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Scopus 16: 101–105, April 1993 Received 23 May 1991, revised 19 September 1992

A new location for the Ankober Serin *Serinus ankoberensis* near Debre Sina, Ethiopia

While on a field trip with the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society to Debre Sina on 26 October 1991, I was able to stop at the view point 3–4 km before the Mussolini Tunnel, above and south of Debre Sina town. At this point on the eastern escarpment of the western highland massif, the rock cliffs of the escarpment are broken by a deep, narrow ravine, with steeply shelving, near vertical sides. The ravine is as little as 30–40 m wide in places, though it is considerably wider at the escarpment rim. The altitude is approximately 3250 m. In this ravine I watched a number of small serins *Serinus* sp., which I subsequently identified as Ankober Serins *Serinus ankoberensis*. The birds were watched from 15:00 to 15:20 at distances between 20 and 100 m from above, in sunny, windy conditions through 10 x 40 binoculars.

The following observations and comments are based on notes made at the time. Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) and Ash (1979) were to hand and were consulted immediately after the sighting:

More than 20, possibly as many as 40, small serins were watched feeding individually and in small groups, typically on grass and lichen-covered rocks, but also on small areas of open earth and on bare rock surfaces at between 20 and approximately 100 m below the rim of the ravine. Occasionally individuals alighted on almost vertical rock faces. None of the birds settled for long at any one site. They gave the impression of sitting very 'flat' on the rocks. They were restless, always on the move, individually and in groups, flitting from rock to rock, flying up, circling and alighting at anything up to 50 m away, occasionally disappearing out of sight round the escarpment rim. A two-note call was made by some birds in flight. One bird, probably of this species, was seen to fly up underneath an overhanging clump of grass on the southern side of the gully. Although it was not possible to positively identify this individual, the behaviour appears to match a pattern of *S. ankoberensis* noted by Ash (1979).

Description: warmish brown above, streaked paler. Tail brown with the outer feathers (seen from above and in flight) paler. No obvious white supercilium. Crown strongly streaked white or pale on dark brown or black. Pale face with darker streaks on the sides. Some individuals appeared to have pale chins in flight. In flight the birds appeared merely greyish below, though darker streaking was visible on those birds that flew within close range. These birds in particular gave the impression of having brown mantles and grey plumage below.

I considered, and subsequently rejected, two other species—Streaky Seed-eater *S. striolatus* and Streaky-headed Seed-eater *S. reichardi*—for the following reasons: the Streaky Seed-eater is a fatter, dumpier bird with a typically more upright appearance. It has a prominent whitish supercilium and overall greyish-brown, as opposed to brown, mantle. The birds seen near Debre Sina, however, were warm brown on the mantle which was streaked with a paler colour. They had no prominent supercilia and appeared to sit very 'flat' on the rocks. Streaky Seed-eaters were seen commonly elsewhere during the same weekend, typically feeding on or near the tops of shrubs ½–1 m in height. When disturbed, they flew to cover in shrubs nearby, but they were never seen to land on rocks or to be associated with rock faces. No Streaky Seed-eaters were seen in the ravine in question.

The Streaky-headed Seed-eater has a prominent white supercilium, a characteristic absent from the birds above Debre Sina and it also lacks the warm brown pale-streaked mantle of the Ankober Serin.

On the basis of the above description and field notes, together with reference to Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) and Ash (1979), I identified the birds as Ankober Serins.

The significance of this sighting is that it represents only the second known locality for this Ethiopian endemic species. The three other previous records are from a narrow strip along the escarpment edge between 3 and 8 km north of Ankober in an area of not more than 5 km² (Ash & Gullick 1979). The present record represents a range extension of some 15 km north. It is quite possible that the species exists in similar habitat throughout the area along the escarpment rim. However, the area north of Ankober is gradually being modified under pressure from increased grazing on the slopes below the escarpment rim, from increased cereal cultivation, and from a eucalyptus planting project on the slopes in the area where Ash (1979) originally found the species. I hope

to be able to explore the area more thoroughly to plot the species' distribution, assess its numbers and identify possible threats.

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Scopus 16: 105-107, April 1992

Received 2 September 1992

Some notes on Black Ducks *Anas sparsa*

Black Ducks *Anas sparsa* of the race *leucostigma* occur on forested mountain streams from southern Sudan (Nikolaus 1989), through the highlands of Ethiopia (Urban & Brown 1971) south to Tanzania (Britton 1980). They may occur in isolated forests as on Ol Doinyo Orok in southern Kenya (Bennun *et al.* 1986) as well as in larger forests, as on the Mau watershed (Betts 1962).

Although typically birds of forested fast-flowing highland rivers, Black Ducks often occur on small dams in the vicinity of streams and may wander to seasonal pools or rivers at lower elevations (Britton 1980). Lewis & Pomeroy (1989) give one striking example of this involving a pair seen by J.S.S. Beesley at about 600 m on the Tiva River in Tsavo National Park (East), while Stuart & Simkin (1981) recorded one at 500 m on the Dodwe River near Amani, East Usambaras, northeastern Tanzania. Black Ducks may also occur well away from forest on moorland streams and tarns and on rivers flowing through open grassland, as in the Aberdares and Kinangop plateau in central Kenya (pers. obs.), and even on polluted, often mainly treeless rivers as flow through the city of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia (Pain *et al.* 1975).

Brown *et al.* (1982) described the habits of Black Ducks as well known, but the following observations, mainly from the Aberdares and Gatamayu Forest in Kenya and from rivers in Addis Ababa, provide some additional information, and contrast with some other records.

Feeding behaviour and food

Brown *et al.* (1982) noted that Black Ducks feed by dabbling, head-dipping and upending, to remove weeds from river beds, and that the diet consists mainly of vegetable matter and chironomid larvae and pupae, with occasional small fish.

On well-vegetated moorland pools in the Aberdares and on a small dam near Kericho in western Kenya, dabbling and upending were the most frequently observed method, but on rivers, birds were also often seen diving. They did this in grossly polluted rivers



Atkins, John D. 1993. "A new location for the ankober serin *Serinus ankoberensis* near Debre Sina, Ethiopia." *Scopus* 16, 105–107.

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