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Taxonomic notes on some Asian babblers (Timaliidae)

N. J. COLLAR

A reconsideration of the taxonomy of Asian babblers (Timaliidae) (Collar 2006) indicated that much work remains to be done. Here I briefly pursue various issues, for which I examined specimens of birds in the American Museum of Natural History, New York (AMNH), Natural History Museum, Tring, UK (BMNH), Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (MNHN), Philippine National Museum, Manila (PNM), National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC (USNM), and Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, Caramillo, California (WFVZ), following a system for assessing species limits outlined in Collar (2006), modified and advanced by Tobias *et al.* (2010). Differences between taxa in morphological characters are graded such that an exceptional one scores 4, major 3, medium 2, minor 1, and scores are allowed for a maximum of three morphological characters (others are mentioned, with the letters 'u' for 'unscored', but with the putative score I judge appropriate in square brackets), two vocal characters, two biometric characters (assessed for effect size using Cohen's *d* where >0.2 triggers minor, >2 medium, >5 major and >10 exceptional) and one behavioural or ecological character. A total score reaching or exceeding the threshold of 7 qualifies the taxon for species status (further details in Tobias *et al.* 2010). An online calculator (<http://www.uccs.edu/~faculty/lbecker/>) was used to determine Cohen's *d* effect sizes. Measurements (bill tip to skull, wing curved) were taken in millimetres, and differences between taxa were compared using two-tailed t-tests.

***Rhinocichla (mitrata) treacheri* as a species**

Judgement on the validity of this split came too late for inclusion in Collar (2006), and it was made without supporting justification in Collar & Robson (2007).

The form *treacheri* (Borneo) differs from nominate *mitrata* (Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra) in its orbital ring being yellow and incomplete, not white and complete (3), ear-covert and nape chestnut, not grey (2), upper submoustachial and interramal area chestnut, not black, and greater extent of chestnut on chin (2), underparts ochreish and with shaft-streaks (u [1]), narial feathering, lores and superciliary area paler chestnut (u [1]), and forecrown-

blaze greyer (u [1]), total 7. Mensural differences are very slight (10 of each taxa examined). Photographs in Pilgrim *et al.* (2009: 30) show the most salient of these characters well.

***Liocichla (phoenicea) ripponi* as a species**

Again, judgement of the specific status of *L. ripponi* came too late for presentation in Collar (2006), and the split in Collar & Robson (2007) was without justification.

The form *riponi* (with *wellsi*) differs from nominate *phoenicea* (with *bakeri*) in having the crimson of the face and black lateral crown-stripe replaced by much brighter scarlet extending clearly over the eye, onto the lores and over the malar area onto the chin (3), crown grey (2), upperparts greyer (u [1]), underparts markedly paler and buffy-grey (2), undertail buffy-grey with an orange wash (where *phoenicea* is bronzy-red) (u [1]), and a longer tail (*phoenicea/bakeri* mean 100.3 ± 3.31 , $n = 10$ *phoenicea*, 10 *bakeri*; *riponi/wellsi* 107.3 ± 3.58 , $n = 10$ *riponi*, 11 *wellsi*; effect size = 2.05) (2), total score 9. (While all *phoenicea* material was unsexed and most *wellsi*, which is rare in collections, were male, the sample for *bakeri* and *riponi* consisted of five males and five females, and while females averaged smaller than males the differences were too slight to suggest that sexual bias in the other taxa could have affected mensural comparisons.)

Delacour (1933: 88) reported that specimens in BMNH indicate that the forms *riponi* and *bakeri* intergrade in the 'Kauri-Kachin tract' in Upper Burma. I have checked the Myanmar material held in BMNH and can find only a single skin, 1905.8.16.156 (taken by G. Rippon in the said tract; undated), which might be interpreted as an intergrade, owing to its rather poorly differentiated crown and underparts: indeed its facial and undertail colours and patterns are as in *riponi* (whether the red meets on the throat cannot be judged as this area is abraded to the skin) while its measurements are those of *bakeri* (tail 99 mm). It is difficult to know what to make of this specimen, which is in very poor condition, but a zone of hybridisation or intergradation is allowed for by Tobias *et al.* (2010); species status for *riponi* is not invalidated.

Jabouilleia naungmungensis as a subspecies

By comparison with Short-tailed Scimitar Babbler *J. danjoui*, 'Naung Mung Scimitar Babbler' was found to possess a 'longer bill, tarsus, hallux, and hallux nail...; single, thick, black malar stripe, rather than two thin dark stripes separated by a white stripe; absence of rufous breast band; brown rather than rusty sides and flanks'; and was consequently accorded species status (Rappole *et al.* 2005). However, the measurements of *J. naungmungensis* in Table 2 of Rappole *et al.* (2005) were at variance with those given in the text for the holotype (holotype: bill '33.5', tarsus '30', wing '78', tail '52'; range of measurements of *naungmungensis* material in Table 2: bill '38.2–39.2', tarsus '33.3–44.0', wing '70.5–77.7', tail '40.2–47.6'), the data on hallux and hallux nail were nowhere presented, and the 'malar stripe', as illustrated on the cover of the issue of *Auk* containing the description, proved to be a thick black moustachial line above a white submoustachial stripe and a very narrow black malar line, a configuration found in *J. danjoui parvirostris* (Collar & Pilgrim 2007). Because of these confounding factors, and given the considerable similarity of the taxa, Collar & Robson (2007) preferred to place *naungmungensis* as a subspecies of *J. danjoui* (using the genus *Rimator*).

I have examined and measured two specimens (including the holotype; both female) of *J. naungmungensis* available in USNM and compared them directly with three specimens of nominate *danjoui* in the same museum. The new form is certainly darker and colder in upperpart and flank coloration than nominate *danjoui*. The blackish moustachial and malar lines, separated by a narrow whitish submoustachial, are stronger and bolder than in *danjoui*, where they are mid-brown and pale buff respectively, although the photograph of a live specimen of *naungmungensis* in Martens & Bahr (2007), reproduced in Collar & Pilgrim (2007), suggests that the markings are not as heavy as depicted on the cover of *Auk* (also reproduced in Collar & Pilgrim 2007) or in the illustration in Collar & Robson (2007). The bill and legs appear more blackish and the bill is somewhat more decurved. However, the measurements given in Table 2 of the type description are indeed seriously awry (so much so that I sought independent confirmation of my own measurements). Rappole *et al.* (2005) wrote: 'The main differences between the two... are in body shape... *naungmungensis* has a longer, more decurved bill..., a longer wing, a shorter tail [and] a longer tarsus...' In reality, however, *naungmungensis* is mensurally very close to *danjoui*: Table 1 shows my sample of two specimens nesting inside the ranges of 11 *danjoui* for bill, tarsus and wing, and with an overlap in tail length.

There is no doubt that *naungmungensis* is darker than other taxa in *danjoui* (score 1, which includes bare-part differences), with stronger-marked moustachial and indeed malar lines (1), and a faint ochreish breast-band (but this is a soft-edged wash, variable in intensity, in *danjoui*, not a sharply defined, obviously consistent feature) (2, which is perhaps generous). However, a score of 4 is insufficient to achieve species status for *naungmungensis*. Newly published vocal evidence and some revised mensural data on *naungmungensis* do not affect this assessment: Rappole *et al.* (2008) acknowledged that a published description of *J. danjoui* 'sounds quite similar to what we heard from *J. naungmungensis*', and their measurements for the first reported male *naungmungensis* (bill 32, tarsus 32, wing 74, tail 55) show it to be largely consistent with the range I found for *J. d. danjoui* (Table 1).

Table 1. Means and range (in parentheses) in mm of *Jabouilleia naungmungensis* (2 specimens in USNM; both female) and 11 *J. danjoui danjoui* (3 in USNM, 2 from Museum of Comparative Zoology on loan to AMNH, 4 in BMNH and 2 in MNHN; six males, five females).

	Bill	Tarsus	Wing	Tail
<i>J. naungmungensis</i> (n=2)	40 (40, 40)	31 (31, 31)	70.5 (70, 71)	57 (55, 59)
<i>J. danjoui danjoui</i> (n=11)	36.3 (30–41)	30.1 (29–32)	73.3 (67–80)	61.8 (57–67)

A new subspecies of *Siva cyanouroptera*

All seven specimens in BMNH and MNHN assigned to *Siva cyanouroptera orientalis* from the Bolaven (Bolovens) Plateau in Laos (BMNH 1932.5.14.131, 159, 161; MNHN 1933.131, 132, 195, 196) are morphologically distinguishable from specimens of *orientalis* from Annam in adjacent Vietnam.

Siva cyanouroptera wirthi subsp. nov.

Diagnosis.—Very like *S. c. orientalis* but with an ochre-tinged buff wash to the back, rump and uppertail-coverts (thus rather warmer than the cold pale mouse-brown of *orientalis*), and mensurally somewhat smaller (Table 2).

Table 2. Measurements (mean \pm standard error in mm) of *Siva cyanouroptera wirthi* and *S. c. orientalis*. Sample of *wirthi* involved four males, one female and two unsexed; of *orientalis* three males, five females and two unsexed.

Taxon	Bill	Tarsus	Wing	Tail
<i>wirthi</i> (n=7)	14.9 \pm 0.34	22.3 \pm 0.29	62.4 \pm 0.65	72.6 \pm 1.48
<i>orientalis</i> (n=10)	16.3 \pm 0.30	23.9 \pm 0.38	64.6 \pm 0.73	76.4 \pm 0.79
<i>t</i>	3.18	3.40	2.22	2.28
<i>P</i>	0.0069	0.0039	0.043	0.047

Type specimen.—BMNH 1932.5.14.159, male, from 'Thateng', Bolaven Plateau, Laos; taken 11 December 1931 by J. Delacour.

Remarks.—Delacour (1932) himself considered that the Bolaven Plateau birds were slightly different from those (*orientalis*) of the Langbian Plateau in Vietnam, in having (my translation) 'their plumage perhaps even more washed-out, the fringes of the remiges slightly less bluish and the crown with less violaceous reflections'. These features are difficult to be confident of; but the ochreish wash, which Delacour missed, is consistent in all specimens I have examined. Localities on the Bolaven Plateau at which these specimens were taken are 'Thateng', 'Paksong', 'Phou Kong-Ntoul' and 'Pakhout'.

Etymology.—Roland Wirth, director of the Zoologische Gesellschaft für Arten- und Populationsschutz, has dedicated his life to the conservation of neglected species, subspecies and populations of higher vertebrates, especially in Indochina. Without his unswerving commitment, good-natured advocacy and encyclopedic knowledge, deployed now over three decades, many taxa would very probably now be extinct, and I salute him in the hope that *S. c. wirthi* is never added to his list of target animals.

Lore colour in *Ophrydornis albogularis*

From his work in Sabah, Borneo, Sheldon (1987) reported that in the field the White-throated or Grey-breasted Babbler *O. [Malacopteron] albogularis* 'has a bright white superciliary line and yellow lores that render its facial appearance reminiscent of some of the fantails *Rhipidura*', but that in skins 'this eyeline is faded and unremarkable'. Dutton *et al.* (1991) responded that 'Barito Ulu and Tanjung Puting birds had white, not yellow, lores'. This apparent difference in the lore colour of northern vs central and southern Bornean birds was mentioned in Collar & Robson (2007), and the possibility that it might be subspecific in nature needed to be checked.

It is not. Specimens from various parts of the range of the species, viewed in BMNH and WFVZ (Sheldon's birds), are inconsistent on this feature. Wells (2007), in a more accurate account of the phenomenon than any other, reached the same conclusion: 'Supercilium from bill-base... white, and broadest over the lores where upstanding feathers are variably tinged tawny orange (in some individuals not at all)'. The specimen evidence indicates that the difference is not sexual, but perhaps there will prove to be an age or seasonal factor.

A reassignment of *Trochalopteron (erythrocephalus) woodi*

In revising the highly variable *Garrulax [Trochalopteron] erythrocephalus* complex, Collar (2006) allocated the form *woodi*, with some uncertainty, to the newly restricted species *G. [T.] erythrocephalus*, but in Collar & Robson (2007) *woodi* was reassigned, without explanation, to *G. [T.] chrysopterus*. This was because, on reconsidering the specimen evidence, geographical relationships and a newly described taxon, *ailaoshanensis* from central Yunnan, it was felt that *woodi* more appropriately fits with the taxa in *chrysopterus* (absence of black on throat, plain silvery ear-covert pattern, dirty olive shade to scapulars and lower back). In reality, however, the taxa in the *erythrocephalus* complex between and including Assam and Yunnan need considerably more study in order to arrive at a more definitive judgement about their separability into two species. I suggest maintaining the status quo of Collar & Robson (2007) for the time being, but accept this is very likely to change.

An island range extension for *Robsonius sorsogonensis*

During a visit to PNM in April 2007 I found that one (register no. 16656) of three specimens there of Grey-banded Babbler *R. sorsogonensis* (formerly *Napothera rabori*: see Collar 2006, Collar & Robson 2007) was collected by P. C. Gonzales at 'camp 1' on the island of Catanduanes on 6 March 1988. Despite Gonzales's co-authorship of Kennedy *et al.* (2000), this notable record is omitted from that work. It is, however, difficult to imagine that the label is erroneous in the provenance it gives, so Catanduanes appears in the range for the species, previously known only from Luzon, in Collar & Robson (2007). Nothing in the plumage or morphometrics of this specimen, a male, suggests geographical variation.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Paul Sweet (AMNH), Robert Prys-Jones (BMNH), Eric Pasquet (MNHN), Lourdes Alvarez (PNM), James Dean (USNM) and Linnea Hall and René Corado (WVZ) for access to specimens in their care, and to Helen F. James for confirming my measurements of *J. naungmungensis*, Craig Robson, Lincoln Fishpool and Swen Renner for their counsel, Marie Stafford for driving me to and from WVZ, Jörn P. W. Scharlemann for statistical advice, David Wells, Alice Cibois and Craig Robson for their helpful comments as referees, and Stuart Butchart for his guidance as editor.

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Eating aliens: diet of the Grey-headed Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* in Singapore

DING LI YONG

Introduction

Three species of large piscivorous raptors (family Accipitridae) are resident in the Thai-Malay Peninsula (Wells 1999). The genus *Ichthyophaga* is represented by two closely related and similar-looking species (Grey-headed Fish-eagle *I. ichthyaetus*, Lesser Fish-eagle *I. humilis*), both of which occur by large forested rivers and lakes (Wells 1999), sometimes sympatrically, and also exhibiting similar distributions across tropical South and South-East Asia (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). Both species were historically known to occur on Singapore Island, but there are no recent records of the Lesser Fish-eagle *I. humilis* and it is currently considered locally extinct (Gibson-Hill 1950, Lim 2009). The Grey-headed Fish-eagle *I. ichthyaetus* presently occurs on a number of Singapore's inland and coastal reservoirs, but its population is presumed to be small and suspected to be in decline; therefore it is considered 'critically endangered' in the Red Data Book of Singapore (Davison *et al.* 2008, Lim 2009). Globally, it is listed as Near Threatened on basis of a

declining population due to habitat loss and degradation across its range (Tingay *et al.* 2006, Birdlife International 2011).

The Grey-headed Fish-eagle is ecologically sympatric with the widespread White-bellied Fish-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* in Singapore. On Singapore's inland reservoirs, there is much evidence of ecological overlap, leading to direct competition between the two species in diet and possibly nesting sites (Lee T. K. *in litt.* 2009). Compared to the White-bellied Fish-eagle, the distribution of the Grey-headed Fish-eagle is more restricted, with relatively fewer records from coastal areas. Most records of Grey-headed Fish-eagles originate from inland reservoirs within the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR), Singapore's largest protected area, and from flooded, disused quarries (e.g. Bukit Gombak). Few recent records are from coastal reservoirs (e.g. Kranji, Sarimbun, Serangoon) and mangrove swamps (e.g. Sungei Buloh) (see Wang & Hails 2008, Lim 2009).

Despite the ease of observations owing to their conspicuousness and the accessibility of many local sites (e.g. reservoir parks), a review