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Remarks on the osteology of the Madagascan warblers *Dromaeocercus* and *Amphilais* (Sylviidae)

by Storrs L. Olson

Received 9 May 1989

On the basis of external morphology, and to some extent behaviour, Parker (1984) considered that the two Madagascan warblers *Dromaeocercus brunneus* and *D. seebohmi* were only convergently similar in possessing long, decomposed tail feathers. He regarded the type species of *D. brunneus* as belonging to the genus *Bradypterus,* whereas *D. seebohmi* was said to belong with the megalurine warblers and was made the type of a new genus, *Amphilais.* Traylor (1986) evidently was not convinced by Parker's arguments and listed *Amphilais* as a synonym of *Dromaeocercus.*

Examination of the cranial osteology of these 2 species fully supports Parker's contention that they are not congeneric. Compared to *Dromaeocercus brunneus,* the skull in *Amphilais seebhomi* is markedly narrower, the cranium not nearly so broad, and in dorsal view the frontals are much less laterally expanded, in part reflecting the much smaller ectethmoid plates. The bill in *Amphilais* is more slender, with the osseous nares proportionately longer; the transpalatine processes are also much longer and more slender than in *D. brunneus.* Unfortunately, the post-cranial skeleton was rather badly damaged in the single available skeleton of *Amphilais seebohmi* examined, so no useful comparison could be made there. Nevertheless, the cranial differences are greater than would be expected among congeneric species of Sylviidae.

The only skeletons of *Bradypterus* at hand were 2 rather poorly preserved examples of *B. luteoviridis*. These differ markedly from *Dromaeocercus brunneus* in that the frontals are not as expanded, the ectethmoids are much more inflated, and the posterior margin of the nostril is more heavily ossified, thus reducing the aperture of the osseous nares. If *B. luteoviridis* is representative of the genus (it is not typical in the nomenclatural sense, being the type of *Tribura*, a genus now included in *Bradypterus*), then *D. brunneus* should not be included in *Bradypterus*.

As I have noted elsewhere (Olson MS), there is a rather close overall similarity in the skull and external morphology between *Amphilais seebohmi* and the New Zealand fernbirds of the genus *Bowdleria*. However, it would be premature, at this point, to speculate on the closest relatives of either *Dromaeocercus brunneus* or *Amphilais seebohmi*, although the evidence is sufficient to justify maintaining these species in separate genera.

The following skeletal material was examined in the above comparisons: *Bradypterus luteoviridis* USNM 318312, USNM 318313; *Dromaeocercus brunneus* MRAC 50616; *Amphilais seebohmi* USNM 432211; *Bowdleria p. punctata* NMNZ 22848.

Acknowledgements

In addition to specimens in the Smithsonian collections (USNM), I also obtained skeletons on loan from M. Louette, Museum Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, Belgium (MRAC), and J. A. Bartle and P. R. Millener, National Museum of New Zealand (NMNZ), to whom I am most grateful.

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Former breeding of *Sula dactylatra* in the Cape Verde Islands*

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Received 9 May 1989

Palaeontological investigations on oceanic islands nearly always produce fossils of extinct or extirpated species of birds. Episodes of extinction are

*CANCAP Contribution No. 79 [Canarian-Cape Verdian Region of the North Atlantic Ocean project.]