

and Luiz C. Marigo who kindly provided help in the field; Helmut Sick for his guidance and encouragement over the years; Nigel Collar who gave me the incentive to write this paper; John Roe for help with the English version of the text; Zelia Wolker and Leandro Gomes for assistance with the computer; and, of course, Cacilda and Fernando Carvalho for their well-informed hunch.

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Batis minima (Verreaux) new for Cameroon

by C. Erard & P. R. Colston

Received 7 March 1988

In the course of studies conducted by C.E. on the systematics, ecology and behaviour of Afrotropical forest flycatchers, especially Platysteirinae, several *Batis* spp. were examined in the collections of the British Museum (Natural History), Tring. It was found that included amongst *Batis poensis* Alexander (*sensu lato*) (including *occultus*) were 4 specimens of *Batis minima* (Verreaux), collected by G. L. Bates, from Bitye, River Ja, Cameroon (3°10'N, 12°20'E): 1 ♂, 5 March 1907, 1 ♂ and 1 ♀, 1 May 1914,

and 1 ♂, 23 May 1924. These details do not seem to have been published before.

The female, which is an adult, had been annotated as 'young' on its label, most probably in reference to its grey breast-band. This character is typical of both females and young of *Batis minima* (see Erard 1975), while females and immatures of *B. poensis* and *B. occultus* Lawson 1984, have a chestnut pectoral band.

A comparison of the notes and drawings made by C.E. on specimens of *Batis* which he examined in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History, (4 ♂♂, 3 ♀♀ from Fernando Po), and of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (1 ♂, 1 ♀ from Ivory Coast, and 1 ♂ from Gabon) with material held at Tring (1 ♂, 1 ♀ from Fernando Po), suggests that the differences between *B. poensis* and *B. occultus*, especially in size, and in head, wing and breast patterns, might be not as well marked as described by Lawson (1984). The only character which seems to be consistent is the much blacker upper mantle on *poensis* from Fernando Po. We would be inclined to consider *occultus* as a subspecies of *poensis*, but further study is obviously required, particularly with regard to vocalizations, before a firm conclusion can be reached.

Males of *B. minima* can best be distinguished from males of *B. poensis* by their much blacker mantle and head, their very indistinct white supraloral and superciliary lines, and their somewhat smaller size. It seems to be almost a rule in *Batis* that females belonging to different species are more distinct than males. In the present case, females, besides showing the same differences as males, are best identified by their grey (not chestnut) breast-band as noted above (for more detailed descriptions see Erard 1987).

This is apparently the first record of *B. minima* from Cameroon (see Louette 1981). When Serle & Morel (1977) state that *minima* occurs in Cameroon, they are following White (1963) in considering *poensis* and *minima* (+ *ituriensis*) as conspecific. In Cameroon, *Batis poensis* (*occultus*) is known from Ebolowa (Chappuis in Louette 1981), but may occur elsewhere, possibly, indeed, at Bitye, though specimens are lacking. It is also known in north Gabon from various places in Woleu N'Tem (c. 1°30'N, 11°30'E) (Chappuis & Erard, unpubl.) and in northeast Cameroon (Brosset & Erard 1977, 1986).

We may recall here that *B. minima* is an uncommon bird of old second growth, not a primary forest species, and that *B. poensis* inhabits man-made habitats. In southern Cameroon, as well as in Gabon, it favours the vicinity of villages, living in high tree-tops, where it is not at all rare; but it can be difficult to detect unless one knows its calls (for ecological details see Erard 1987).

Acknowledgements

The work of C. Erard in various US museums (New York, Chicago, Washington) was possible thanks to a grant from the Chapman Fund of the American Museum of Natural History.

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Rediscovery of *Malimbus ibadanensis* Elgood, 1958

by J. H. Elgood

Received 8 March 1988

It is good to report that J. S. Ash, with P. Hall and 2 others had an undoubted sighting in secondary forest in November 1987 of a small family party of *Malimbus ibadanensis*, the first record for c.10 years. The species is entered in the Africa Red Data Book as endangered.

Ash has drawn my attention to difficulties that he thinks may have contributed to the failure of recent attempts to find this species at or near Ibadan, Nigeria. He points out the serious inadequacy of the original illustration of the ♀ (Elgood 1958), showing a narrow red throat bridle instead of a fairly broad bib, and Ash thinks he may have mistaken ♀ *ibadanensis* for ♂ *M. scutatus* by looking for the erroneously red bridle. If the differentiating red vent feathering of ♂ *M. scutatus* is concealed, being similar in size and in the amount and arrangement of red on the head and throat, confusion with ♀ *ibadanensis* may well occur. Another possible confusion arises because the ♂ *ibadanensis* is very similar to that of allopatric *cassini*, though the ♀ *cassini* is entirely black and I have no doubt that the late Sir Hugo Marshall (*in* Bannerman 1949) mistook *ibadanensis* for *cassini* when he claimed that he saw *cassini* at Ibadan. Against these pitfalls, in my experience *ibadanensis* is usually encountered in pairs or family parties and the very conspicuous ♂, with red apron, immediately draws one's attention.

However, Ash has a valid point when he states he was misled by the 1958 illustration of ♀ *ibadanensis* and a more accurate representation appears here in Fig. 1b. That the original illustration was misleading had been realized when the proof reached me in Ibadan too late for alteration, but the text was amended to state that "other females may prove to have a rather wider band of red". Later (Elgood 1975) I was able to confirm that



Érard, Christian and Colston, Peter. 1988. "Batis minima (Verreaux) new for Cameroon." *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club* 108, 182–184.

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