

sort are rare in this large subfamily, occurring elsewhere (as elongated broad crown feathers rather than as partially concealed patches of silky feathers) only in *Lophospingus* (two species), *Charitospiza* (monotypic), and *Emberiza* (*E. variabilis*), as well as in the doubtfully emberizine genera *Paroaria* and *Melophus*.

On the other hand, within the Thraupinae red is a fairly common colour and crests similar to that of *Rhodospingus* are found in *Habia*, *Iridosornis*, *Tachyphonus*, and *Trichothraupis*. The genus *Tachyphonus*, a group of eight species in which the males are mainly black, though lacking forms with large areas of red, has five species with crown patches very similar to that in *Rhodospingus*. In addition, white axillaries as well as white bases to the remiges are found in seven of the eight species. The enumeration of similarities between the genera cannot be pushed much further. All species of *Tachyphonus* have tails which are proportionally longer than that of *Rhodospingus* and white or red lesser wing coverts and coloured rumps also occur several times, all of which lessen the similarity between the genera. In monotypic *Trichothraupis*, a taxon which could easily be considered congeneric with *Tachyphonus*, both sexes are brown and are not strikingly dimorphic, but the crown patch, white-based remiges, and white under-wing coverts are all found and, also as in *Rhodospingus*, the lesser wing coverts do not contrast with the rest of the wing. I am not prepared to claim a close relationship between *Rhodospingus* and *Tachyphonus* or *Trichothraupis*, although it is easy to hypothesize that *Rhodospingus cruentus* could have evolved from a population of either *Tachyphonus* or *Trichothraupis*, both of which are wet region genera, that became isolated to the west of the Andes. I do, however, wish to stress that *Rhodospingus* seems to fit more with the ill-defined group we treat as the Thraupinae than with the equally ill-defined subfamily Emberizinae.

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## Notes from coastal Eritrea on selected species

by Jeffery Boswall

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The following records were obtained during a visit to Eritrea, Ethiopia, from 22nd May to 15th June 1970. During this period, I was either in Massawa or among the islands of the Dahlak Archipelago.

Reef Heron *Egretta schistacea*

About 15 to 20 nests in the mangrove trees of Sheikh Said island on 30th May. One nest contained two blue eggs, others well-grown young.

European Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

On 30th May 1970 Dr. Sigrun Klug and I discovered a colony of these birds nesting in the mangrove trees of Sheikh Said or Green Island, just off Massawa. About 20 pairs were nesting. One tree that I climbed had three nests, all with young. The first nest contained three young, one quarter-size, and two half-size; the second nest three young, one quarter-size, one-third size and one half-size; and the third nest two young, one quarter-size and one third-size. Adult spoonbills were seen feeding in the sea. The colony was loosely mixed with nests of the Reef Heron, see above.

It would appear from Smith (1957) that this bird has only been proved to breed in Eritrea on three previous occasions, though it is described as resident in island mangrove swamps.

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*

From 2nd to 8th June I was resident on a tiny island called Kundabilu off Entedebir, one of the Dahlak Islands. One or two Sooty Falcons were present each day. When two were present, the birds would dive at each other and engage in swift pursuits, as if they were courting. This would seem to be a little early since the species lays eggs locally in July or August (Clapham 1964). (When he visited this very island on 5th September 1962, Clapham found three pairs present). But, in the closely related species, Eleonora's Falcon, *Falco eleonora*, which also nests late, from mid-July to October, birds return to their nesting grounds as early as April. In any case, as Moreau (1969) concluded from Ennion's January observations in Oman, "not all Sooty Falcons migrate...". This is further supported by a March record from the Dahlaks of Salvadori (1954) which Moreau overlooked, and further March records of Urban & Boswall (1969).

It may be worth drawing attention to some apparent small transcription errors in Clapham's paper. Von Heuglin (1859: 338) says "on the 30th of August I discovered four breeding pairs on a rock near the island of Dahlak el Kebir (15° N.L.) and found three nests, which were placed very artlessly on the rocky precipice. One contained three, the two others each two eggs". Clapham says these nests were found on Sarad, one of many islands that could be described as "near the island of Dahlak el Kebir"; he describes two nests as "30ft. up below rock over sea", and one as "cleft in middle of a cliff" and describes the contents as "1e/2y, 2y, and 1e/1y". Also, it seems much more likely that the year was 1858, not 1857. Clapham may have consulted other writings of von Heuglin but he quotes only one.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

On 30th and 31st May and 1st June I was able to make observations on the kites at Sheikh Said island off Massawa where this species is known to roost (Clapham 1964; Urban & Boswall 1969). The birds appeared to be present and active over the area of the highest mangroves throughout the day and I felt sure that when I came to examine that area in detail I would find them nesting. But no—they were merely using the tallest tree and one or two neighbouring ones for resting *during* the day. As one approached the highest tree, 35 or 40 kites would "burst" out of it. Perhaps, if there is no problem with the food supply locally, these birds "roost" by day to avoid the heat. At high tide, of course, the mangroves stand in water and at low tide there

would be moisture in the mud that would evaporate and make the air immediately above cooler. I also noticed that, as the tide ebbed, some of the kites would fly down and perch on the wet areas recently uncovered. I watched carefully, but none of them foraged for food. They tended to stand quite still. It is interesting to speculate on whether coastal kites in very hot areas may keep cool by selecting these microclimates whereas those inland probably employ soaring for this purpose, as suggested by Harry Madsen, quoted by Schmidt-Nielsen (1964: 205). K. D. Smith has pointed out to me that nesting was not to be expected as the species breeds in the winter.

#### White-eyed Gull *Larus leucophthalmus*

About 80 birds were already in occupation of Kundabilu islet when we arrived on 2nd June. Two scrapes, each with one egg on 5th, had two on 6th. Doubtless others also were starting to lay among the impenetrable thickets of *Euphorbia*.

#### Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Smith (1957) does not include this species, and Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) avoid treating the free-living but domestic variety of this species. Nevertheless, it seems worth recording that in Massawa and Asmara the species is very well-established. The town pigeon of Addis Ababa is the endemic White-collared Dove *Columba albitorques* as discussed by Pitwell & Goodwin (1964) but even here the domestic *Columba livia* were a little commoner than these last two authors suggest. In particular, a small population of white ones seems to be established at the large church near the Menelik statue.

#### *Acrocephalus* sp.

Three or four Acrocephaline warblers were heard in song at the same place on three consecutive days, 30th May to 1st June, on Sheikh Said island. They could have been Clamorous Reed Warblers *A. stentoreus* (see Smith 1961).

#### Lesser Brown-necked Raven *Corvus corax edithae*

On several days in early June 1970 I saw up to 50 birds of this species together in the vicinity of the house of Signora Gabriella Solaro, at Massawa. The house is on the waterfront and belongs to the salt factory. The birds were superficially a little like Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* but were more 'rakish'. I had particularly close views on 12th June when I was mobbed by nine or ten adults as I climbed to a nest of the species in a tree in Signora Gabriella's garden. The nest contained two pulli a little more than half the size of the adults.

In mid-March 1969 Emil K. Urban and I had glimpsed a bird in another part of Massawa that I felt sure was an Indian House Crow *Corvus splendens*, hence Urban & Brown's (1971) reference to the possible occurrence of the Indian House Crow in Massawa. This reference must be ignored as the bird must have been *C. corax edithae*, which in January 1970 E. D. H. Johnson (pers. comm. 1971) positively identified in Massawa. Smith (1957) records this species no further north in Eritrea than Thio.

As to when this species might have arrived in Massawa, it is worth recording that Signora Solaro first noticed the bird in 1968, and is sure that it was not present—at least in the vicinity of her house—prior to then. She regards the birds as a noisy nuisance early in the morning and would certainly have remembered them! Also, she feels sure that, had they been common elsewhere in the vicinity, as they now are, she would have noticed them. It does thus seem likely that the bird is a recent arrival.

## Summary

Notes on eight species on the mainland coast or on the islands of Eritrea, including a first probable observation and certain nesting of the Lesser Brown-necked Raven *Corvus corax edithae* as far north as Massawa in Eritrea.

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## *Apalis flavida caniceps* (Cassin) in Ethiopia

by C. Erard

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The "Black-breasted Apalis" *Apalis flavida* Strickland and the "Green-tailed Apalis" *A. caniceps* (Cassin) (see Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1955: 407-409) are currently considered conspecific (White 1962: 702; Hall & Moreau 1970: 181), although Grant & Mackworth-Praed (1941) have shown that it is possible to place the various forms in two groups: (A) *flavida*, characterised by a relatively long tail (42-62 mm), the rectrices (excepting the central pair) with broad yellow or whitish ends; (B) *caniceps*, characterised by a relatively short tail (31-55 mm), the rectrices (excepting the central pair) merely with yellow or whitish tips.

Up to the present, only the group (A) (*flavida*) has been known from Ethiopia. Neumann (1905: 78) described the race *malensis* on a specimen obtained in January near the River Schambala in the district of Male (ca. 5°30'N, 36°30'E.), south of Gemu-Gofa between the low valleys of the Omo and Sagan (see map B in Reichenow 1902). Slightly to the south of the type locality, in the area immediately to the north of Lakes Rudolf and Stefanie (altitude 650-900 m), Zaphiro collected five specimens in August for Macmillan (Ogilvie-Grant 1913: 610). Further north, south of Lake Shamo, the Childs Frick Expedition obtained one specimen on 15th April 1912 near Gardulla, at 5°38'N, 37°28'E. (Friedmann 1937: 177). Further west, on the opposite side of the Omo valley in the extreme south of Kaffa, a male was collected on 1st April 1940 at Uasha-Uaha, 5°50'N, 35°33'E. (Toschi 1959: 384). During his stay in Sidamo, Benson (1946: 195) collected nine specimens in July, August, October and November near Yavello, 4°57'N, 38°08'E, and two others in June and October near Arero, 4°48'N, 38°50'E (in both localities, altitude 1,300-1,500 m). All of these specimens have been attached to the race *malensis*, which extends into the extreme south-east of the Sudan



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