

Comments on two *Myrmecocichla* chats in Tanzania

Glen *et al.* (2011) discussed, in some detail, the plumage variations among *Myrmecocichla* populations in Tanzania, contending that all birds in the humid semi-deciduous forests east and south of the Eastern Arc divide, and including the Nguru Mountains, belong with the White-headed Black Chat (*M. arnotti / leucolaema*) group, while the 'white-collared' miombo woodland birds (*collaris*) west of that mountain divide are worthy of a higher rank, and not to be treated as a synonym of *leucolaema*, as done by Dickinson & Christidis (2014) and del Hoyo & Collar (2016).

In 1880, Fischer & Reichenow described *M. leucolaema* from an 1879 specimen reportedly collected by Fischer from the Nguru Mountains. In the description, no type is designated and there are no inventory numbers for specimens. Only one specimen's measurements are given, of a bird from the locality 'Nguru-Berge' [= Nguru Mountains, Tanzania]. The whereabouts of this specimen are unknown, and it has never been incorporated into the collections of either the Berlin or Hamburg museums (Sylke Frahnert *in litt.*).

Later, Reichenow (1882) described *M. nigra* var. *collaris* from a specimen collected by Richard Böhm at Kakoma in Tabora District in August 1880. At the time, Reichenow considered *M. nigra* and *M. arnotti* to be conspecific, and his view was later supported by Ogilvie-Grant (1908) who considered the forms *leucolaema* and *collaris* to be synonyms of nominate *arnotti* too. As a consequence, the names *leucolaema* and *collaris* effectively disappeared from the ornithological literature until revived by Glen *et al.* (2011).

Morphologically, the two groups (*collaris* vs *leucolaema / arnotti*) are very similar, in fact adult males are identical; although females have white cheeks, it is only the female *collaris* that has an all-white collar. While we agree that this is far from being evidence for full species status (Ruaha Chat, the name given for *M. arnotti leucolaema* in del Hoyo & Collar *op. cit.*), too little attention has been given to the vocalizations of these groups, although on one occasion, birds in Katavi National Park (typical *collaris*) were totally unresponsive to a playback of the call of nominate *arnotti* (Glen *et al.* 2011).

With further studies clearly warranted, particularly on vocalizations and by acquisition of more conclusive molecular data, it is clear that two discrete populations occur either side of the Eastern Arc divide. We suggest that they may best be provisionally considered as two subspecies of the White-headed Black Chat *Myrmecocichla arnotti*: *M. arnotti arnotti* (including *leucolaema*) to the east, and *M. arnotti collaris* in areas to the west of the divide, as defined by Glen *et al.* (2011).

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