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**On the breeding of Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* (Pallas)
in Africa and Madagascar**

by C. W. BENSON and CHARLES R. S. PITMAN

Received 6th May, 1966

Our attention has been drawn to a collection of eggs in the British Museum by C. Mason in southern Nyasaland (now Malawi) in 1916-17. An item of special interest is a C/3 fresh collected on Lake Chilwa on 11th June, 1917, from a "small nest of grass on water 3 feet deep". There is no reasonable doubt but that this clutch is referable to *Porzana pusilla*. In general colour and pattern the eggs closely resemble others of this species in the British Museum, consisting of over 20 European-taken clutches, an oviduct egg from Addis Ababa, Abyssinia (Guichard, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.*, 68, 1948: 104), and various other eggs from Madagascar.

The Lake Chilwa eggs are pale olive, slightly glossed, thickly and finely marked all over light brown, size 29.0 x 20.2, 29.9 x 21.3, 27.6 x 21.5 mm. The Abyssinian egg is buff, smooth, dull surfaced, somewhat pointed, finely marked all over dull brown on underlying lilac, more thickly at larger end, 29.3 x 20.0 mm. The Madagascar eggs are as follows:—

Six collected by the Rev. W. Dean Cowan, in the Betsileo District, south-eastern Madagascar, apparently from four different clutches. One of two single eggs is pale buff, the others buff, all six marked all over dull or light brown on underlying lilac. The two singles are too disintegrated to be measurable, but the other two pairs measure respectively 27.0 x 22.7, 27.2 x 21.5; 29.8 x 21.3, 29.0 x 20.8 mm.

Six others from Betsileo, no collector's name, though presumably also collected by Cowan, from Captain G. E. Shelley and the Jaurach/Crowley Bequest (B. M. registered numbers 1901. 11. 20. 422–427), as follows:— 422, buff, slightly glossed, marked all over light brown on underlying lilac, 28.3 x 20.3 mm.; 424/5, pale buffy-olive, smooth, dull surfaced, finely marked all over pale brown on underlying dull lilac, 29.5 x 20.6, 30.0 x 20.3 mm.; 423, 426/7, possibly all from one clutch, brownish-buff, smooth, dull surfaced, thickly and finely marked all over dull brown on underlying dull lilac, 30.7 x 21.0, 29.7 x 20.5, 27.2 x 20.5 mm.

One collected by the Rev. James Wills, in eastern Madagascar, from a C/4, colour and markings as in Abyssinian egg, heavily incubated and too disintegrated to be measurable.

Unfortunately not one of the Madagascar eggs is dated, nor do the reports on Cowan's and Wills's activities referred to by Rand (1936: 154–155) throw any light on this. Milne-Edwards and Grandidier (15, 1881: pl. 306), under the name *Ortygometra pygmaea* Naumann, figure an egg which agrees closely in colour with the eggs examined by us, though neither do they (12, 1879–85: 579) give any date (they give a measurement, however, of 30 x 21 mm.). But presumably, as seems to be the case for *P. pusilla* in Africa, breeding is mainly during the rains, in Madagascar from November to April (Rand, 1936: 205). In south-central Africa most Rallidae are rains breeders (Benson, *Proc. 13th Internat. Orn. Congr.*, 1963: 625, and Benson *et al.*, 1964). Considering the incidence of the rains in the Ethiopian region as a whole, as outlined by Moreau (*Ibis*, 1950: 226), the Abyssinian record, which is for July, falls within that season, as does another from Malawi and more dubious ones from Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) (Benson, 1964). Gurney (*Andersson's Bds. Damaraland*, 1872), under the name *O. pygmaea*, describes eggs, unfortunately without giving a date, but Roberts (*Ann. Trans. Mus.*, 11(7), 1926: 229) describes a clutch from Potchefstroom, Transvaal, taken in December, Benson *et al.* (1964) give a record of egg-laying in Rhodesia in March, Clancey (*Bds. Natal and Zululand*, 1964) states that breeding is from about November, and Smithers (*Check list Bds. Bechuanaland*, 1964) records a specimen in breeding condition at Lake Ngami in January. The Lake Chilwa record is after the normal conclusion of the rains, but conditions could still have been relatively moist in early June, with floodwaters not yet receded.

The following unpublished data, on the files of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute, Cape Town, have been provided by Professor J. M. Winterbottom:— Somerset West (near Cape Town), C/5, mid-September, 1955, and C/4, 10th November, 1963; Ladybrand, Orange Free State, two C/2, 29th January, 1934. The Somerset West records are from the winter rains area peculiar to the south-western Cape Province, the first falling within the rains, the second in the early dry season, so perhaps analogous to that from Lake Chilwa, southern Malawi. The Ladybrand records fall within the rains. Winterbottom (*Proc. 13th Internat. Orn. Congr.*, 1963: 643) records a peak in the breeding of water birds generally in the south-western Cape in the latter part of the rains, in September, while by November there is a marked fall-off.

Benson (1964) shows a tendency towards a longer bill in Madagascar specimens of *P. p. intermedia* (Hermann) (of which he regards *P. p. obscura* Neumann as a synonym) than in African. Four from that island in the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, not included in his measurements, all have culmen from base 19.0 mm., wing in one 84 mm., the other three not measurable.

References:

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The southern forms of *Mirafr africanaoides* Smith

by C. M. N. WHITE

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In 1961 in Revised Check List of African Broadbills, Pittas, Larks, etc., at pages 21-24, I dealt with the forms of *Mirafr africanaoides* Smith. In 1965 in *L'Oiseau*, 35, No. Spécial: 163-174 Professor Winterbottom has reviewed the southern subspecies of the species, and in 1966 Mr. P. A. Clancey in *Arnoldia*, 2, no. 20, 1-8 has provided yet another review of the southern subspecies. These two most recent reviews are divergent in a number of respects although both are evidently based upon much the same material in South African and Rhodesian museums. Of the two Clancey's conclusions are much nearer to my own. It is obviously most unsatisfactory to have several diverse views about the treatment of geographical variation in this species and the present note seeks to show that Clancey's and my own views can be reconciled. The points involved are as follows:—

i. The application of the name *africanaoides* Smith. In *Bull. B.O.C.* 1960, 80: 10-11 I gave reasons for accepting Litakun, near Kuruman as the restricted type locality. Clancey (*op. cit.* 102-103) considered that Macdonald's later restriction to Colesburg should be accepted as more in keeping with the facts. It had been generally considered that birds from Colesburg were darker and more heavily streaked than those from Kuruman but Winterbottom now reports that some birds from Kuruman are of the dark type, and others of the lighter type. This may be due to the unstable population or may be due to nomadism. At any rate it shows that even if Kuruman were accepted the name *africanaoides* might be based on light or dark birds. In view of this and the fact that most recent writers have used *africanaoides* for the darker birds, I propose that *africanaoides* should be restricted to the dark birds. Since Kuruman is an unsatisfactory restriction of type locality in view of the instability of the population there, I would now avoid uncertainty by accepting Colesburg as the type locality. Thus *africanaoides* replaces *austin-robertsi* White in my Check List. I do not consider the slight size difference mentioned by



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