

A New Race of Red Bishop *Euplectes orix* (Linnaeus) from South Africa

by MR. P. A. CLANCEY

Received 10th February, 1958

Two races of the Red Bishop *Euplectes orix* (Linnaeus) are currently recognised in South Africa, these being *Eu. o. orix* (Linnaeus), 1758: Angola, and *Eu. o. sundevalli* Bonaparte, 1850: eastern Transvaal. Roberts, *Birds of South Africa*, 1940, p. 345, admitted a third race from the eastern tropical lowlands of the sub-continent, using for it the name *Eu. o. wertheri* (Reichenow), 1897: Wembere, Tabora district, Tanganyika Territory.

Eu. o. orix supposedly ranges from Angola southward through South-West Africa and Bechuanaland to the Cape Province, Orange Free State, Basutoland, Southern Transvaal and Natal, but recently Chapin, *Birds of the Belgian Congo*, part iv, 1954, p. 421, has questioned this arrangement, observing that breeding male topotypes in the American Museum of Natural History have wings 71 – 74, as against 75 – 79 mm. in South African specimens of *Eu. o. "orix."* No topotypical specimens of breeding males of this bishop are currently available in South African museums, nor are there any in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), London, but through the kindness of Dr. A. L. Rand, of the Chicago Natural History Museum, U.S.A., I have been able to study a pair from Huila, Angola, collected by Gerd Heinrich in 1954. Size details of six other Angolan topotypes have kindly been furnished by Drs. Dean Amadon and Charles Vaurie, of the American Museum of Natural History, New York. The American Museum specimens are from Humpata, Mossamedes, and Fort Quilenges, Benguela, and were collected by Ansorge and Mocquerys. Angola specimens agree with those of South-West Africa, northern Bechuanaland, Southern Rhodesia and the northern Transvaal, but not with those from further south, which are substantially larger.

Angolan topotypes of *Eu. o. orix* have wings 73 and 74+ mm. as measured by myself, and 72 – 74 (72.7) mm. in the six specimens in the American Museum measured for me by Vaurie. Two specimens from Ovamboland, in the extreme north of South-West Africa, in the collection of the Transvaal Museum have wings of 70.5 and 71 mm. Eight Southern Rhodesian examples have wings 68 – 73 (71.0) mm., while five northern Transvaal specimens measure 71 – 74 (72.6), and six southern Portuguese East African specimens 66 – 71 (68.3) mm. Three eastern Transvaal skins in the American Museum have wings of 69.5 – 71 (70.5). Cape Province birds are much larger than those just dealt with. Sixteen breeding males have wings 75.5 – 80 (78.0) mm., and similar large-sized birds are found in the Orange Free State and southern Transvaal – wings of thirteen males 75 – 81 (76.9), and Basutoland – wings of seven males 76 – 79 (76.7). Natal birds are again small, and not separable on size from Angolan topotypes. Twelve Natal breeding males have wings – 70 – 75.5 (73.0) mm. An old Verreaux skin from Port Natal (*i.e.*, Durban) in the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia has a wing of 70 mm., while another also in the Academy's collection from Ulundi, Zululand (*ex. Tristram collection*), likewise has a wing of 70 mm. It is clear from the above measurements that the populations of Natal and Zululand, Swaziland, eastern and

northern Transvaal, Southern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, South-West Africa and Angola consist of birds of similar size, and that *Eu. o. sundevalli* (type-locality: eastern Transvaal) is a synonym of *Eu. o. orix* (type-locality: Angola). The much larger birds of the Cape Province, Orange Free State, Basutoland and the southern Transvaal, hitherto placed as *Eu. o. orix*, must be separated as a new race, and for this I propose the name:

Euplectes orix turgida, subsp. nov.

Type: ♂, adult. Citrusdal, south-western Cape Province, South Africa. 20th October, 1955. Breeding. Collected by Dr. J. M. Winterbottom. In the collection of the South Africa Museum, Cape Town, Mus. Reg. No. S.A.M. 20218.

Diagnosis: Similar to *Euplectes orix orix* (Linnaeus), 1758: Angola, with which it has hitherto been confused, but differs in being larger in all respects. Wings of 16 parotypical males of *Eu. o. turgida* from the Cape Province 75.5 – 80 (78.0), as against 71 – 74 (73.1) mm. in 8 males of *Eu. o. orix* from Angola. Not constantly separable on colour grounds.

Material: (Adult breeding males only). *Eu. o. turgida*, 37 (Cape Province, 17; Orange Free State, 1; Basutoland, 7; southern Transvaal, 12). *Eu. o. orix*, 36 (Gordonia, north-western Cape, 1; northern South-West Africa, 2; Angola, 2; Southern Rhodesia, 8; southern Portuguese East Africa (see "Remarks"), 6; northern Transvaal, 5; Natal, 12. *Eu. o. nigrifrons*, 2.

Measurements of the Type: Wing (flattened) 76.5, culmen from base 18, tail 43.5, tarsus 23 mm.

Range: The whole of the Cape Province with the exception of the Gordonia district in the north-west, Orange Free State, Basutoland, and the highveld areas of the southern Transvaal. Intergrades to the north of its stated range with *Eu. o. orix*.

Remarks: The sixteen Cape paratypes of *E. o. turgida* have culmens 17 – 18.5 (17.6), and tails 40.5 – 46 (43.8) mm. Fifteen males of *Eu. o. orix* have culmens 15 – 17 (16.1), tails 36.5 – 43 (38.3) mm. 39 mm. seems to be the normal upper limit of the tail-length in *Eu. o. orix*, but three males from near Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, have tails of 42, 43, 43 mm., which measurements are within the size-range of *Eu. o. turgida*. The six southern Portuguese East Africa specimens measured by me have culmens of 14.5 – 16 (15.5), tails 35.5 – 38 (36.8) mm. Females of *Eu. o. turgida* have wings of 68 – 73 mm., those of *Eu. o. orix* 60 – 66.5 mm.

As noted earlier in this paper, Roberts, *loc. cit.*, considered that the small birds of the eastern tropical lowlands of sub-continental South Africa should be kept separate from those of the interior, and called them *Eu. o. wertheri*. *Eu. o. wertheri* is often placed as a synonym of *Eu. o. nigrifrons* (Böhm), 1884: Karema, Ubende, western Tanganyika Territory, by workers, but Chapin, *loc. cit.*, believes there may be grounds for recognising it. In any event, *Eu. o. wertheri* is unlikely to range to South Africa, and the small birds with wings 66 – 70 mm. occurring in the Portuguese East African lowlands to the north of the Limpopo River appear to be inseparable from *Eu. o. nigrifrons*. In addition to being smaller sized, *Eu. o. nigrifrons* differs from *Eu. o. orix* in having a much narrower black frontal band and in being rather more orange red. Chapin *loc. cit.*, claims that the mantle of *Eu. o. nigrifrons* is paler than that of *Eu. o. orix*,

but I have examined birds with very pale mantles from within the range of the nominate race, and such pallor seems to be due mainly to wear and bleaching. The character is not mentioned at all by Mackworth-Praed and Grant, *Birds of Eastern and North Eastern Africa*, vol. ii. 1955, pp. 950–951, who give the southern range limits of *Eu. o. nigrifrons* as western Nyasaland. The Portuguese East African populations of the Red Bishop occurring to the south of the Limpopo River are difficult to place. They are small-sized like *Eu. o. nigrifrons*, but the breeding males have the deep red of *Eu. o. orix* and similar broad black frontal bands. They appear to represent an intergrading population *Eu. o. orix* \geq *Eu. o. nigrifrons*.

Three races of the Red Bishop can be recognised from South Africa, and the nomenclature, characters and ranges of these are as follows:

1. *Euplectes orix turgida* Clancey, 1958: Citrusdal, south-western Cape Province, South Africa.
Forehead and fore-crown black. Size largest.
Wings ♂♂ 75 – 81, ♀♀ 68 – 73 mm.
Range: As defined in the above description.
2. *Euplectes orix orix* (Linnaeus), 1758: Angola. (syn. *Eu. o. sundevalli* Bonaparte, 1850).
Similar to *Eu. o. turgida*, but consistently smaller.
Wings ♂♂ 70 – 74, ♀♀ 60 – 66.5 mm.
Range: Southern Angola, South-West Africa, Gordonias district of northern Cape Province, western and southern Northern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland Protectorate, Southern Rhodesia, northern and eastern Transvaal, southern Portuguese East Africa to the south of the Limpopo River (intergrades with *Eu. o. nigrifrons*), Swaziland, Natal and Zululand.
3. *Euplectes orix nigrifrons* (Böhm), 1884, Karema, Ubende, western Tanganyika Territory.
Similar to *Eu. o. orix* but adult male with only forehead black, and red surfaces often more orange, less pure vermilion. Smaller in size.
Wings ♂♂ 63 – 70, ♀♀ 54 – 60 mm.
Range: Southern Portuguese East Africa to the north of the Limpopo River, eastern Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, northern Portuguese East Africa to Tanganyika Territory, eastern Belgian Congo, central Uganda, and Kenya Colony east to Machakos. (Note: The latter part of the range just given is based on the assumption that *Eu. o. wertheri* and *Eu. o. nigrifrons* are synonymous, which view is contestable).

For the loan of material and assistance I am grateful to the Directors of the South Africa Museum, Cape Town (through Dr. J. M. Winterbottom); Transvaal Museum, Pretoria; Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg; Museu Dr. Alvaro de Castro, Lourenço Marques. For the loan of two Angola topotypes of the nominate race of *Eu. orix* I am indebted to Dr. A. L. Rand, Chicago Natural History Museum, U.S.A., and I am also grateful to Drs. Dean Amadon and Charles Vaurie of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, for details of Angolan material in their charge. Dr. James Bond, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, U.S.A., has kindly provided useful information on the Academy's South African material of *Eu. orix*.



1958. "A new race of Red Bishop Euplectes orix (Linnaeus) from South Africa."
Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club 78, 95–97.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/125530>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/81400>

Holding Institution

Natural History Museum Library, London

Sponsored by

Natural History Museum Library, London

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/4.0/>

Rights: <https://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>.