

South Africa, recorded from the eastern Cape (Cape Recife) and Natal in 1984, and from Durban, Natal, on 27 August 1980. Post-breeding disposition as in nominate race.

Acknowledgement

For first detecting the differential criteria outlined above, credit must go to Dr J. M. Mendelsohn, Director of the State Museum, Windhoek, Namibia. As the findings were never committed to print, I have felt it desirable now to resolve the issue in formal taxonomic terms.

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Field observations on the Degodi Lark *Mirafra degodiensis*

by J. S. Ash & T. M. Gullick

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No field observations exist for the Degodi Lark *Mirafra degodiensis*, a species known from only 2 specimens in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (Paris), and described several years after their collection in

Ethiopia (Erard 1975). They were collected at 350 m a.s.l. (450 m according to our calculations) on 24 November 1971 at 11 km east of Bogol Many* on the road to Dolo Odo (at 4°34'N, 41°38'E), and considered by Erard to be a sibling species of Gillett's Lark *Mirafra gilletti*.

We spent part of 3 days, 26–28 February 1989, at the height of the dry season, in the Bogol Many area. In the immediate area of the type locality, after 7½ hours searching, we found 2 birds 200–300 m apart on the second day. Superficially they resembled *M. gilletti*, but differed in certain plumage characters and behaviour. We concluded that they were not *gilletti* and, in the absence of a specimen, it was reasonable to suppose that they were *M. degodiensis*. Elsewhere during the previous few days we had watched closely both nominate *gilletti* and Fawn-coloured Larks *M. africanoides*. On 28 February a bird was relocated in one of the previous day's sites—it flew into a mist net but bounced out again; 2 others were found together about 1 km away, but were not caught.

A summary of our observations follows:

Habitat. Thin low acacias 3–4 m high with scattered *Commiphora* and other bush species; very dry, with neither water in the streambeds nor any low vegetative ground cover anywhere. There were only a very few other passerines in the area including: *Spreo albicapilla*, *Eremomela flavicrissalis*, *Nilaus afer*, *Nectarinia hunteri*, *Pycnonotus barbatus*, *Dinemellia dinemelli*, *Cercotrichas galactotes*, *Dicrurus adsimilis*, *Emberiza poliopleura* and *Oenanthe oenanthe*.

General appearance and behaviour. A small, slim, dull-coloured lark (generally duller and appearing smaller than *M. gilletti*), almost entirely fearless of our approach, and very unobtrusive. Birds observed fed on the ground below the shade of the overhanging small acacia trees and the bushes, but ran very fast when disturbed or when moving across a patch of hot sunlit ground in the heat of the day. If hard-pressed they flew off just above ground level for a short distance. The tail did not appear to be inordinately short. One bird once alighted in a bush.

Calls. None heard.

Description. Upperparts dull brown with darker brown streaks and paler edges to feathers; wing coverts with a row of 6 dark central spots; remiges and rectrices darker brown with paler (buffish) edges, broader on the former. Top of the crown faintly rufous and streaked, supercilium pale, and a near-black eye-line; ear coverts slightly tinged rufous; nape tinged buff, streaked and paler than the crown. A hint of a pale half collar extended from the throat to below the ear coverts; rest of the underparts unmarked creamy, except the breast which had blurred short brown streaks extending onto the side of the neck. Bill fawn-coloured; legs pinkish-red.

Remarks. Behaviour may change with the stage of the breeding cycle or for other reasons, but *M. gilletti*, including birds we had seen on the previous few days, has an 'extroverted' manner, singing from bush tops,

*There are several spellings for this locality. It is Bogol Many in Collar & Stuart (1985), following the Times Atlas of the World, but Bogol Manyo in the U.S. Army Map Service map No. NB-37/6 (based on Italian and British Army maps). Since it was named after one of the engineers, probably not an Italian, 'the great Bogol', on Mussolini's Strada Imperiale, the original orthography was almost certainly Bogol Magno.

restlessly flying about above the bushes over a rather wide area. We were impressed by the 'introverted' manner of the Bogol Many birds, and by this feature, combined with their relatively uniform appearance, we concluded we had seen *degodiensis*.

Erard (1975) emphasizes that (in specimen skins) the relatively short tail is diagnostic in separating this species from *gilletti*, and does not give any other unequivocal characters which might be used in the field. He states: "Ressemble à *Mirafra gilletti* Sharpe mais est beaucoup plus petit. Sa coloration rappelle celle de la race nominale de cette espèce mais est plus claire et plus fauve. La striation des parties supérieures est plus étroite et moins dense. La poitrine est plus grivelée que striée, les taches étant chamois et obsolètes. Le caractère distinctif réside dans la remarquable brièveté relative des rectrices. Les rémiges secondaires sont également plus courtes."

We forwarded our description and notes, together with a series of 8 colour photographs of our bird taken by Mrs Katie Gullick, to Dr Christian Erard, who kindly compared them with his specimens in Paris. He made the following comments: "The habitat and behaviour of the larks you observed at Bogol Magno (*sic*) are in accordance with what I know of *degodiensis*. The fact is that your bird (photographs 2 and 8) looks longer-tailed than the 2 skins we have here. Otherwise the colouration of the upperparts and wings matches that of *degodiensis* apparently better than that of nominate *gilletti*: see photographs 4, 6, 7, and especially 3. The light hind-neck, giving a whitish collar, is noticeable and seems to me more pronounced than in nominate *gilletti*. From photographs 1, 2 and 8, the breast pattern seems to match that of *degodiensis* better than that of nominate *gilletti*: spots look dark tawny rather than brown."

His letter continued: "I admit that without tail measurement *degodiensis* is very difficult to identify. I remember that when I examined my specimens, I was somewhat hesitant to describe a new species but Charles Vaurie who compared the specimens with me convinced me (especially when comparing them with nominate *gilletti* from between Neghelle and Filtu, collected during the same trip), so [I] did the multivariate analysis.

So if photographs 3, 4 and 1 give a correct view of the colouration (colours in photographs 2, 6, 7 and 8 could be a little altered by light, unless you photographed several birds) and if the relatively short tail of *degodiensis* is not a good field character, then your bird is *degodiensis*. I think that you did indeed meet this species."

M. degodiensis is an Insufficiently Known Threatened Species in the Red Data Book (Collar & Stuart 1985). The 4 birds we saw were within a distance of 1 km and within a 200 m strip alongside the road. No others were seen up to 1 km beyond, but the species could easily be overlooked owing to its skulking habits. It may be that its only known range is within an area of some few km², and it is possibly significant that the type locality of *degodiensis* is surrounded by an area extending from it of up to 50–100 km from which there are no records of *gilletti*. Since the publication of Erard's (1975) distribution map for *M. gilletti*, its known range has increased appreciably, notably to the north and east in Somalia (Ash & Miskell 1983) and to the south into Kenya (Miskell & Ash 1985). It is of special interest that *M. degodiensis* does not appear now merely on the

southwestern edge of the range of *gilletti*, but is surrounded by that species.

A possible threat to the habitat in this area may result from the increased human population and a resultant increase in grazing pressure and demand for fuel wood, but there was no indication that this is likely to occur in the short term.

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Two birds new to the Brazilian avifauna

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In the last few years we have accumulated several observations on the avifauna of southern Brazil, based on the field work performed by the Fundação de Amparo à Tecnologia e ao Meio Ambiente (FATMA), Santa Catarina. Two of these records are noteworthy, and represent new additions to the Brazilian avifauna.

AUSTRALASIAN GANNET *Sula serrator*

Typical of the Australasian region (Nelson 1978) this gannet has occasionally occurred in southwestern Africa and off Marion and Crozet Islands (Harrison 1983). Thus, it was surprising to record an isolated specimen of this gannet at the Moleques do Sul Islands (c. 27°51'S, 48°26'W), 12 km off the coast of Santa Catarina, southern Brazil, 21–23 August 1986. So far as we know, this individual apparently remained around these islands until collected on 27 June 1987 at the site where it was first observed. According to the South American ornithological literature, this bird, an adult male now housed in the collection of Museu Nacional (MN 36.164), is the first record of the species for the Americas (Hellmayr & Conover 1948).



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