

An indigobird *Vidua* sp. puzzle in Uganda

Three species of firefinches occur in Uganda where they represent potential hosts for indigobirds *Vidua* spp. These are Red-billed Firefinch *L. senegala*, host for the Village Indigobird *V. chalybeata*; African Firefinch, *L. rubricata*, host for the Dusky Indigobird *V. funerea*; and Black-bellied Firefinch *L. rara*, together with African Firefinch, thought to be a host for the Cameroon Indigobird, *V. camerunensis*. Neither Dusky nor Cameroon Indigobird has yet been confirmed as occurring in Uganda, despite their hosts being present. However, Dusky is reported to have occurred at Bukoba in north-western Tanzania just across the border from southern Uganda, and Cameroon is known from western South Sudan and north-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, just across the border from northern Uganda.

In December 2016, RS was undertaking a bird survey in Kihhi near Ishasha (Queen Elizabeth National Park) in Kanungu District, Uganda. He noted that African Firefinches were present, and observed an indigobird associated with these. He further observed that the song closely matched the one on his 'app.' (Stevenson, T., Fanshawe, J. & Finch B.W. 2014. *eGuide to Birds of East Africa*. www.mydigitalearth.com) recording of Dusky Indigobird (Stevenson *et al.* 2014) and differed from that of Village Indigobird. He managed to get some photographs, but was unsuccessful in getting a recording of the bird he was observing. Because Cameroon Indigobird is not known to the East African region, RS concluded that he had a record of Dusky Indigobird (see *Bulletin of the African Bird Club*, March 2017, 24: 121, where it is referred to as Variable Indigobird – a less widely used English name for *V. funerea*) and submitted it as such for consideration by the East African Rarities Committee (EARC). Knowing the difficulty in identifying indigobirds, expert advice was sought. This advice brought to the fore the possibility of the bird being Cameroon Indigobird as the Sudanian ecosystem does occur in Uganda, and it was further suggested that the photographs indicated plumage more akin to Cameroon Indigobird. As a consequence, RS resubmitted the record to the EARC as Cameroon Indigobird.

After further consideration, the EARC concluded that it was not possible to accept the record as being beyond all doubt, either Cameroon or Dusky Indigobird, bearing in mind that the location was in fact thought to be south of the Sudanian ecosystem, that no audio recordings were available for analysis, and that deciding on plumage alone was unwise. The EARC recommended that further study be undertaken, not just at Kihhi, but elsewhere where African and Black-bellied Firefinches occurred with indigobirds present. In particular, they urged that audio recordings be obtained whenever possible as well as photographs. The audio recordings could be significant, because whilst Dusky Indigobird only parasitizes African Firefinch, Cameroon Indigobird is thought to parasitize the two firefinches as well as Brown Twinspot *C. monteiri*, and Dybowski's Twinspot *Euschistospiza dybowskii*. The song of Cameroon Indigobird may therefore include mimicry of all four possible hosts.

It is hoped that this note will encourage the collection of information regarding the unresolved indigobird identity in Uganda, which can be sent to NH, using the following email address: nigelhunter@timbale.org.

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