisable from *tinniens* by its much larger size and paler rump.

(9) *Cisticola uropygialis* (Fraser).

- 2 Examples from Zoutpansberg, Transvaal (Marais).
- 1 Example, Matopos (Rhodesia Museum).

Mainly differing from *C. terrestris* and *C. lavendulae* by the tail feathers having a marked subterminal black bar before the white tip.

(10) *Cisticola terrestris* (A. Sm.)

- 3 Zoutpansberg, Transvaal (Marais).
- 2 Pretoria, Transvaal (A. Roberts).
- 1 Belfast, Transvaal (A. Roberts).
- 2 Honingspruit, O.R.C. (D. Gunn).
- 1 Grahamstown, C.C. (R. H. Ivy).

Differs from *uropygialis* in the coloration of the tail feathers being dark brown with a white tip (no distinct subterminal black bar); slightly larger size, and paler edges to feathers of upper parts, and from *lavendulae* in its shorter tail. (30 mm.)

(11) *Cisticola lavendulae* Grant & Reid.

- 1 Example, Waterfall, Zoutpansberg (Marais).
- 1 Example, Sand River, Pietersburg (F. V. Kirby).

Differs from *terrestris* in its longer tail (40 mm.) and much paler rump; also general tone of upper surface paler.

(12) *Cisticola pretoriae* Nov sp.

Similar to *rufopiliata*, but underside much darker.

The Museum contains three examples collected at Pretoria by Mr. Austin Roberts; and the Rhodesian Museum one from Bulawayo, collected by Mr. F. P. Mennell.

Description: Above dark earth brown, crown dark rufous-brown; tail feathers with a subterminal black bar and paler tips. This bar is very feint in freshly moulted examples, the centre rectrices of which are generally unicoloured. Remiges edged with rusty brown on outer web, and isabel-line on the inner. Chin and throat white. Centre of breast, abdomen, and under tail-coverts tawny-yellow, sides of breast, body and flanks dark smokey grey.

Length in flesh 150 mm. (5.9 inches A.R.), wing 58-59, tail 68-69; tarsus 23; bill 12<sup>5</sup>, —13 mm.

Type: Male, Pretoria, 16th December, 1908. (Iris red-brown; bill dark, gonys horn colour; tarsus flesh colour; claws brown A.R.)

(13) *Cisticola sylvia* Rehw.

- 1 Male, Machili River, N.W. Rhodesia (C. Wilde).
- 1 Sex incert, Boror, P.E. Africa (Kirby & Roberts).



Upper surface drab-brown with a tinge of fawn, top of head only slightly rustier than back. Under surface whitish; sides of head, neck, body, and flanks pale tawny-yellow. Tail feathers very broad (approaching *Bradypterus*) with a broad pale edge after the subterminal black bar.

Central tail feathers unicoloured. Length, 140 mm.

The specimen from Boror is a young bird, as evidenced by the washes of yellow on both upper and under surface. (Iris light vandyke-brown, bill brown above, horn below; gape yellow; tarsus flesh colour. L. 144. W. 58. C. 13. Kirby & Roberts.)

(14) *Cisticola semitorques* (Heugl.)

[*C. cinerascens*, Stark & Selater.]

Resembles *pretoriae*, but paler everywhere, also smaller, the bill being also more slender. Back greyer.

The Transvaal Museum possesses only two examples of this species, one from Natal, collected by A. Roberts, and one from Melssetter, Rhodesia (Swynnerton).

(15) *Cisticola ruficapilla* (Vieill.) [*C. aberrans* (Smith)].

4 Grahamstown, C.C. (Ivy).

7 Pondoland (H. H. Swinney).

1 Woodbush, Transvaal (F. V. Kirby).

1 Boror, P.E. Africa (Kirby & Roberts).

1 Karri River, Bulawayo (Rhodesia Museum).

From this series it is impossible to separate *ruficapilla* from *aberrans*, and the two must henceforth be united.

Distinguished from *cinnamomeiceps* Haagner by its much larger size and longer tail, and from *fulvicapilla*, in addition, by its whitish under parts.

(16) *Cisticola cinnamomeiceps* Haagner.

(Annals, Transvaal Museum, January, 1909.)

Type from Beira, P.E. Africa (P. A. Sheppard).

Co-type from Matabeleland (C. Wilde).

5 Skins, Pretoria, Transvaal (A. Roberts).

1 Potchefstroom, Transvaal (A. Roberts).

1 Irene (Shortridge).

1 Bulawayo (Rhodesia Museum).

1 Shangani River (Rhodesia Museum).

1 Boror, P.E. Africa (Kirby & Roberts).

This bird has hitherto been confused with *fulvicapilla* and possibly with *aberrans*. It is the northern representative of *fulvicapilla*, from which it mainly differs in its pale under parts, *only the sides of breast and body* being washed with grey, and the upper breast greyish in some specimens. It has moreover a faint subterminal dark brown bar on the tail not possessed by either *fulvicapilla* or *ruficapilla*. From the latter bird it is in addition distinguished by its smaller size and shorter tail.

(17) *Cisticola fulvicapilla* (V).

5 Grahamstown (Ivy).

2 Knysna (Marais).

1 E. Pondoland (Davies).

8 W. Pondoland (Swinney).

This is a distinct and easily recognised form; the throat, entire breast, sides, and flanks being of a deep (slate) grey, only centre of abdomen and chin being white; under tail-coverts tinged with grey. This is the true (southern) *fulvicapilla*, the description of which in "Vögel Afrikas," p. 565, is somewhat misleading.



(18) *Cisticola rufa* (Fraser).

1 Skin from Beira (P. A. Sheppard).

Distinguished by its unicoloured pale brown (sometimes tawny) upper surface, and small size. A dark subterminal bar on tail.

(19) *Cisticola erythrops* (Hartl.)

2 from Boror, P.E. Africa (Kirby &amp; Roberts).

Distinguished from *rufa* by its larger size, darker upper surface, and rustier flanks.

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Haagner, Alwin. 1909. "A revision of the South African species of Cisticola (Grass Warblers)." *Annals of the Transvaal Museum* 1(4), 227-232.

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