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Some additions to the avifauna of Central African Republic

by Robert J. Dowsett & Gregory B. P. Davies

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Summary.—Details are given of four species new to the avifauna of the Central African Republic, based on specimens overlooked in American museum collections and previously unpublished: Madagascar Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii*, Black-necked Wattle-eye *Dyaphorophyia chalybea*, White-browed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas leucophrys* and Grey Ground Thrush *Geokichla princei*.

We present here details of some museum specimens that represent additions to the avifauna of Central African Republic, but which have not appeared in the literature. A list of the species documented for this and other Afrotropical countries is, or will be, presented at: https://www.africanbirdclub.org/dowsett-checklists. In the case of the Central African Republic's avifauna there are numerous unpublished species records that would be new, and work is in progress to document them. Meanwhile, details of these are obtainable from the first author.



Figure. 1. Cuckoo specimens held in Los Angeles County Museum and collected near Baroua, Central African Republic: Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii* (LACM 84699, left) and Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx mechowi* (LACM 84700, right) (Gregory B. P. Davies)

MADAGASCAR CUCKOO *Cuculus rochii*

Friedmann (1978) reported five specimens of Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx mechowi* collected by A. Williams on 1–17 June 1976, near the Ouossi River, *c*.11 km west of Baroua, Mbomou Prefecture (*c*.05°20′N, 24°20′E), housed in the Los Angeles County Museum. However, examination shows that one of them, collected on 12 June (LACM 84699), labelled as a female with ovary not enlarged, stands apart from the other correctly identified *C. mechowi* (Fig. 1). It had been shot '40 feet up in [a] mature forest tree' (specimen label) within an extensive forest where the river had cut into a partially grassy plateau (A. Williams *in litt*. 2019). Its small size, proportions (wing: tail ratio) and plumage pattern indicate it is not a Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo.

The largely grey throat (with a few dark-barred feathers), folded wings extending far towards the tip of the tail and basic measurements (wing 158 mm, tail 139 mm) suggest that it is attributable to either Asian Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* or Madagascar Cuckoo *C. rochii*. These two species are very similar (being often treated as conspecific in the past) and have long caused confusion both in the field and

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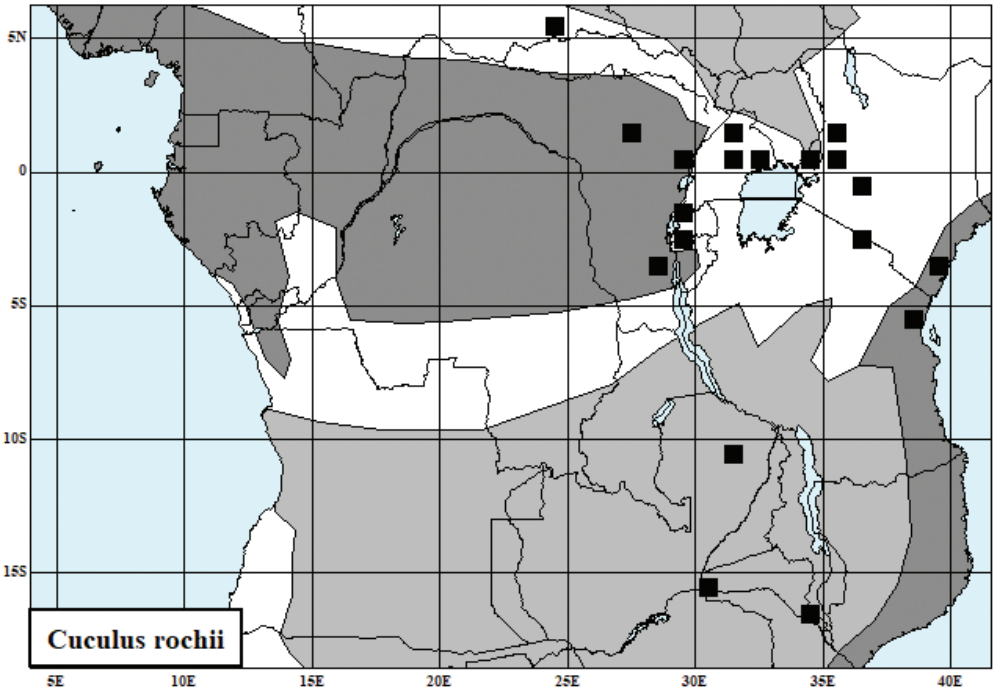


Figure 2. East African records of Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii* (based on published and unpublished records in R. J. Dowsett's *Tauraco* databases).

museum. Several criteria were proposed by Becking (1988) for separating specimens of the two species, specifically wing and tail measurements, body mass, carpometacarpal feather patterning and the form of the mandibular symphysis.

Using Becking's (1988) criteria, the LACM 84699 cuckoo shows barred carpometacarpal feathering, a rounded mandibular symphysis, heavy mass (61 g) and large measurements (wing, tail), which attributes indicate it to be *C. rochii*. The June collection date is also more consistent with *C. rochii* given these species' known migratory movements—*C. rochii* visiting mainland Africa between May and September (Becking 1988, Payne 2005), with some remaining during the austral summer (Ginn 1999, Spottiswoode & Allan 2000, Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2006), while *C. poliocephalus* visits Africa exclusively between November and early May (Becking 1988, Payne 2005).

LACM 84699 is a juvenile beginning the transitional moult to adulthood. The few barred feathers on the throat are interpreted to be remnants of the completely barred throat found in juveniles. The remiges and rectrices are old and heavily worn, indicating that moult was not far advanced at the time it was collected.

Fig. 2 maps East African records of *C. rochii*, wherein it can be seen that the Baroua record is *c*.300 km north-west of the nearest, Avakubi, Democratic Republic of Congo (01°22'N, 27°35'E: Chapin 1939).

BLACK-NECKED WATTLE-EYE *Dyaphorophyia chalybea*

A female was collected on 24 May 2001 by D. Willard in the Ndoki sector of Dzanga-Ndoki National Park, 38.6 km south of Lidjombo (02°21'N, 16°03'E). It is in the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago (FMNH 429637: VertNet.org). This record represents just a slight extension to the east from Lobéké, Cameroon (02°09'N, 15°44'E: Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2000).

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Figure 3. Specimen of White-browed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas leucophrys* collected near Beya, Central African Republic (AMNH 832113, middle), two *C. leucophrys munda* (Baudouinville, Democratic Republic of Congo, left) and two Brown-backed Scrub Robins *C. hartlaubi* (Tshibati, Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, right) (© American Museum of Natural History, New York)

WHITE-BROWED SCRUB ROBIN *Cercotrichas leucophrys*

Examination of a scrub robin specimen in the American Museum of Natural History, New York, collected on 27 June 1998, *c.*8 km south of Beya (i.e. near Monasao) by A. L. Porzecanski (AMNH 832113), confirms its identification as *C. leucophrys munda*. The bird was collected in a small savannah at 03°17′N, 16°14′E (P. Sweet *in litt*. 2018), and there are populations of *C. l. munda* in enclosed savannahs in several parts of the northern forests, the nearest being to the east, at Gele, Bosobolo (04°48′N, 19°02′E: Schouteden 1962). This specimen is heavily worn, but characters that distinguish it from the forest-dwelling Brown-backed Scrub Robin *C. hartlaubi* include (1) the well-defined streaking on the breast (not diffuse), (2) the large pale yellowish base to the mandible (largely all black in *hartlaubi*) and (3) the warm cinnamon mantle (not drab grey-brown as in *hartlaubi*). Fig. 3 compares AMNH 832113 to skins of *C. leucophrys* and *C. hartlaubi* from the Congo (collected by J. P. Chapin).



Figure 4. Specimen of Grey Ground Thrush *Geokichla princei* (AMNH 832142) collected at Bayanga, Central African Republic (© American Museum of Natural History, New York)

GREY GROUND THRUSH *Geokichla princei*

A female was collected in forest at Bayanga (02°54′N, 16°15′E) on 23 June 1998 by P. Beresford (AMNH 832142; Fig. 4). There

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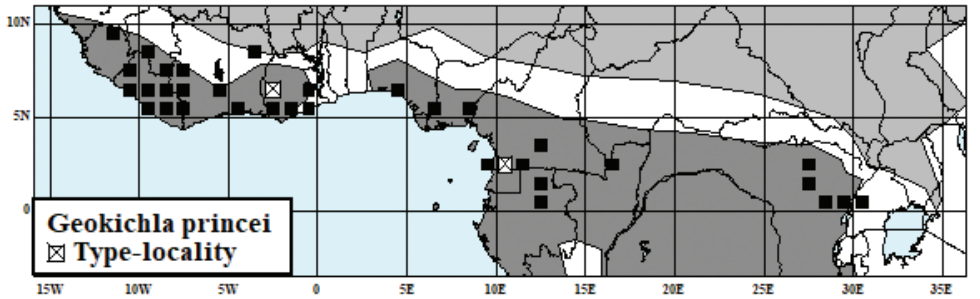


Figure 5. Distribution of Grey Ground Thrush *Geokichla princei* (based on the *Tauraco* databases).

have been several observations in the area (R. Cassidy *in litt*. 2019). This is an easterly extension of the known range from Bitye, Cameroon (03°10′N, 12°20′E: Good 1953) and M'Passa, Gabon (00°30′N, 12°50′E: Brosset & Erard 1986).

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