

A new species of sunbird from Tanzania

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During August 1981 a ten-day visit was paid to Mwanihana Forest Reserve, a rain forest on the eastern scarp of Uzungwa Mountains, eastern Tanzania. Stuart *et al.* (1981) and Stuart & Jensen (1981) have documented a number of notable range extensions of forest birds from this area, which, until recently, was unexplored by ornithologists. Jensen & Stuart (in press) described four new subspecies of birds and Homewood & Rodgers (in press) described a new subspecies of the Crested Mangabey *Cercocebus galeritus* from the same locality. Both the physiognomy of the rainforest and the composition of the avifauna suggest strong affinities between Mwanihana Forest, and the forested scarps of other basement block mountains in eastern Tanzania, most notably the Mgurus and the Ulugurus (Stuart, *et al.* 1981).

On 2 August 1981, while carrying out a mist-netting study in the forest at 1000 m, a male specimen was caught of a very distinct and hitherto undescribed sunbird. On a subsequent visit in September 1981, Miss T. A. van der Willigen, S. N. Stuart and Dr K. M. Howell secured a female specimen of this new species to be described as:

NECTARINIA RUFIPENNIS NEW SPECIES
RUFOUS-WINGED SUNBIRD

Type

Zoological Museum, Copenhagen no. 8.12.1981.1, adult male collected on 2 August 1981 by F. P. Jensen (field no. 191) in Mwanihana Forest Reserve, Uzungwa Mountains, above the village Sanje, Kilombero District, Morogoro Region, eastern Tanzania. Altitude 1000 m.

Description of type

Capitalized colours are from Smithe (1975). The crown, face, nape, back, wing-coverts and upper tail-coverts are iridescent Spectrum Violet, but showing a Turquoise Blue gloss in certain lights. From the base of the lower mandible to the upper chest there is a triangular glossy bronze patch. There are two bands across the chest, the upper one being identical in colour to the back and about 4 mm wide. The lower one is Chestnut and 10 mm wide. There are small pale Spectrum Yellow pectoral tufts. The upper belly is Glaucous (colour 79) merging into Lime Green on the lower belly and thighs. The under tail-coverts are Glaucous (colour 79). The upper side of the tail is black, with a Spectrum Violet gloss, especially on the outer margins of the feathers. The underside of the tail is Blackish Neutral Gray with Dark Neutral Gray tips. The upperside of the primaries and secondaries is mainly black. The outer edges of the secondaries, however, are strikingly and broadly Cinnamon-Rufous. There is a much narrower Cinnamon-Rufous border on the outer edges of the primaries. The under-side of the primaries and secondaries is Dark Neutral Gray. The under wing-coverts are Pale Neutral Gray. The bill and the legs are black. The iris was noted as dark brown.

Measurements of type (in mm)

Wing (chord) 57, tail 43, tarsus 16, culmen from base 23.5. Weight 10.0 g (large fat deposits).

Description of female

No. 1981.9.7. British Museum (Natural History), collected 16 September 1981 by Miss T. A. van der Willigen, S. N. Stuart and Dr K. M. Howell at the type locality, altitude 1000 m. Specimen prepared by C. A. Msuya. The ground colour of the crown, face and nape is Grayish Olive merging to Olive Green (Basic) on the back and upper wing-coverts and to olive Green (Auxiliary) (colour 47) on the upper tail-coverts. On the crown, nape, upper wing-coverts and back the feathers have black centres, giving a dappled appearance. This is especially pronounced on the back. There is a slight Turquoise Blue gloss on the nape, back and upper tail-coverts, but most obvious on the back. The throat is Olive Yellow merging to Sulphur Yellow on the chest, belly and under tail-coverts. The centre of each feather on the chest and upper belly is black, giving a pronounced spotted appearance. The upperside of the tail is black, with the outer margins of the feathers Antique Brown with a slight Turquoise Blue gloss, tipped with Glaucous (colour 80). The underside of the tail is black, tipped with Glaucous (colour 80). The secondary wing-coverts are Blackish Neutral Gray with Smoke Gray (colour 45) outer margins. The upperside of the primaries and the secondaries is mainly Blackish Neutral Gray, with a broad Tawny outer margin to the secondaries. There is also a narrow Tawny outer margin to the primaries. The underside of the primaries and secondaries is Dark Neutral Gray. The under wing-coverts are Pearl Gray. The bill and feet are black.

Measurements of female (in mm)

Wing (chord) 55, tail 38, tarsus 15, culmen from base 21.5. Weight 8.7 g.

Range

Known only from the type locality at 1000 m.

Field observations

Miss T. A. van der Willigen, S. N. Stuart and Dr K. M. Howell have subsequently made field observations of this species and have provided the following notes. A pair was observed from time to time over a period of two days. They seemed to stay in the same area, probably not much more than a hectare, over this time. The male and female always stayed close together, feeding very actively from the flowers of an understorey shrub (unfortunately not yet identified). While feeding they frequently uttered squeaking and fizzing noises, characteristic of many Nectariniidae. Occasionally the male sang a soft high pitched trilling song, not too dissimilar from that of the Eastern Double-collared Sunbird *Nectarinia mediocris*, but less 'electrical'. The pair were particularly aggressive to Olive Sunbirds *N. olivacea*, which were abundant in the area, and chased them frequently. They spent most of their time between 2 and 6 m from the ground, but this might just be because the flowers on which they were feeding were at this level. The rufous wing patch is particularly distinctive in the field.

Systematic position

The confusing variation of morphological characters among African sunbirds makes a phylogenetic classification of the species in the family very difficult. Although the long, curved bill places the new species in the genus *Nectarinia*, there appears to be no obvious affinity to any particular superspecies or species-group sensu Hall & Moreau (1970).



FIGURE 1. *Nectarinia rufipennis*: new species, female and male, painted by Jon Fjeldså.

