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Comments on Black-throated Coucal *Centropus leucogaster*, claimed from Niger

Debout *et al.* (2000) report seeing near Niamey what would be the first Black-throated Coucal *Centropus leucogaster* for Niger. As they remarked, there are few records from this latitude, the nearest being from Kangaba in the Monts Mandingues of southern Mali (Lamarche 1980–1), and the nearest at any latitude being from Djodji and Kouniohou in Togo (Cheke & Walsh 1996), some 650 km south of Niamey. The habitat of the Niamey sighting (gardens and old cultivation) is quite atypical for this forest bird (LDCF pers. obs., Cheke *et al.* 1985). Even the extreme southwest of Niger seems to be utterly devoid of forest species such as the sedentary *C. leucogaster*. The only large coucal known from the Niamey area is the savanna Senegal Coucal *C. senegalensis*, although another that might occur is the Blue-naped Coucal *C. monachus*, whose status and distribution in W Africa are imperfectly known, owing to the few certain records of it. This species is reported from the R. Niger, some 620 km northwest of Niamey, at Diré in Mali (Lamarche 1980–1), and reappears further east at L. Chad (Dowsett 1971).

C. leucogaster is a skulking species that rarely leaves thick cover, but when seen should be the easiest coucal to identify; indeed, G. Debout (*in litt.*) stresses that “les conditions étaient très bonnes et l’oiseau très proche de nous ... et nous sommes donc certain que la poitrine était bien noire”. Debout *et al.* (2000) mentioned “le dessous vraiment blanc (non crème)” which would point to an adult of this species. *C. monachus* does not have any black on the throat as a rule, although Bannerman (1933) refers to the immature having “dark tips to some of the feathers of the throat”, but this would not be sufficient to give the appearance of a totally black throat, and in the juvenile the rest of the underparts would be buff rather than pure white. The rufous underparts of the morph *epomidis* of *C. senegalensis* also rule out that possibility, and in any case this form probably does not occur further inland than some 200 km from the coast (Elgood 1973). Perhaps an undescribed morph (black throat, white underparts) of *C. senegalensis* is involved.

We are not sure which species of coucal Debout *et al.* (2000) saw at Niamey, and G. Debout (*in litt.*) is now no longer certain of the identification. Despite the fact that the totally black breast recorded by Debout *et al.* (2000) seems not to allow for any known alternative other than *C. leucogaster*, we believe that there is insufficient evidence for this species to be claimed to occur in Niger.

We thank Gabriel Debout for kindly replying to our enquiries.

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Editor's note

As might be imagined, both referees and I strongly questioned this record before agreeing to publish it in *Malimbus*. At the time, the authors' description and additional correspondence seemed to allow for no alternative to *C. leucogaster*, despite the extremely unlikely habitat. The record was therefore published as it stood. The bird's description, taken in excellent viewing conditions, still argues for *C. leucogaster*, although the habitat does not, and vagrancy in this sedentary species seems unlikely. The suggestion of an undescribed form is intriguing. Other observers might care to examine the site of Debout *et al.*'s record, or skin collections.

Première observation d'une *Zoothera* en Guinée

Le 11 décembre 2000, marchant en compagnie de Michel Fouquet sur une piste à quelques km à l'est de Tountouroun, préfecture de Labé, Guinée (11°24'N, 12°14'W) à c. 1000 m d'altitude, mon attention a été attirée par un oiseau fouillant la litière de feuilles sèches du sous-bois proche. J'ai pu d'abord apercevoir l'oiseau effectuant un court vol au ras du sol, puis l'observer à l'aide de jumelles, pendant c. 10 s, posé au sol à c. 12 m de moi, avant qu'il ne s'éloigne à pied hors de ma vue. Cet oiseau avait l'apparence d'une grive et à peu près la taille d'une Grive musicienne *Turdus philomelos*. Il avait des barres sombres sous l'œil et en arrière de la joue, elle-même