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On sexual dimorphism and vocal behaviour in the Mount Kupe Bush Shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis*

The Mount Kupe Bush Shrike *Malaconotus kupeensis* is endemic to the forests of western Cameroon. The main population is apparently centred on the Bakossi Mts, with a few pairs on Mt Kupe and a single bird observed in Banyang Mbo (a northern extension of the Bakossi range) (Stattersfield & Capper 2000). The primary rain forest in Bakossi may contain as many as 50 pairs, at medium altitudes (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2000). Since the territorial song was tape recorded in 1998 (Dowsett-Lemaire 1999) I have searched for the species with tape playback on the lower slopes of Mt Nlonako (Feb 1999) and Mt Manenguba (Mar 2000) but failed to find it. The tall, primary rain forest on Nlonako is superficially similar to the type of forest favoured by the bird elsewhere but is noticeably drier than in Kupe-Bakossi. The mid-altitude gallery forests on the lower, SE slopes of Manenguba are of relatively recent origin and may be too secondary (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2000).

Four museum specimens of the species exist (not five as in Fry 2000), all collected on Kupe. Serle obtained the type (an adult female) in 1949 and three birds (adult pair and immature female) in 1951 (Serle 1951). Adults show limited dimorphism in the breast pattern, with either a thin blackish necklace (thickened in the middle) between white throat and grey breast, or a large, dark maroon round spot within the white just above the grey breast. The former has been attributed to males and the latter to females (Fry 2000, Harris & Franklin 2000). My initial observations of two birds in song, both with black necklace (Mar 1997 on Kupe, Mar 1998 in Bakossi), and unpublished observations by S.M. Andrews (in Dowsett-Lemaire 1999) also led me to assume that the dark necklace was restricted to males.

In Mar 2000 I spent a week in the forest around Lake Edib (Bakossi) and located four territories of Mount Kupe Bush Shrike. Two of the calling birds (presumed males) showed a large maroon spot and the other two a dark necklace. One of the presumed males with maroon spot was called up in precisely the same location where I had recorded the song two years earlier, given then by a bird with clearly a dark necklace. The other was observed for an hour and was accompanied by its mate, following silently behind. Both members of this pair were seen close to each other for several minutes and looked identical: both had a similar maroon spot. The “male” produced an occasional babbler-like song (as described in Dowsett-Lemaire 1999), between feeding bouts, and a few detached soft whistles, of strange, distorted quality, on a pitch reminiscent of Western Nicator *Nicator chloris*. These were tape-recorded. Both members of the pair moved with noisy wing-snapping and were (initially) feeding in a small, loose, mixed bird party. The presumed female was vocally silent.

The third territorial bird was called up with tape playback and sang back within seconds. The fourth was feeding low down in a bird party; brief tape playback brought it closer to me, followed by its mate 1–2 m behind, both birds were wing-snapping and the “male” sang back a few times (the usual babbler-like chatter). I lost sight of its mate before I could see details of the breast plumage. The third and fourth songsters were clearly seen and had a complete blackish necklace, thickened in the middle. The necklace of the male specimen collected in 1951 is apparently somewhat broken as it

consists of a row of small dark spots (Fry 2000, Harris & Franklin 2000); these details could not be seen in the field. The only immature specimen collected (a female) had an "indistinct necklace of yellowish brown" (Serle 1951). In March 2002 Cohen & Mills (2002) visited the Edib region in Bakossi and video-taped a Mount Kupe Bush Shrike coming to tape playback, using a copy of my tape of babbler-like song (C. Cohen pers. comm.); the bird photographed has a large maroon spot and no necklace.

Borrow & Demey (2001) correctly quote a pers. comm. by me saying that "presence of maroon throat patch and necklace appears unrelated to sex", based on the above observations. But their general plumage description is a little ambiguous as they write "with or without round maroon patch in centre; 'necklace' present in some". This suggests one might even come across a bird with both a necklace and a maroon spot or with neither, which combinations have not yet been reported. Nevertheless territorial birds assumed to be males (because the loud, stereotyped song is given by only one bird per territory and the observed mates were vocally silent) can have either, and the significance of one pattern over the other remains unclear. Possibly the breast pattern might be related to age, with the maroon spot developing after the necklace (as a necklace is already present in the one immature specimen).

Further observations on vocal behaviour by myself and also others (e.g. N. Borrow, C. Cohen pers. comm.) confirm that the main song-type is clearly the loud, babbler-like chatter (Dowsett-Lemaire 1999). Soft whistles (as above) were heard only once, they are not far-carrying and are unlikely to be used in territorial advertisement. Those I heard are probably related to the trisyllabic whistle heard by Serle (1951) and detached whistles, "out of tune", heard by I. Faucher (*in* Dowsett-Lemaire 1999). Harris & Franklin (2000) describe several other vocalizations without giving a specific source (they have never been to Cameroon) but they apparently come from an unpublished manuscript by S.M. Andrews (seen by me), but with some modifications. Bowden (2001) describes a "subsequent recording" to mine, obtained by N. Borrow, which appears different. Bowden did not specify, however, that this song was obtained in reaction to playback of my original tape and sounded just like another babbler-like territorial song. The "cheow-cheeow-cheeow" notes given in Bowden could equally be rendered "tchraa-tchraa-tchraa" as in my original description (N. Borrow pers. comm.). Bowden (2001) mentions Dowsett-Lemaire (1999) only in respect of "more detailed descriptions of calls"; but the main babbler-like song I described had not been published previously. The "insect-like grating" mentioned by Bowden & Andrews (1994) but never tape recorded, is said to be given almost continuously by pairs (Harris & Franklin 2000). Colleagues and I have still not come across it and I suspect that, either it is not as frequent as claimed, or that it is the babbler-like chatter heard by different ears. Certainly confirmation based on good tape recordings is required to clarify the description.

Almost nothing is known of the feeding ecology and territory size of this highly localized species, whose endangered status should make such a study a priority among conservationists in Cameroon. This would be greatly helped by colour-ringing a few individuals but despite regular mist-netting on Mt Kupe over several years, only one Mount Kupe Bush Shrike has been captured (Bowden & Andrews 1994, Bowden 2001). Birds seen feeding before tape playback was attempted were rather low down

in the mid-stratum, mainly 4–10 m up; they tend to sing a bit higher, often around 10–15 m, and birds excited by tape playback go even higher, up to about 20 m.

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Status of the Cape Verde Cane Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis* on São Nicolau, with notes on song, breeding behaviour and threats

The Cape Verde Cane Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis* is a little known species endemic to the Cape Verde Islands, regarded as Endangered because of its small and declining population (Stattersfield & Capper 2000). Until 1998, it was thought to survive only on the island of Santiago, with a population of probably several hundred pairs, and to have become extinct on Brava (last recorded in the 1960s by Frade 1976) and São Nicolau (last seen in 1970: see Hazevoet *et al.* 1999). However, it was