Discoveries

Three new species for Seychelles: Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* and Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Adrian Skerrett

L'auteur rapporte les premières mentions de trois espèces pour les Seychelles. Un Vanneau sociable *Vanellus gregarius* était présent à Alphonse approximativement du 12 novembre 2001 au 15 mars 2002. Ceci constitue la première observation de cette espèce pour l'hémisphère Sud. Un Chevalier arlequin *Tringa erythropus* en plumage internuptial a été observé à Providence, Mahé, le 17 décembre 2000 et un Pouillot véloce *Phylloscopus collybita* à Alphonse, le 27 décembre 2001.

Sociable Lapwing

When the plane landed on Alphonse airstrip on 22 December 2001, I watched from the window as waders, including Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* and sand plovers *Charadrius* sp, took flight. Among these, a bird with black-and-white wings immediately stood out. After landing, I soon located it in grass at the side of the airstrip. After initial uncertainty—the bird not figuring in the Seychelles field guide[5]—identification as Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* was eventually clinched using *Shorebirds*[2]. I observed it repeatedly over the course of the next few days until 26 December. I also established that the bird had arrived around 12 November 2001, and was subsequently informed that it remained until around 15 March 2002 (F Payet pers comm). My field notes include the following.

A medium-sized wader, in structure and appearance between a plover *Pluvialis* and a lapwing *Vanellus*. Always appeared noticeably larger than a nearby Grey Plover *P. squatarola*, though *Shorebirds* indicates the two are of similar size[2]. Size difference accentuated when standing erect, as it often did when approached, with a profile similar to a courser *Cursorius*, appearing somewhat more slender than Grey Plover and significantly longer necked. Feeding action typically plover-like, consisting of a short rapid run interrupted by an abrupt stop, followed by a 'frozen' pause or a peck at the ground.

The most distinctive feature was the broad white supercilium, narrowing behind the eye to meet at the nape in a downward-pointing V and outlined by a black loral line and eyestripe. Crown grey-brown. Throat off-white with a faint greyish wash. Face-sides dirty pale yellow-buff. Upperparts grey-brown; some very faint, slightly paler feather edges apparent in early-morning light. Black primaries visible at rest, forming a broad black line at edge of wing; black subterminal band to tail also visible. Breast pale grey-brown (much paler than upperparts) with lines of darker streaks. Belly white. Bill short and black. Legs fairly long, appearing black in strong sunlight, but dark grey in early-morning light. In flight, had broad wings with striking jet black primaries and pure white secondaries, contrasting with grey-brown mantle and wing-coverts. Pure white underwing-coverts. Tail white at edges with broad black band in centre, decreasing in width towards outer tail. Feet projected beyond tail.

Tentatively aged as a first-winter due to its uniform dark upperparts, indeterminate crown and clearly flecked breast.

The Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC) has accepted this as the first record for Seychelles, which makes it also the first south of the equator (Alphonse lies at 07°S). The species is listed as Vulnerable and declining with probably fewer than 10,000 mature individuals[1]. It breeds in southern Russia and Kazakhstan, wintering south to the Red Sea, the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan and north-west India. It has been recorded as a vagrant west to Spain and south to Sri Lanka (two records), the Maldives and northern Somalia.

Spotted Redshank

On 17 December 2000, while birdwatching along the east coast of Mahé, I decided to visit some temporary pools on reclaimed land opposite the Gondwana Granite factory, Providence. Upon arrival, I spotted a medium-sized wader walking in shallow water, which stood out by virtue of its long orange-red legs. It was similar in size and structure to a nearby Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*. Leg colour, however, indicated either Common Redshank *T. totanus* or Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus*, while the long tibia visible above the waterline suggested the latter. I telephoned Gerard Rocamora and Ron Gerlach for information on different plumages of Spotted Redshank, using *Shorebirds*[2]. When GR arrived with a telescope, we observed the bird at closer range and concluded that it was indeed a Spotted Redshank in non-breeding plumage, but were unable to determine whether it was an adult or an immature.

The black bill had the basal half of the lower mandible red and was longer and more slender than that of a Common Redshank. The jet black lores outlined a clear white supercilium, particularly striking when the bird was observed head-on. Upperparts were uniform grey-brown, browner than Common Greenshank, with many feathers narrowly edged white. Underparts were white, with a grey wash and some pale streaks to the breast-sides, becoming grey bars on the lower flanks. In flight, it was immediately evident that the bird was not a Common Redshank, given the absence of the striking all-white secondaries of that species. Upperwings appeared mainly uniform grey-brown with white fringes to feathers evident.

The SBRC has accepted this as the first record for Seychelles. There has also been just one record of Common Redshank, in 1972[4]. Spotted Redshank breeds from northern Scandinavia to north-east Asia, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa, western Europe and the Mediterranean to south-east Asia. Wintering grounds are mainly between the equator and 30°N, but it is regular in small numbers south to Kenya and Tanzania, and a vagrant further south. As with this sighting, all southern African records are of single birds at inland locations[3].

Chiffchaff

At 13.00 hrs on 27 January 2001, as I bicycled through the Alphonse Island Resort grounds, a warbler flew up from the

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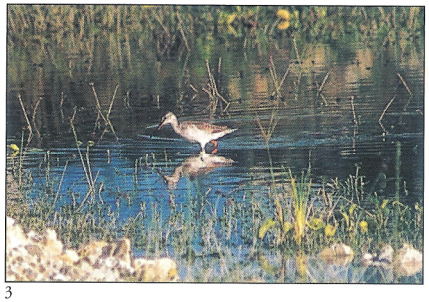

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Figures 1–2. Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Alphonse, Seychelles, December 2001 (Adrian Skerrett)

Figure 3. Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, Mahé, Seychelles, December 2000 (Adrian Skerrett)

Figures 4–5. Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Alphonse, Seychelles, January 2001 (Adrian Skerrett)

pathway to perch in a low bush. After I had stopped, it flew back down to the grass to feed. Migrant warblers are extreme rarities in Seychelles and need to be checked thoroughly. As I had no binoculars, paper, pen or camera with me, I decided to go back for these. When I returned, the bird was still there.

It was a small, fairly slender *Phylloscopus* with a clean appearance and a long, pale yellow supercilium prominent in front and behind the eye. Upperparts were pale brown; underparts whitish with a trace of yellow on the chin and throat. This initially suggested Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*. However, the plain dark ear-coverts, prominent lower white eye crescent and dark legs pointed to Chiffchaff *P. collybita*. Northern and eastern races (eg *abietinus*) can have a prominent supercilium and a rather clean appearance. The bird fed in a rather restless manner, persistently flicking its wings and dipping its tail. This behaviour is unlike that of Willow Warbler, which usually gives only one desultory dip to the tail after alighting or none at all. From photos subsequently examined by the SBRC, the primary projection was measured as 7–10 mm, with the tertial length 15–18 mm (39–67%). For Willow Warbler, the percentage would be 75–100%.

The SBRC has accepted this as the first record of Chiffchaff for Seychelles. Race was left undetermined, though the most likely appears to be *abietinus* (Scandinavian Chiffchaff), which has a more obvious supercilium and is more grey-brown above and paler below than the nominate. Nominate *collybita* breeds in western Europe east to Poland merging with *abietinus*, which breeds in Scandinavia and western Russia, and *tristis* (Siberian Chiffchaff), which breeds in Russia from the Pechora basin east. All three races are migratory, wintering from sub-Saharan tropical Africa and Arabia to northern India. *P. c. abietinus* is the race found in East Africa[6].

There have been three previous records in Seychelles of Willow Warbler and two of indeterminate Willow Warbler / Chiffchaff. Other records of migrant warblers in the country include Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (one), Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* (one), Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* (two), Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (one) and Common Whitethroat *S. communis* (one); just 11 records involving seven species, indicating that a warbler crossing the Indian Ocean to reach Seychelles is a rare, or at least an under-recorded, event.

References

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Parasitic Weaver *Anomalospiza imberbis*, new to Benin

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Le 1er juillet 2002, un mâle Anomalospize (Tisserin) parasite *Anomalospiza imberbis* a été observé dans le sud du Bénin, le long de la route Cotonou–Lomé. Ceci constitue la première mention pour le pays.

Parasitic Weaver *Anomalospiza imberbis* is described as a 'very local and patchily distributed, uncommon to rare resident' throughout its West African range[1]. There are no published records for Benin: it is not mentioned in Dowsett's country list[3], nor in later publications documenting additional species. It has, however, been recorded in Togo and Nigeria[2,4].

On 1 July 2002, along the main Cotonou–Lomé road, 9 km east of the Mono River, in south Benin (06°28'N 01°82'E), I observed a small, rather weaver-like bird, which I identified as a male Parasitic Weaver. It was perched in an area of flooded grassland and had a striking yellow head and underparts, a deep-based black bill and lightly streaked flanks. It held its bill open, but remained silent. I was able to observe it in detail and for several minutes, at a distance of c3 m, from an overhead bridge.

Parasitic Weaver is known to parasitise cisticolas, prinias and other small passerines[1], all of which were observed in the area. Given its small size, the male's distinctive plumage, and habitat, confusion with other species is most unlikely. Considering its status in West Africa, it is an interesting addition to the Benin list, although, given its occurrence in neighbouring countries, its presence was to be expected.

References

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