

which may be equivalent to this third habitat type. Ninety per cent of over 300 sightings were equally distributed between these 3 habitat types.

Most observations of *D. tyro* were made in the Bensbach River area as far north and east as Morehead. However, the species was also observed near Dimississi (8°39'S, 142°14'E) in areas of woodland and *Banksia* sp./*Synoga lysicephala* shrubland on poor soils; and at Bimitj (north of Dimississi, 24 km south of the Fly River at D'Albertis Island) in *Melaleuca* woodland bordering an open seasonal watercourse with *Dillenia alata* thicket and *Barringtonia* parkland in close proximity. These records extend the observed range of *D. tyro* further north and east. Hoogerwerf (1964) suggested that Rand's (1942) observations increased the known range (Mayr 1941) of *D. tyro*, but the specimens referred to are the same as those discussed in Rand (1938), all of which were from the area between the Morehead and Wassi Kussa Rivers. Hoogerwerf (1964) provided the first records for southeastern Irian Jaya.

#### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Bruce Beehler, Nigel Collar and Keith Eltringham for comments on the manuscript, and to G. F. Mees for data on specimens from Irian Jaya.

#### References:

- Bell, H. L. 1981. Information on New Guinea Kingfishers, Alcedinidae. *Ibis* 123: 51–61.  
 Coates, B. J. 1985. *The Birds of Papua New Guinea*. Vol. 1. Dove, Alderley.  
 Forshaw, J. M. & Cooper, W. T. 1983. *Kingfishers and Related Birds. Part 1, Vol. 1, Kingfishers (Alcedinidae) Ceryle to Cittura*. Lansdowne, Melbourne.  
 Hoogerwerf, A. 1964. On birds new for New Guinea or with a larger range than previously known. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 84: 153–161.  
 Mayr, E. 1941. *A List of New Guinea Birds*. The American Museum of Natural History, New York.  
 Rand, A. L. 1938. Results of the Archbold Expeditions. No. 19. On some non-passerine New Guinea birds. *Amer. Mus. Novit.* 990.  
 Rand, A. L. 1942. Results of the Archbold Expeditions. No. 42. Birds of the 1936–1937 New Guinea Expedition. *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.* 79: 289–366.  
 Rand, A. L. & Gilliard, E. T. 1967. *Handbook of New Guinea Birds*. Weidenfield and Nicholson.

Address: Neil Stronach, Dept. of Applied Biology, Pembroke Street, Cambridge CB2 3DX, UK.

© British Ornithologists' Club 1989

## Commentary on the Melba Finches *Pytilia melba* of Djibouti and the requirement of a specimen for a taxonomic description

by Robert B. Payne

Received 9 February 1989

Welch & Welch (1988) recently reported a "new subspecies" of Melba Finch *Pytilia melba* from Djibouti based on a photograph of a bird in the field, but not collected or captured and examined in the hand. Their description (1988) of a new subspecies "*Pytilia melba flavicaudata*" duplicates their earlier description in Welch *et al.* (1986), a privately-



published report to their expedition sponsors. Copies of Welch *et al.* (1986) were sent in March 1987 to the British Museum (Natural History), Sub-Department of Ornithology, at Tring and the BM(NH) library in South Kensington, and to the EGI library at Oxford, satisfying a minimal condition of publication, though not satisfying review by the scientific editorial process. Welch *et al.* (1986) has been recognized as a publication by other ornithologists (Porter & Christensen 1987), but the authorship of the nomenclatural description is in question: either Welch & Welch 1986, or Welch *et al.* 1986 as cited in Welch & Welch 1988.

In fact, neither publication appears to meet the standards for description of a new taxon because no specimens were collected. The *International Code for Zoological Nomenclature* requires a specimen in the form of "an animal, or any part of an animal" (Article 72c (i)). In cases where an illustration is involved, "the specimen illustrated or described and not the illustration or the description" is considered to be the type (Article 72c (v)). The Code recommends but does not require deposition of the type specimen in a museum (Recommendation 72D). Photographs were deposited with the BM(NH), but the photograph designated cannot be considered a type specimen under Article 72c (v).

G. R. Welch has provided copies of photographs including one (no. 1) that he regards as "the holotype". The birds in Djibouti are more yellowish in plumage than other known populations of *P. melba*, the males lacking a definite area of red. Nevertheless in the photographs the males are slightly reddish or orangish around the face, especially no. 1. The forehead appears more pinkish than the bill; and in the absence of a specimen or of a colour standard in the photograph, the bill, described as reddish, as in other forms of *P. melba*, by Welch *et al.* (1986), provides an indication of the colour of the plumage. Males from neighbouring northwestern Somalia have a reddish rump and tail, but approach the Djibouti birds in having reddish plumage otherwise restricted to the region of the chin (Senckenberg specimens 1833–1835 taken in January 1900 by Erlanger at Dadab, c.40 km from Djibouti) and these are regarded as *P. m. jessei* (which grades into *P. m. soudanensis*). The red or grey colour of the lores, emphasized by Wolters (1963) and Welch *et al.* (1986) as distinguishing geographic forms of *P. melba*, actually is quite variable, with many specimens from Ethiopia and Somalia having mixed red and grey feathers in the lores, and also a few having other unusual carotenoid pigmentation with orangish outer webs on the primaries and primary coverts (e.g. USNM 598,655 from Weyfo River, Ethiopia). In addition, an adult male that appears identical to the photographs of the Djibouti males is known from a specimen collected by G. Nikolaus south of Lado, Sudan (Stuttgart Museum 59, 150).

The main point is not that the Djibouti birds may not be differentiated at a level that would be recognizable as a subspecies, but that the publications of Welch & Welch did not meet the standards of nomenclatural publication in usual practice and as described in the Code, and that without a specimen there are insufficient grounds for describing a new taxon. I recommend that the name proposed by Welch *et al.* (1986) be regarded as invalid until specimens have been collected.

Changing cultural conditions make it difficult to collect bird and other specimens in many areas. Ornithologists have the opportunity to



convince local authorities of the significance of obtaining specimens in order to document the biological diversity of their areas. Where collecting is contraindicated, it might be possible to meet the standards of the Code and to obtain material evidence for direct comparison with other specimens by capturing birds and retaining samples such as distinctive feathers and preserving material such as the growing feather pulp or tissue biopsies for genetic studies. With unusual forms that may be new species-group taxa one may describe the birds in the general, and not the nomenclatural sense, as has been done for other birds (Williams 1963:18, Field 1979:12), and to take care to restrict systematic descriptions to collected specimens (Wolters 1974, Prigogine 1981).

### Acknowledgements

G. R. Welch provided copies of photographs of the *Pytilia melba* from Djibouti and dates of mailing of publications. The curators of several museums loaned specimens and I thank the Natur-Museum und Forschungs-Institut "Senckenberg," Museum Alexander Koenig, Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde in Stuttgart, American Museum of Natural History, Field Museum of Natural History and US National Museum. G. S. Cowles, J. F. Monk and D. W. Snow commented on publications received and R. O. Prum commented on the manuscript.

### References:

- Field, G. D. 1979. A new species of *Malimbus* sighted in Sierra Leone and a review of the genus. *Malimbus* 1:2-13.
- International Trust for Zoological Nomenclature. 1985. *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*, 3rd Ed. International Trust for Zoological Nomenclature, British Museum (Natural History), London.
- Porter, R. F. & Christensen, S. 1987. The autumn migration of raptors and other soaring birds in North Yemen. *Sandgrouse* 9:121-124.
- Prigogine, A. 1981. A new species of *Malimbus* from Sierra Leone? *Malimbus* 3:55.
- Welch, G. R. & Welch, H. J. 1988. A new subspecies of *Pytilia melba* from Djibouti, East Africa. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 108: 68-69.
- Welch, G. R., Welch, H. J., Coghlan, S. M. & Denton, M. L. 1986. *Djibouti II-Autumn '85 Expedition Report*. Privately published by the authors, Whittlesey, UK.
- Williams, J. G. 1963. *A Field Guide to the Birds of East and Central Africa*. London: Collins.
- Wolters, H. E. 1963. Zur Rassengliederung von *Pytilia melba* (L.). *J. Orn.* 104: 185-190.
- Wolters, H. E. 1974. Aus der Vogelsammlung des Museums Koenig. *Bonn. Zool. Beitr.* 25: 283-291.

Address: Professor Robert B. Payne, Museum of Zoology, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109, USA.

© British Ornithologists' Club 1989

## A new subspecies of the Green-backed Robin *Pachycephalopsis hattamensis*, comprising the first record from Papua New Guinea

by Walter E. Boles

Received 24 October 1988

The Australo-Papuan robin genus *Pachycephalopsis* Salvadori 1879 (Eopsaltriidae) of New Guinea comprises 2 species, which are roughly east-west counterparts, although there is overlap in the Weyland, Nassau and Oranje Mountains (Fig. 1; map in Diamond 1985: 89). The



Payne, Robert B. 1989. "COMMENTARY ON THE MELBA FINCHES PYTILIA-MELBA OF DJIBOUTI AND THE REQUIREMENT OF A SPECIMEN FOR A TAXONOMIC DESCRIPTION." *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 109, 117–119.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/123708>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/76687>

**Holding Institution**

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

**Sponsored by**

Biodiversity Heritage Library

**Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: In Copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder

Rights Holder: British Ornithologists' Club

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions/>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.