

A new subspecies of *Spreo albicapillus* (Blyth) from Kenya

by STUART KEITH

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Spreo albicapillus, described by Blyth from the Warsangeli district of British Somaliland, is one of the least known members of this genus of starlings. Archer and Godman (1961) give its range as "from the coast of the Gulf of Aden south through the Haud to the Webbe Shebeli and east to the Mijjertein country." In other words, the range includes British Somaliland (for convenience I use the old political terms), extreme eastern Ethiopia and extreme northern Italian Somaliland. There is also, however, another population, not mentioned by Archer and Godman, discovered by Benson (1946) in the highlands of southern Ethiopia at Yavello. This is about 400 miles west of the nearest part of the range given by Archer and Godman.

In 1962 I discovered a small population of this bird at North Horr, northern Kenya, from which I collected two birds. These differ markedly in size from the Somaliland birds (see photo), there being no overlap in measurements between them and a series of 15 skins examined at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. I therefore propose to name my birds

Spreo albicapillus horrensis, subsp. nov.

Type: American Museum of Natural History No. 766689; adult male; North Horr, north west Kenya; 1st November 1962; Stuart Keith, collector.

Measurements of type: Wing 137; tail 93; tarsus 33; total culmen 24 mm.

Description: Smaller than the nominate race. 15 skins in the A.M.N.H. collection were examined, 13 from British Somaliland, one from eastern Ethiopia, and one a captive bird with no locality. These skins have the following measurements:—Wing 144–161, average 154.5; tail 107–122, average 114.6. My two birds from North Horr measure: wing 130–137, average 134; tail 89–93, average 91. In addition, I examined the eight skins in the British Museum's collection taken by Benson at Yavello, southern Ethiopia. These tend to be a little smaller than the Somali birds, especially in the tail, (the 8 birds measured: wing, 143–159, average 152; tail, 99–113, average 106). However, as can be seen, these measurements overlap with those of the Somali birds, but do not overlap with those of my birds. Furthermore, these Yavello specimens are the same dark colour below as specimens from Somaliland (see below under "remarks" for a note on colour).

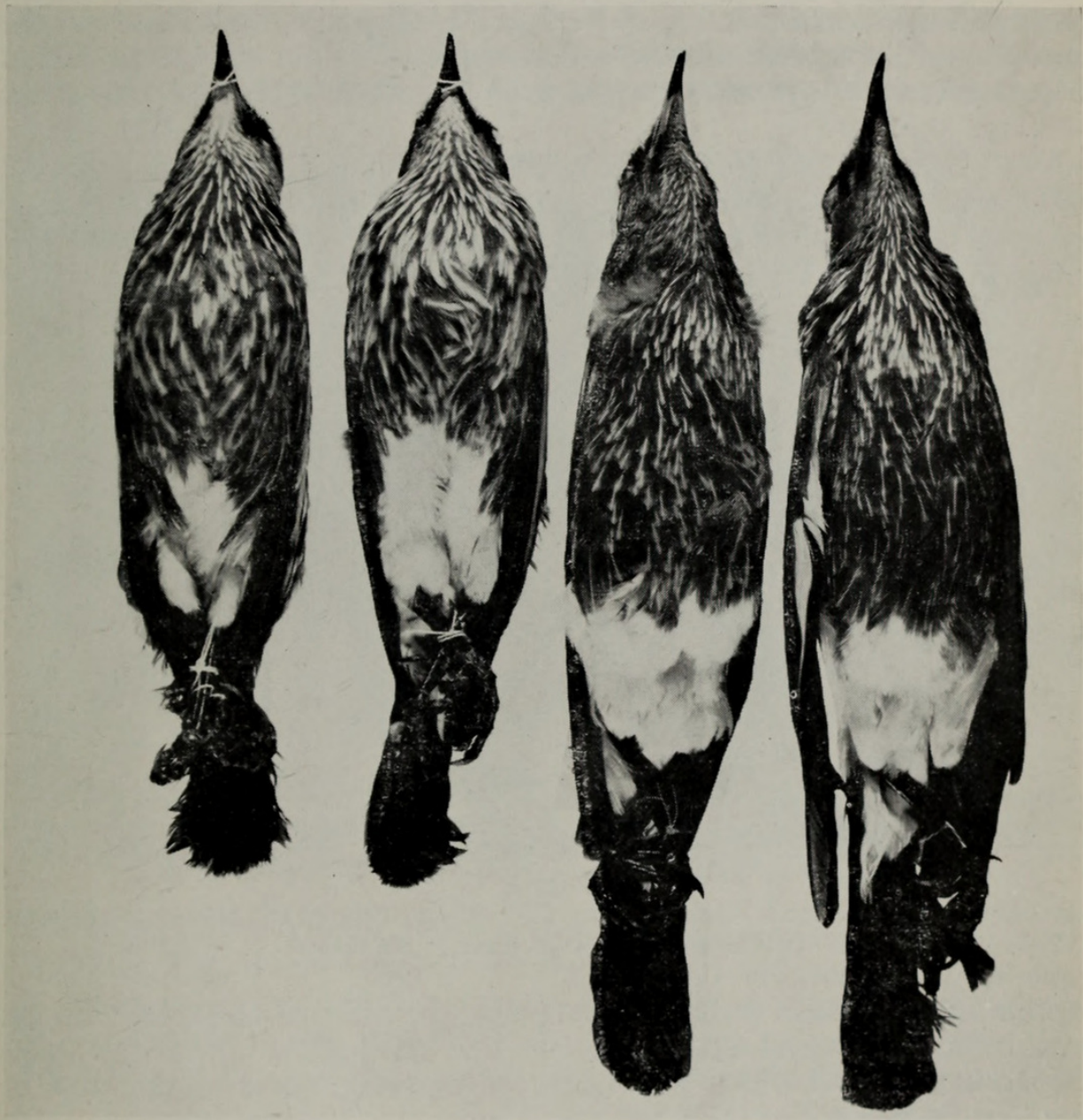
Distribution: At present only known from the type locality, but this region of extreme northern Kenya near the Ethiopian border is virtually unexplored ornithologically. There is a recent sight record (1963, Leslie Brown, pers. comm.) of *Spreo albicapillus* subsp. from the Dida Galgalla desert north of Marsabit, Kenya, about 100 miles to the east of North Horr.

Remarks: There is a good deal of individual variation in colour among the series of A.M.N.H. skins, particularly in regard to the amount of blue and green gloss on the back and tail. My two birds from Kenya are rather paler below than the A.M.N.H. birds (see photo), but apart from this can hardly be separated on grounds of colour.

One of the Kenya birds is a young bird, with the basal half of the lower mandible yellow instead of black (on left in photo). I have therefore

included in the photograph, for comparison, a young bird, with the same bill colouring, from Somaliland, (second from right).

Habitat: In British Somaliland, *Spreo albicapillus* is found at all levels, from the coast right up to the mountains in the interior. In southern Ethiopia, Benson (*loc. cit.*) found it at 4000–4500 ft., in “park-like acacia



country”. North Horr, 1300 ft., is in hot, sandy desert country, with a few scattered palms and thorn trees. The birds were quite tame, living right in around the tiny settlement. I estimated their numbers at between twenty and thirty.

My thanks are due to Mr. Peter Walters, Provincial Commissioner, Northern Frontier Province, for allowing me to enter his Province at a time of year when it was closed; and to Mr. David Dale, District Commissioner, Marsabit, who not only allowed me to collect freely within his District, but also personally accompanied me to North Horr.

References:

- Archer, Sir Geoffrey and Godman, Eva, *The Birds of British Somaliland and the Gulf of Aden*, Edinburgh, 1961, p. 1417.
Benson, C. W., *Ibis* 88, 1946, p. 453.



Keith, Stuart. 1964. "A new subspecies of *Spreo albkapillus* (Blyth) from Kenya." *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 84, 162–163.

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