

# The type locality of the Barred Owl *Glaucidium capense*

by J. Vincent

Received 16 February 1990

In 1834 Dr (Sir) Andrew Smith described his *Noctua capensis* in the *South African Quarterly Journal*. Since he did not mention where his bird was collected, the type locality was regarded for many years as no more than 'South Africa'. W. L. Sclater recorded it thus in his 1930 *Systema Avium Aethiopicarum*, but in *Ann. Transv. Mus.* 18(3), 1936, Austin Roberts showed that Smith's bird was obtained in the eastern Cape Province. Accordingly that was the type locality in *A Check List of the Birds of South Africa* (Vincent 1952) and it was repeated in the SAOS 1980 Checklist.

In that 1936 reference, Roberts recorded extracts from some hitherto unpublished notes by Smith, found in 2 manuscript volumes owned by the Transvaal Museum. Therein Smith said that his owl came from "one of the forests of the eastern district of the Cape Colony" adding that it was "shot at Mr Biggar's early in the morning". Roberts commented that if it could be found where this Mr Alexander Biggar had lived, the place could be taken as the precise locality.

When first I read that remark I promised myself the task of solving the problem, if or when time and opportunity permitted what was likely to be a long search. Half a century has gone by, but now I think and trust that the answer has been found.

By lucky chance one of the books referred to in my delvings into Eastern Cape history was one with many entertaining stories of the area, entitled *Assegai Over the Hills* by F. C. Metrowich (1953). In it is described how in 1824 "a very interesting character", Alexander Biggar, was caught up in an incident in a Grahamstown street, when chatting with his friends there. This proved a first valuable clue that Biggar's place was unlikely to have been very far from Grahamstown.

Smith mentioned that a bird identical with his type specimen had been collected at the same locality in 1824. So because it is said that Smith did his Eastern Cape collecting before his westward journeys to the Orange River during 1827 to 1829, it seemed likely that the second bird was obtained between 1825 and 1827. Certainly it was collected before 1831, in which year Smith left for Natal. The problem now was to find where Biggar had lived throughout the important 6-year period.

This part of my search proved much easier than expected, thanks to the most kind and fortuitous help of Dr C. J. (Jack) Skead, of Port Elizabeth. He had all the needed details in his valuable notes on Eastern Cape farms of historical interest, and was generous enough to let me have them.

It appears that before leaving the Cape, Alexander Biggar lived on a small farm only 23 km WSW of Grahamstown, but that this property was granted to him only in 1832, and this was too late for my purpose. His



previous home, the one lived in during the relevant years was at a place called The Baakens. This was on the farm Driefontein, which has been since subdivided into the farms Woodlands and Goodwoods, and I now restrict the type locality of *Glaucidium c. capense* to **17 km west of Bathurst, eastern Cape Province, at 33°32'S, 26°37'E.**

In *Durban Mus. Novit.* (1980) xii(12): 145, Clancey proposed the Uitenhage district of the eastern Cape as the type locality, this being the home of Krebs, who might have collected the owl. That suggestion, however, has now been overtaken by the fact that Smith noted, though he did not name, the farm where his bird was secured.

To close with a repeat of another piece of historical interest. Bathurst was the first administrative centre of the 1820 Settlers. Metrowich, in his book already mentioned, tells us that Alexander Biggar emigrated to the Cape from Scotland in 1820 in the *Weymouth*, bringing with him his wife Mary, of Stirling, and their family of 9 daughters and 2 sons. Alexander later took part in the battle of Blood River, but subsequently he and both his sons were killed fighting the Zulus.

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## Description of a new subspecies of *Saltator aurantiirostris*, with comments on *S. maxillosus*

by José Maria Cardoso da Silva

Received 14 February 1990

The Golden-billed Saltator *Saltator aurantiirostris* is distributed over a large area of western South America, from Peru to Argentina (Meyer de Schauensee 1982). The first study of the geographic variation of this species was carried out by Chapman (1927), followed by that of Hellmayr (1938) and most recently by that of Paynter (1970). Paynter recognized only 2 subspecies in the southernmost part of the species' distribution: *S. a. aurantiirostris* Vieillot, from the south of Bolivia, north of Argentina (except Misiones), Paraguay, Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul and Mato Grosso do Sul) and Uruguay; and *S. a. nasica* Wetmore & Peters, from west-central Argentina (La Rioja, San Juan, Mendoza and western La Pampa). The latter differs from the nominate subspecies by having on average a slightly larger bill (Chapman 1927, Hellmayr 1938).

A total of 106 specimens collected within the geographic range of *S. a. aurantiirostris*, deposited at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), was analysed for the present study. This analysis resulted in the identification of a separate population of *S. aurantiirostris* that exhibits a combination of characteristics derived from both *S. a. aurantiirostris* and *S. maxillosus* Cabanis, from southeastern Brazil, in addition to unique plumage traits, justifying the designation of a new



Vincent, Jack. 1990. "THE TYPE LOCALITY OF THE BARRED OWL GLAUCIDIUM-CAPENSE." *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 110, 170–171.

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