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Address: C. Erard, Zoologie (Mammifères et Oiseaux), Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, 55 rue de Buffon, 75005 Paris, France. P. R. Colston, Sub-dept of Ornithology, British Museum (Natural History), Tring, Herts HP23 6AP.

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Rediscovery of *Malimbus ibadanensis* Elgood, 1958

by J. H. Elgood

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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

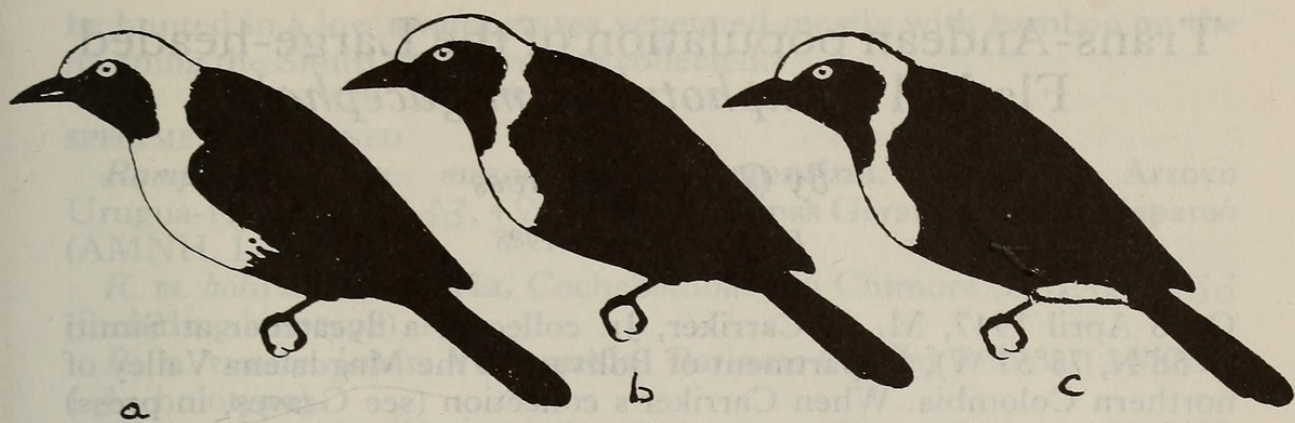


Figure 1. Scarlet (unshaded) and Black plumage patterns in (a) ♂ *Malimbus ibadanensis*, (b) ♀ *M. ibadanensis*, (c) ♂ *M. scutatus*. (Adapted from *Ibis* 100: 621, with acknowledgements to the British Ornithologists' Union.)

"all subsequently collected females" had "possessed a broad red bib". Field's (1979) review of the genus *Malimbus*, illustrated with drawings made by C. H. Fry from British Museum (Nat. Hist.) skins, seemed to me adequate for field workers specifically looking for *M. ibadanensis*; but this view now seems not to have been entirely justified.

Ash tells me that he spent 12 days searching the area around Ibadan, circumscribed by the various localities of known previous occurrence, including 8 days at Ibadan, both on the Campus of the University (2 days) and on the grounds of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture – IITA – (6 days). It was at the latter (which did not exist in my time), c.5 miles from the University, where I collected the type specimens, that this new encounter occurred. It would seem that Ibadan may still be the centre of distribution of this apparently very local species; however, the decrease in numbers, if real, cannot be attributed to destruction of primary rain forest, since patches of secondary forest, even gardens, have been the habitat for both former and recent encounters.

Although it is impossible with conviction to draw any conclusion as to reduction in population numbers, it is of significance that in the 12 months Oct 1953 to Sep 1954, before it had been established that a new species was involved, I encountered *M. ibadanensis* 13 times in the course of general bird fieldwork, probably averaging c.10 hours per week (1 encounter per 40 hours); whereas Ash, in Nov 1987, had only one encounter in 8 days of intensive search (perhaps c.1 encounter per 80 hours).

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Address. J. H. Elgood, 26 Walkford Way, Highcliffe, Dorset BH23 5LR, UK.

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