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A new subspecies of the babbler *Malacocincla abbotti* from the Eastern Ghats, India

by S. Dillon Ripley and Bruce M. Beebler

Received 22 September 1984

The Vernay Scientific Survey conducted a thorough avifaunal exploration of the Eastern Ghats, the chain of low mountains that parallels the eastern coast of India (c. 16°–18°N, 80°–83°E) (Whistler & Kinnear 1930, 1932). This major expedition uncovered a surprising diversity of previously undescribed forms. Many of these were relict montane populations, similar in nature to the assortment of upland species that inhabit the Western Ghats, and whose affinities link them to the avifauna of the northeastern hill states and Burma.

In 1981, and again in 1983, field trips jointly sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and Bombay Natural History Society were made to the Eastern Ghats of the Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh. Among the new distributional records made during this survey was the discovery of an isolated

population of the widespread Asian babbler *Malacocincla* (*Trichastoma*) *abbotti* (for generic assignment to *Malacocincla* see Ripley & Beehler in press). The only other records for the Indian region are from Eastern Nepal and from the Khasi Hills, more than 1000 km to the north.

We have found several plumage characteristics that distinguish this isolated babbler from its nearest related forms to the north. We suggest this south-eastern form be named:

Malacocincla abbotti krishnarajui subsp. nov.

Holotype. Adult female collected 15 October 1983 by Bruce Beehler at Pedevalasa, Chintapalli Teluk, Vizag District, Andhra Pradesh, at c. 1000 m (17°50'N, 82°20'E), USNM #585181.

Diagnosis. The new population differs from the nominate *abbotti* from Nepal and northeastern India as follows:— (1) upper surface of tail and rump deeper brown; (2) crown, back, wings more olive; (3) vent feathering richer rufescent; (4) pale grey of throat extends further onto the breast; and (5) lower breast and belly are slightly paler washed with buff-tan. A comparison of measurements of wing, tail, culmen and tarsus show no significant differences between southeastern and northeastern populations.

Measurements and soft parts. Wing (chord) 70.5 mm, tail 44 mm, culmen (from skull) 20.5 mm, tarsus 28 mm, weight 25.5 g. Iris medium brown; legs dusky flesh.

Distribution and ecology. First mist-netted by K. S. R. Krishna Raju at Rhagavendra Nagar in 1981. The species is now known from 4 localities in the ghats: Pedevalasa, Rhagavendra Nagar, Lankapakalu and Wangasara, all of which support at least some remnant patches of moist deciduous or semi-evergreen forest. As elsewhere in its range in India (Ali & Ripley 1971), the species appears to prefer wooded ravines and thickly vegetated gulleys, and was usually netted close to the ground.

Specimens examined. Visakhapatnam Ghats: 1 ♂, 3 ♀♀ (USNM); Eastern Nepal (Kosi R.) 1 ♀ (USNM); Khasi Hills: 2 ♂♂ (AMNH); Thailand: 5 ♂♂ (USNM).

Remarks. This new form is named to honour K. S. R. Krishna Raju of the Andhra Pradesh Natural History Society, for his efforts to promote the survey and conservation of the natural resources of the Eastern Ghats.

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1985. "A new subspecies of the babbler *Malacocincla abbotti* from the Eastern Ghats, India." *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 105, 66–67.

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