

A new population of the Udzungwa Forest Partridge

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The discovery of the Udzungwa Forest Partridge *Xenoperdix udzungwensis* in 1991 in the Udzungwa highland in Tanzania (Dinesen *et al.* 1994) has been characterised as one of the major surprises for the ornithological world in recent years (McGowan 1994). The species was suggested to represent a relict population from the early Miocene, when the Tethys Sea was closed and primitive forest partridges had a brief opportunity to distribute themselves all the way from the Oriental Region to tropical Africa. The postulated relationship between *Xenoperdix* and Asiatic forest partridges (*Arborophila*, *Rollulus* and others) has now been confirmed using molecular data (T.M. Crowe *in litt.*).

Within the Udzungwa highland, the species is still known only from the Nyumbanitu and Ndundulu Mts. It was therefore a great surprise when JK saw the species (and collected one identifiable feather) in March 2000 in the Maf-wemiro forest, a north-western outlier of the Rubeho highland. This is 150 km north of the type locality in the Udzungwa highland and isolated from it by a large inter-montane basin of arid lowland along the Great Ruaha River.

In December 2000 and January 2001 JK succeeded in catching three adult birds in Maf-wemiro forests. After comparing these with three Udzungwa specimens, kept in Copenhagen, and with data concerning the specimen that is kept in University of Dar es Salaam (Dinesen *et al.* 1994), we are able to state that morphological differences are sufficiently consistent that we will recognize the Mafwemiro population as a distinctive and probably isolated form, which we name

TABLE 1

Measurements (mm) of collected specimens of *Xenoperdix udzungwensis*. The wing-length was flattened on a ruler and stretched; the bill was measured to the skull.

	Wing	Tarsus	Tail	Bill
Mafwemiro ZMUC Cat.no. 93.215	130.8	35.2	57.5	—
Cat. 93.216	137.0	36.4	61.8	18.7
Cat. 93.217	132.0	35.6	57.7	19.1
Udzungwa Cat. 91.301	149.0	39.0	73.0	23.7
Cat. 91.302	148.5	38.0	73.0	23.7
Cat. (spirit; tail partly lost)	140.5	36.8	(52.2)	19.7
UDSM specimen	137.5	35.5	68.0	23.7

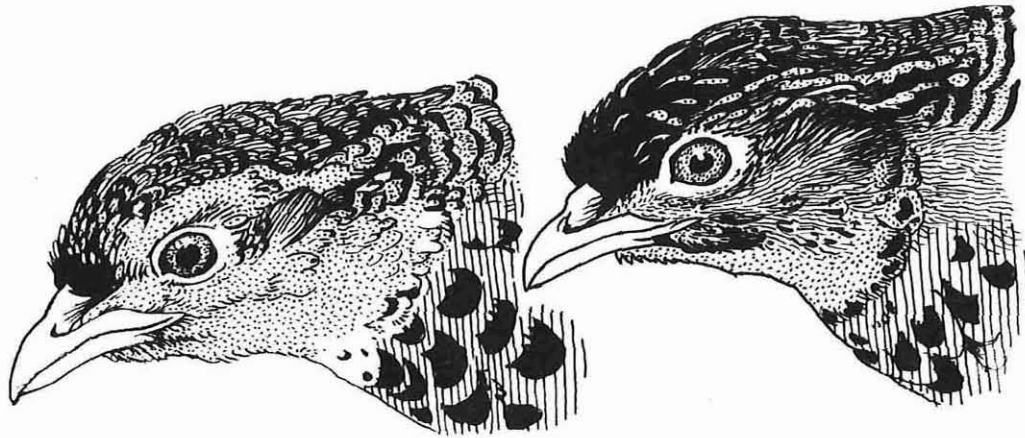


Figure 1. Portraits comparing *Xenoperdix* specimens from the Udzungwa Mts (based on ZMUC 91.302) and Mafwemiro Forest (ZMUC 93.215).

***Xenoperdix udzungwensis obscurata*, subsp. nov.**

Holotype

The Zoological Museum University of Copenhagen (ZMUC) cat. no. 93.215. Sex not determined. Collected 29 December 2000 in Mafwemiro Forest (6°50'S 36°34' E), which covers the top plateau of an outlying ridge in the northern Rubeho Mountains, west of the main ridge. This forest is situated in the Mpwapwa District, Dodoma Region.

Diagnosis

All birds are distinctly smaller than those of the nominate subspecies (Table 1) with relatively shorter tails (0.44-0.45 of wing-length, against 0.49 in the nominate subspecies). None of the individuals have the "necklace" of mostly white feathers with variable black spots seen in the nominate subspecies (Fig. 1). Instead there is an arc of black spots placed along the olive-grey borderline between throat and breast. The face is more obscured with dusky than in the nominate subspecies, but this may be somewhat variable among individuals. Under tail-coverts have only faint traces of the ochraceous wash on the white distal parts seen in the nominate subspecies. Secondaries have, overall, less distinctive barring, and the wing-coverts have distinctive grey to whitish distal margins, giving a scaly effect quite unlike the black-and-ochraceous barring in the nominate form. Rectrices are less broad (11-14 mm vs. 15-20 mm), and the bars of the central feathers are less distinctive black.

