

and thrush-like, 'wuwuwi, wuwuwi' and 'weedleedle we wiwi wew', coming from the undergrowth on Naghasi Ridge". They describe the habitat for this bird as "ridge forest". *Vitia parens* a small non-descript warbler, dark brown above and slightly paler below.

I believe that odedi is probably a *Vitia* -- either *parens* or some island relative. I support this idea with the following: (1) the phonetic names given the bird by Bougainvillians -- "kopipi" and "odedi" closely match the second part of the native name applied to *V. parens* on San Cristobal -- "harighi", and match the key phrase in Cain & Galbraith's song description; both are three syllables, and end on a higher note -- like 'wuwuwi'; (2) my local informant said that the bird is small, like a *Vitia* in being brown, and with a big voice. This coincides with Cain & Galbraith's description; (3) Diamond (pers. comm.) spoke with nine Bougainvillians about the bird, and while there were conflicting descriptions of plumage coloration, informants who mentioned size (5 of 9) all said it was "small"; (4) both Diamond (1975) and Cain & Galbraith (1956) describe the calls as thrush-like; (5) Diamond (Condor 73:481; Emu 76:1) has collected *Zoothera talasea* on New Britain and Umboi Islands; his field notes on the birds reported no striking vocalizations; (6) my single experience in the field indicated that odedi lived on sharp ridges and was absent from more level habitat; this corresponds with Cain & Galbraith's comment that *Vitia* is a bird of ridge forest; (7) we never heard odedi at the high plateau camp, although we captured two and five specimens, respectively, of the new thicket warbler and

thrush.

To date *Vitia parens* is known only from San Cristobal in the eastern Solomon Islands. If *Vitia* does occur on Bougainville, it will constitute a northwestern range extension of 750 km for the genus.

There are points that might be used to argue that odedi is not *Vitia parens*. The diverse local descriptions given to Diamond mention a variety of characters not shown in *Vitia parens*. My local information, and two of Diamond's informants mention that odedi lives up in trees, not on the ground; Cain & Galbraith mention that their bird sings from the undergrowth. The situation is further clouded because Cain & Galbraith's identification of the vocalizations of *Vitia* are based on identification by local informants, not personal observation.

The identity of odedi, whether *Vitia* or otherwise, remains to be proved by whoever can invest the time and effort. The purpose of this note is to suggest possibilities, and to stress that more work is required on the birds of the Solomon Islands.

I thank Don Hadden and his family for their generous help while I visited Bougainville. Thanks also to Eliot Harding, Francis Munau, and the youth group at Sirian Village, who made the trip possible. The field trip was funded by the Smithsonian Institution. J.M. Diamond and R.F. Pasquier made helpful criticisms of an earlier draft.

BRUCE BEEHLER, MNH 114 Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560, USA.

13 January 1982

THE LITTLE GRASSBIRD *MEGALURUS GRAMINEUS* IN THE NORTH-EASTERN KIMBERLEY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Of the current texts dealing with the distributions of Australian birds, none records the Little Grassbird *Megalurus gramineus* from north of the Tropic of Capricorn (23½°S) and west of longitude 130°E (Macdonald 1973; Slater 1974; Readers Digest 1976; Pizzey 1980). Storr (1980) also makes no mention of the Little Grassbird. The discovery of a population of Little Grassbirds in the north-eastern Kimberley Division of Western Australia, at Kununurra (15° 47' S, 128° 44' E), is reported here.

On 25 November 1980, between 16:00 and 17:30, I located two parties of Little Grassbirds near Kununurra. The first group was found in a 5 m² patch

of cumbungi (*Typha* sp) 1.5 m in height, on the edge of the East Packsaddle Swamp, 4 km SW of Kununurra. A rank sedge field, 0.5 m in height and 2 to 20 m across, surrounded the cumbungi. The second group was located 50 m to the east in a circular cumbungi stand 300 m² in area and 2 m in height. This stand was surrounded by water 0.3 - 0.5 m deep, was variously vegetated by *Eleocharis* sp and *Marsilea* sp, and at its closest point was 8 m from the edge of the swamp.

Each group had evidently completed breeding and consisted of three individuals (two adults and a juvenile bird). The four adult birds were similar in their plumage, being grey-brown, heavily streaked with dark

brown and black above (including the crown), and light below with light streaking on the sides of the throat and breast. In each party, however, one adult bird had a more prominent off-white brow than the other. The third member in each group was a recently-fledged juvenile bird. Both juveniles lacked fully developed tail feathers, and their plumage was more reddish brown above than the adults, and uniform grey below with striations across the neck and breast. I watched each group for twenty minutes, finding it necessary to imitate repeatedly their soft, three-noted, mournful call to lure them to the edge of the cumbungi. At no time then, or since, have they been observed away from this vegetation type. On 26 November 1980 I attracted one bird with a taped call and collected it (CSIRO Wildlife Museum, ANWC Specimen No 37000).

In the evening of 3 December 1980, I visited the West Packsaddle Swamp (5 km WSW of Kununurra), where the cumbungi has formed a complete belt around the margin of the swamp. From the dry landward side I "called up" and observed five Little Grassbirds in the first 100 m. Within the next 300 - 400 m of margin, in near darkness, I heard the calls of at least twelve more individuals. Calling ceased about forty-five minutes after sunset. These observations show that the Little Grassbird is quite common in the swamps near Kununurra.

It is possible that the Little Grassbird may have been overlooked in the Kununurra region in the past because it has a soft call, and is small, secretive and inconspicuous within a much more noisy and visible swamp bird fauna, which includes the Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*, Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*, Crimson Finch *Neochmia phaeton* and Rufous-throated Honeyeater *Conopophila rufogularis*. However, experienced observers such as J.P. Rogers and P. Slater who lived in the area during the 1900's and 1950's respectively, failed to record the species (Mathews 1909; Slater 1959), and it is unlikely that it was present at those times. The Kununurra swamps are perennial, but they have existed only since the diversion dam for the Ord River Irrigation Area was filled in 1962. Aerial photographs show that the cumbungi favoured by the Little Grassbird has developed (albeit with gusto) only within the last five years. Thus the Little Grassbird

probably has arrived in the Kununurra area since then.

From RAOU Australian Bird Atlas Data (to 16 April 1982) the nearest records of Little Grassbirds to Kununurra are to the SSE, 700 km across the Tanami Desert, and to the SW, 1900 km across the Great Sandy Desert. The isolation of this population from the previously known distribution of Little Grassbirds raises the question of its origin. Examination of the specimen showed that it belonged to the eastern Australian subspecies *M.g. gramineus*, the form that also occurs in North-eastern Queensland and occasionally in central Australia (Dr R. Schodde, pers. comm.). Although the Little Grassbird is known to undertake long migratory flights (Macdonald 1973 p. 323; Readers Digest 1976 p. 404), it appears that dispersal from the east across monsoonally-influenced northern Australia seems more likely than migration through arid regions from the SW of Western Australia. This dispersal pattern is not without precedent. The eastern subspecies of the Swampphen, *Porphyrio porphyrio*, also a fresh-water marsh-dwelling bird, has similarly colonized the north of Australia while the western form has remained restricted to the SW of Western Australia (Pizzey 1980 p. 104).

I thank Ms Liz Edwards for bringing the calls of these birds to my attention, Dr R. Schodde for confirming the identity of the specimen and offering helpful comments, the RAOU for supplying distribution information, and Dr S.R. Morton and Mr John McKean for reading the draft.

REFERENCES

- MACDONALD, J.D. 1973. Birds of Australia. Sydney: Reed.
- MATHEWS, G.M. 1909. On the Birds of North-West Australia Parts 1, 2 & 3. Emu 9: 1-16, 52-65, 238-241.
- PIZZEY, G. 1980. A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia Sydney: Collins.
- READERS' DIGEST 1976. Complete Book of Australian Birds. Sydney: Readers Digest Services.
- SLATER, P. 1959. Breeding periods of birds in the Kimberley Division, Western Australia. W.A. Nat. 7: 35-41.
- . 1974. A Field Guide to Australian Birds. Sydney: Rigby.
- STORR, G.M. 1980. Birds of the Kimberley Division, Western Australia. West. Aust. Mus. Spec. Pub. No. 11.

KYM BRENNAN, *Office of the Supervising Scientist, Alligator Rivers Region Research Institute, Jabiru East, NT 5796.*

12 February 1982