

Short communications

A new record of the Dusky Indigobird *Vidua funerea* from the Kerio Valley, Kenya

While birding in the Kerio Valley, Baringo County, on the morning of 1 March 2012, we observed, photographed and audio-recorded a male and several female indigobirds which we identified as Dusky Indigobirds *Vidua funerea*. There appears to be only one previous record of this species in Kenya (EANHS 2009), and we detail our observations here in support of a second Kenya record.

Field Observations

We found the indigobirds near the Chebloch Gorge (0°27'N, 35°39'E) in an area of open *Acacia-Balanites* dominant woodland with a sparse, mostly rocky ground cover at 1150m. The birds were observed for five minutes with 7x Zeiss binoculars at a range of 6 to 10 m, during which time the male sang from the ground among some low grass cover and the females perched in an acacia hedge surrounding a small homestead. During our brief observation we did not observe any firefinches *Lagonostica* sp.

Although Dusky Indigobird is morphologically indistinguishable from Purple Indigobird *V. purpurascens* (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), we immediately noticed the male to be different from Village Indigobird *V. chalybeata*, with which we are quite familiar from elsewhere in Kenya. Prominent features observed include an ivory-coloured and heavier looking bill than in that species, as well as dull salmon-pink feet (Fig. 1). The bird also appeared slightly larger than Village Indigobird, the plumage less glossy and more blue than purple. Female-type birds which were photographed appeared identical to females of other Indigobird species, with no distinguishing field marks.



Figure 1. Male (left) and female (right) Dusky Indigobirds in the Kerio Valley, 1 March 2012.

Vocalizations

We used a Sennheiser ME-67 microphone and Sony digital recorder to make a short recording of the male's song (archived online at www.xeno-canto.org/212710), permitting confident separation from Purple Indigobird. The song comprised the typical chattering notes of an indigobird species, interspersed with a mimetic "twee-too" call and trill call notes common to African Firefinch *Lagonostica rubricata*, which is the breeding host of Dusky Indigobird.

Sonograms of the two mimicked firefinch vocalizations were made and the delivery rate of notes in the purred alarm call was used to confirm the identification (Fig. 2). Payne *et al.* (1993) define the delivery rate of these notes as less than 20 per sec for Dusky Indigobird and more than that for Purple Indigobird. In our recording, the mimetic alarm notes were delivered at a rate of between 13 and 14 notes per sec, which is slower than the alarm trill of Jameson's Firefinch *L. rhodopareia* as mimicked by its brood parasite, Purple Indigobird.

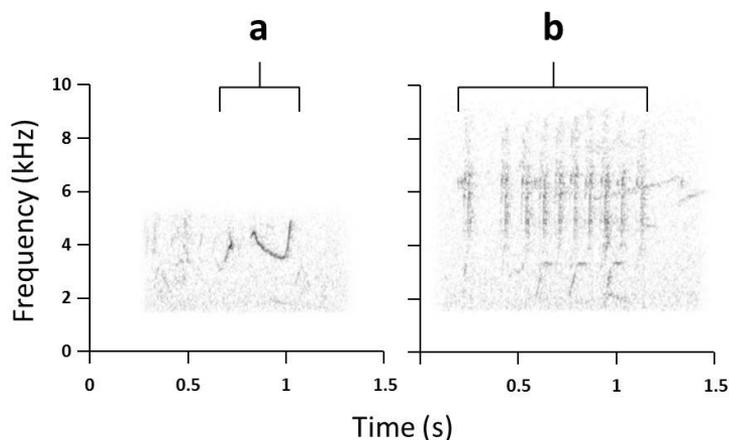


Figure 2. Sonograms of mimicked "twee-tuuee" contact call (a), and "pit-pit" alarm trill (b) made by a male Dusky Indigobird in the Kerio Valley, 1 March 2012.

Independent scrutiny of our recording also supports a likely identification of Dusky Indigobird. Distinguishing characteristics noted include the consistency of whistled and "pit-pit" notes with calls of African Firefinch, as well as the absence of rapid alarm, or flat contact calls common to Jameson's Firefinch and its brood parasite Purple Indigobird (J. DaCosta, pers. comm.).

Summary

The Dusky Indigobird has a primarily southern distribution in Africa, and Kenya represents the northernmost limit of its continental range (Fry & Keith 2004). Although within Kenya its host species is widespread to the south and west of the Kerio Valley, the only previous record is also from the Kerio Valley in 1988 (Payne *et al.* 1992). This bird, which was captured, examined and documented by audio recording (Chappuis 2000), was found alongside both Village and Purple Indigobirds near Biretwo (0°33'N, 35°33'E), approximately 15 km to the northwest of Chebloch and 100 m higher in altitude. Although often difficult to separate from Purple Indigobird,

Dusky Indigobird is clearly rare in Kenya and this small area of the Kerio Valley remains its sole known site of occurrence.

This record has been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee (N. Hunter, EARC Secretary, pers. comm., March 2016).

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