

the smallest 30.2 x 26.9 and 34.3 x 25.1 mm. The weight of six unblown fresh eggs was 9.7—12.6 grams (average 11.7 grams.).

Four eggs of the host *Cacicus cela* had a white ground colour with blackish spots and hair-lines; they averaged 27.3 x 18.7 mm.

It is very interesting that all the eggs of *Scaphidura* in this colony of *Cacicus cela* were in colour as well as in shape totally different from the white eggs of *Scaphidura* in nests of *Psarocolius decumanus* described in my earlier notes. As up till now white eggs of *Scaphidura* seem to be unknown from nests of *Cacicus* and blue eggs of the parasite practically unknown from nests of *Psarocolius* (only Smooker mentions them but his records seem not wholly satisfactory) I feel inclined to the view that the statement made by the Penard brothers as long ago as 1910, that the eggs of *Scaphidura* in nests of *Cacicus* are different from those laid in nests of *Psarocolius* is indeed correct, and is in my opinion a most interesting fact of brood parasitism.

Further observations will be necessary to see if blue and more rounded eggs of the parasite are indeed confined to *Cacicus cela* and white more elongated eggs to nests of *Psarocolius decumanus*.

## *Cisticola aberdare* a good species

by MELVIN A. TRAYLOR

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In July 1966, at the 14th International Ornithological Congress at Oxford, Mr. Myles North presented a paper supported by tape recordings of the songs of different populations of some species of African birds. Among those were the songs of *Cisticola robusta ambigua* of the Kenya highlands and *C. "robusta" aberdare* from high altitudes on both sides of the Rift Valley in Kenya. On the basis of striking differences in voice plus the fact that both occurred in close proximity at Molo on the western side of the Rift, North believed that *aberdare* should be considered a distinct species and not a race of *robusta*. Examination of a series of skins from the National (formerly Coryndon) Museum of Nairobi, collected at Molo, shows that North was quite correct in his belief, and that the two species occur at Molo without intergradation or evidence of interbreeding and may thus be considered sympatric at this locality.

In his original description of *aberdare*, Lynes (1930, *Ibis*, *Cisticola* Supp., p. 426) stated that it was similar in size to the surrounding *ambigua*, but darker in general colour like the summer plumage of nominate *robusta*. The most notable character was the colour of the tail, which, except for the buff tips, was so dark that the subterminal black spots disappeared, even when viewed from below.

Lynes had only four adults available for his original description. Examination of a fresh series of seven adult males and one adult female from Molo shows that there are other characters both of colour and size which distinguish *aberdare* from *ambigua*. One of the most marked specific characters of *robusta*, including the race *ambigua*, is the clear rusty nape, forming a reddish hind collar separating the streaked crown and back (see figure). In *aberdare* this hind collar virtually disappears, and the dark streaking of the hind crown extends down over the nape. In the winter





Comparison of *Cisticola aberdare* (left) and *C. robusta ambigua* (right). In each pair the male is to the left. The distinguishing characters evident in the figure are the clear, unstreaked nape of *robusta*, and the greater size and proportionately longer tail of *aberdare*. All specimens are from the vicinity of Molo.

plumage of nominate *robusta* the nape may be somewhat mottled rather than clear, but the mottlings are never so bold as the streaking on the crown.

In size, *aberdare* averages larger in wing length than *ambigua* and has an absolutely and proportionately longer tail. Among the specimens measured there was no overlap in tail measurements between the two species. Of six adult males of *aberdare* the shortest tail length was 55 mm., while of 30 males of *ambigua* the longest tail length was 54 mm. The difference was even greater in females; the longest tail length out of 20 females of *ambigua* was 48 mm., while two adult female *aberdare* both measured 55 mm. Comparative measurements of the two species are given below; those for *ambigua* were taken from specimens from the highlands west of the Rift, in the general area of overlap.



	Wing	Tail	Culmen	Tarsus
<i>aberdare</i>				
6 ♂♂	73–76 (74.5)	55–62 (59.1)	16–18 (16.8)	26–28 (27.0)
2 ♀♀	65, 71	55, 55	15.5, 16	23, 25
<i>ambigua</i>				
10 ♂♂	66–72 (69.6)	45–54 (49.0)	15–17 (15.9)	25–27.5 (26.4)
12 ♀♀	58–63 (60.0)	41–48 (44)	14–15 (14.5)	22–25 (24.0)

	tail/wing ratio	♀/♂ wing ratio
<i>aberdare</i>		
♂♂	79%	
♀♀	81%	91%
<i>ambigua</i>		
♂♂	70%	
♀♀	67%	86%

The proportionately longer tail of *aberdare* is evident in the tail/wing ratios above. The difference in sexual dimorphism shown by the ♀/♂ wing ratio may be significant, but with only two *aberdare* females available it is not possible to be sure.

*Aberdare* was discovered at 9–12,000 feet in the Aberdare mountains on the east side of the Rift; on the west side of the Rift it is now known to occur both at Molo and at Mau Narok, some 30 miles south-east and appears to be commonest in the high downlands around 8,500 feet. *Ambigua* has a wide range over the Kenya highlands mostly around 5,500 to 7,500 feet; it is the race of the Rift floor, thus separating the two *aberdare* populations, and it also encircles them on their non-Rift sides. However, among the National Museum series are four males and one juvenal female of *aberdare* and one female and one first winter male of *ambigua*, all collected at Molo at 7,700 feet, between 8th and 12th December 1964 by John Williams. These demonstrate actual sympatry between the two species, and not just altitudinal replacement. Lynes, p. 425, notes that *ambigua* has been collected at 8,000–8,500 feet, on the Mau downs, which is near the area where *aberdare* has been located and affords additional evidence that the two species are sympatric.

While the evidence is conclusive that *ambigua* and *aberdare* behave as distinct species, their relationship to nominate *robusta* and to the other races of the group are not equally clear. In the previous discussion, Lynes' concept of the species *robusta* was accepted for all races except *aberdare*, which was considered a separate monotypic species. However, John Williams (*in litt.*) has suggested that *aberdare* and the Abyssinian races of *robusta* may be conspecific, and that the remaining races may form a second species for which *angolensis* is the oldest name. The Abyssinian races, *robusta* and *omo*, here joined as *robusta* for convenience, are completely isolated from any of the remaining races by several hundred miles of inhospitable terrain. No ornithologist familiar with either *ambigua* or *aberdare*



in the field has had an opportunity to observe the behaviour of *robusta*. This is unfortunate, because in the genus *Cisticola* the song and courtship behaviour are frequently the most reliable clues to relationship. The only description of the song of *robusta* is that of Cheesman (1935, *Ibis*: 620), and according to North it seems to show no relationship to that of either *ambigua* or *aberdare*.

Below I have tried to tabulate the various characters other than behaviour that might indicate the relationship of *robusta* to either *ambigua* or *aberdare*.

1. Characters uniting *robusta* more closely with *ambigua*.
  - a) the clear nape of *robusta* is much more like that of *ambigua* than like the streaked nape of *aberdare*.
2. Neutral characters
  - a) the long winter tail of *robusta* is similar in proportion to the perennial long tail of *aberdare*, but the short breeding tail is similar in proportion to that of *ambigua*.
  - b) *robusta* is the largest race, and thus nearer in size to *aberdare* than to *ambigua*; however, *angolensis*, which Lynes found to be identical with *ambigua* in behaviour and clearly conspecific, is equally large.
  - c) geographically, the gaps in ranges between *robusta* and *ambigua* and *aberdare* respectively are equally great.
3. Characters uniting *robusta* more nearly to *aberdare*.
  - a) *robusta* and *aberdare* prefer higher altitudes, the former occurring between 6,600 (rarely down to 5,000 according to Cheesman) and 8,800 feet, and the latter between 7,700 and 12,000 feet. *Ambigua* ranges from around 3,000 to 8,600 feet.

None of the above characters are conclusive in themselves, although the first, the clear nape of *robusta* and *ambigua*, may perhaps be given more weight than the others. In the absence of conclusive evidence furnished by the comparative behaviour of the three forms, I prefer to upset the established nomenclature as little as possible, and to keep *aberdare* a monotypic species, and all the other subspecies, from Abyssinia to Cameroon and Angola, as races of *robusta*.

The fine series from Molo, including ten *aberdare* and two *ambigua*, are from the collection of the National (formerly Coryndon) Museum of Nairobi, Kenya and I am very grateful for the opportunity to examine them. I would like to thank Mrs. B. P. Hall of the British Museum (N. H.) and Mr. G. Stuart Keith of the American Museum for their help in arranging this loan. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Myles North not only for his original discovery but for his kindness in reading this paper and his many valuable suggestions. Mr. North wishes to thank Mr. and Mrs. Sessions of Mau Narok and Mr. and Mrs. Start of Molo, with their sons, for much hospitality and ornithological co-operation; Mr. John Williams, till recently of the Nairobi Museum, for identifying and preparing the specimens and for his suggestions concerning the relationship of *aberdare*; Mr. G. Stuart Keith for his help when Mr. North was ill; and Mrs. Hall and myself for examining and reporting on this collection.

Mr. North informs me that a considerable amount of field work on



*aberdare* has been done by Mr. Sessions (on whose farm *aberdare* was discovered, on account of its voice) and by the Start family, as well as by himself, and that it is intended to publish the results in due course.

## A Swift, *Apus a. apus*, with twelve rectrices

by A. DE ROO

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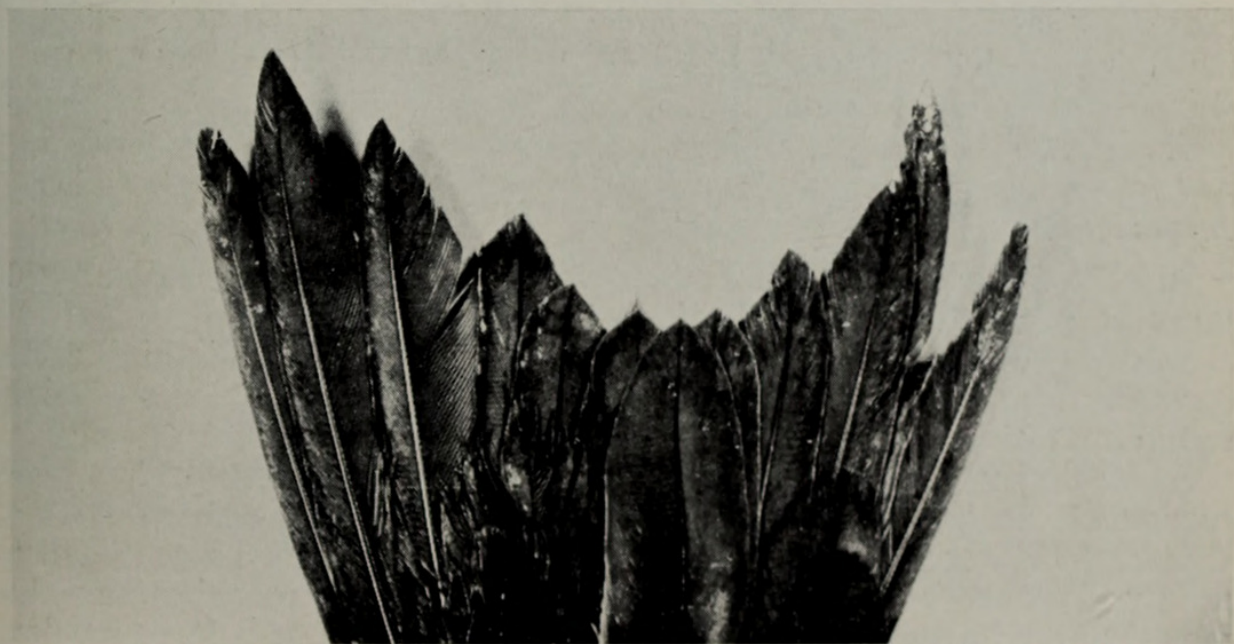
All Apodidae normally have ten rectrices and apparently no exceptions are described.

The present exception deals with an European Swift, *Apus a. apus* (L.) breeding at the colony of Overijse, 15 km. to the south-east of Brussels, Belgium. This bird was caught on its nest on 1st July, 1966 and, after close examination, released with ring Bruxelles X77344. Besides the normal ten tail feathers an additional outermost or 6th pair of rectrices was found, of the same general shape as that of the 5th pair, but 5 mm. shorter on the right side of the tail and 1.5 mm. longer on the left side. Detailed measurements of the twelve rectrices are given below.

*Other characteristics:* wing length, 180 mm.; tail, 74 mm.; weight at 19.20 hrs. 44.5 g. Primaries 1 to 9 of adult type but outermost or 10th primary conspicuously worn in both wings (for age-characteristics in *A. apus*, see De Roo, 1966). As a case of partial albinism, one single white body feather was also found in the middle of the rump.

The sex of the Swift is unknown but there is some evidence of male behaviour: its partner had a normal ten-feathered tail and so had the two young they reared from a C/3.

In 1967 this bird came back to its nest on 1st May while the partner arrived the day before. Examined on 7th May the tail again presented twelve fresh rectrices, the 6th pair being 5 and 9 mm. shorter than the 5th right and left rectrices respectively and also more rounded towards the tip (see photograph). Full measurements are given overleaf.



Photograph, Museum Tervuren

Aberrant twelve-feathered tail in *Apus a. apus*



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