

## Confirmed range extension of the White-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis albirostris* in northern Tanzania

The genus *Bubalornis* is represented by two similar species, one with an almost entirely black with few white patches (males) or brownish (females) plumage, the Red-Billed Buffalo Weaver *B. niger* and the White-billed Buffalo Weaver *B. albirostris*. The main diagnostic characters are the bill and leg colours, and the bill morphology. The two species are highly social and breed communally in large multi-chambered nests, and are mainly resident in dry woodlands and savannas in a large part of sub-Saharan Africa.

The distribution of the two taxa is parapatric and for this reason, until recently, they were normally considered conspecific. *B. niger* is distributed in eastern and southern Africa from southern Ethiopia to central Tanzania (race *intermedius*), and from western Angola to southwest Mozambique south to the northern provinces of South Africa (race *niger*), whereas *B. albirostris* inhabits a strip from southern Mauritania and northeast Guinea-Bissau east to western Ethiopia and northwest Kenya (del Hoyo *et al.* 2010).

One of us (SP), during a recent visit to Serengeti National Park, on 11 November 2013, observed and photographed at least three different individuals of *B. albirostris* searching for food near the visitor centre at Naabi Hill Gate (02°49'56" S, 34°59'54" E, 1729 m; Plate 1).

In the Serengeti area only *Bubalornis niger* is normally seen (Schmidl 1982, Sinclair & Arcese 1995), and almost all the eastern African bird guides (Zimmerman *et al.* 1999, Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002), handbooks (del Hoyo *et al.* 2010), and also the updated ABC checklist (Dowsett *et al.* 2014) do not report *B. albirostris* for Tanzania (or southern Kenya). Only Sinclair and Ryan (2010) indicate the species in northeast Tanzania with a single cross symbol (x) used for extra-limital or vagrant records. This is referred to as the first record for Tanzania, obtained exactly in the same location on 2 March 2005. At the time it was considered an odd record of a bird well outside its

normal range, observed in a well-watched area (J. Stenbäck *in litt.* in Lindsell & Fisher 2009).



**Plate 1.** Three different individuals of *Bubalornis albirostris* at Naabi Hill Gate, Serengeti National Park, 11 November 2013 (Photos S. Panzera).

Even without any recorded evidence, breeding activity in the area now seems probable, considering the overlap of observations at the same site some years apart, the mainly sedentary habits of the species, as well the suitability of the surrounding habitat (Sinclair & Arcese 1995, del Hoyo *et al.* 2010).

Research in other localities in northern Tanzania and southern Kenya is obviously needed to verify if the Serengeti harbours a truly isolated population or if this apparently isolated spot is connected with its main range through other colonized sites. Further research in areas where the two taxa live in sympatry is certainly warranted on taxonomic, ecological and ethological grounds.

#### Acknowledgments

We thank Marco Pavia (Turin) for useful suggestions.

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*Scopus* 34: 56–57, January 2015

Received 8 November 2014