Systematic notes on Asian birds. 42. A preliminary review of the Oriolidae

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Asian orioles that have been reviewed since Greenway (1962) are discussed and recommendations are made for the recognition of subspecies. Reasons are provided for the split of *Oriolus steerii* Sharpe, 1877a, from *Oriolus xanthonotus* Horsfield, 1821, originally proposed in Dickinson et al. (1991) when such reasons were omitted. Problem areas remain and research is suggested, some morphological, some molecular.

Introduction

The series of preliminary reviews examines each family as treated in Peters's Check-list of Birds of the World, in this case, the Oriolidae by Greenway (1962). The arrangement in Greenway is discussed and more recent treatments are noted and discussed with recommendations. Revisions in the planned synopsis will be governed by the extent to which supporting detail for proposed changes has been published. It is hoped that molecular studies will be available; if so no doubt they will be influential.

The Oriolidae is essentially an Old World family of about 30 species with representatives in Eurasia, Africa, Asia, and through Wallacea into New Guinea and northern Australia[1]. Although it is generally accepted that orioles are corvoid in their relationships, in spite of limited taxon sampling within the corvidan assemblage, it is now thought that orioles may be one of a number of basal groups and not belong to either of the principal clades which have fuelled a radiation of species from Australasia (Cracraft et al., 2003). This small family has not been monographed since treatment by Greenway (1962). He provided a list of important papers published between 1923 and 1959, but he published no preliminary review and it was no part of the check-list process to include the family summaries of the type found in the Catalogue of the birds in the British Museum.

The consolidation of all the orioles in the genus *Oriolus* was already in place in Sharpe (1877a). Meinertzhagen (1923) agreed and noted that differences in overall

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[1] Wetmore (1960: 19) gave his reasons for considering the fairy bluebirds (genus *Irena*) best placed within the Oriolidae. When Greenway (1962) dealt with the orioles he did not need to consider this. Mayr & Greenway (1956) had reported on the deliberations of a Committee set up at the XIth. International Ornithological Congress at Basel, 1954; this Committee provided the Editors of Peters' Checklist with what came to be known as the 'Basel Sequence'. During the deliberations of that Committee the Editors had pledged to follow that sequence (Mayr & Greenway, 1960: vii). Consequently the Irenidae had been included in Peters Vol. IX (1960).

colouration between the 'sombre coloured' '*Mimeta*-group' and the '*Oriolus*-group' were not sufficient to warrant subdivision. For Sharpe (1877a) and subsequent authors the figbirds (*Sphecotheres*) were the only other oriolids, distinguished by bare red skin round the eye. Figbirds, which are essentially Australasian, are colonial nesters (Schodde & Mason, 1999). Moreau (1964), accepting the same two genera, thought this arboreal family 'remarkably homogeneous'. He noted that across most of the geographical range of the family the typical adult male plumage was 'patterned brilliant yellow and black'. He did note that the yellow colour seems to have been lost in the Moluccas (and on São Tomé off central West Africa) and that the 'black' species in Malaysia tend to have bluish bills where yellow species tend towards reddish bills. For a further general discussion see Schodde & Mason (1999: 594). They noted that Meinertzhagen (1923) had suggested the Australasian region as ancestral for the orioles and felt that molecular studies supported this opinion.

The dull brownish Moluccan species closely resemble local species of friarbird (*Philemon*) and it has been suggested that the convergence producing this mimicry has been a beneficial evolution (Wallace, 1863a[2]; Diamond, 1982). The theory is that the weaker, quieter and more timid orioles benefit from a close resemblance to the noisier, gregarious and more aggressive friarbirds through reduced predation by crows and hawks due to misidentification. Apparently mimicry also occurs in figbirds (Béland, 1977).

Stresemann (1931) noted that soon after fledging orioles moult into a first year plumage that they retain until after the following breeding season. For most species the first year plumage has been described, but at subspecific level discussions of individual variation have often been uninformed about age-related change. No doubt this has mainly been due to the small sample size available. To add to the problems of understanding plumages, the literature contains several instances of females wearing male plumage[3], although missexing may have occurred.

Only one new taxon has been named since Greenway (1962), *Oriolus xanthornus andamanensis* Abdulali, 1967, renamed *O. x. reubeni* Abdulali, 1977. By contrast the specific limits of several species have been modified or disputed.

Nomenclature

Mees (1965) has shown that *Oriolus melanotis* (Bonaparte, 1850) must replace the name *O. viridifuscus* (Heine, 1859), which had been used by Greenway (1962: 123).

Taxonomy above the species level

Although there may have been a consensus view that subdividing the genus *Oriolus* was not necessary (Sharpe, 1877a; Meinertzhagen, 1923; Greenway, 1962), those concerned with overall plumage patterns will see three groups.

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[2] Quoted at some length by Stresemann (1914).

[3] The study of age and sex related plumage change is probably complicated by 'cross-dressing'. Blyth (1846), writing of *Oriolus xanthonotus* wrote "I have discovered that females of *O. melanocephalus* very commonly assume the plumage which is generally thought to be characteristic of the adult male; and I greatly suspect that the same obtains in the various other species of Oriole."

One comprises dull brown birds varying in tone to olive green, with striped underparts reminiscent of the stripes found in the first year plumage of many species in the typical group. These were once grouped in a genus *Mimeta* Vigors & Horsfield, 1827. For recognition of this as an infrageneric group see Schodde & Mason (1999: 599). The group is made up of a single wide-ranging superspecies (*sagittatus* Latham, 1802[4]) present in Wallacea, New Guinea and Australia (White & Bruce, 1986; Sibley & Monroe, 1990), and one other species (*flavocinctus* King, 1826[5]) more strictly Australasian and, in its plumage, suggesting some linkage to the figbirds. The second, typical, group is made up of species that are usually black and yellow, but sometimes with green replacing black as seen most extremely in the hood of the African highland species *Oriolus chlorocephalus* Shelley, 1896, sometimes losing the black hood as in Palaearctic *O. oriolus* (Linnaeus, 1758) and African *O. auratus* Vieillot, 1817, and also, once, retaining the hooded pattern but changing in colour scheme from black and yellow to black and maroon or black and crimson (with a variant form losing the red lipochrome and presenting as silky white, although the feather bases are maroon). The third group is Malaysian and comprises two black species. One widely distributed species that is black with red alar patches (and has red on the belly in the male) and a second, very restricted range species in Borneo that is black with no red, but with deep chestnut under tail coverts. Were this small group to be generically separated the name *Analcipus* Swainson, 1832, would apply.

Taxonomy at and below species level

Oriolus bouroensis (Quoy & Gaimard, 1830)

Oriolus bouroensis (Quoy & Gaimard, 1830) is not now the broad species that it was in the days of Meinertzhagen (1923) who recognised a single species comprising *szalayi* Madarász, 1900 (actually Meinertzhagen called this *granti* Mathews, 1916, and Sharpe (1877a) had called it *striatus* Quoy & Gaimard, 1830[6]), *viridifusca* Heine, 1859 (*viridifuscus* in Greenway, but more recently found to bear the name *melanotis* – see below), *decipiens* (Sclater, 1883) and *finschi* Hartert, 1904. The union of most of these forms had been proposed earlier by Hartert (1919), but Mayr (1944) suggested a superspecies was more appropriate and that it should include *bourouensis* [sic], *viridifuscus* – with *finschi* as a subspecies, *phaeochromus* Gray, 1861, and *forsteni* (Bonaparte, 1850). Mayr probably intended to include *sagittatus* but this is not 100% clear from his phraseology. Mayr's are the views reflected by van Bemmel (1948) and which influenced White & Bruce (1986).

Wallacean forms, in this species now just *bouroensis* and *decipiens*, were discussed by White & Bruce (1986: 318). This was essentially an extralimital species for them and is for this series too. They referred to a '*bouroensis* superspecies'. By using the name

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[4] Often cited as 1801, but see Browning & Monroe (1991) whose views are accepted pending further review.

[5] For reasons to attribute this name to King, rather than to Vigors, see Mees (1964).

[6] Mathews (1916) showed that the use of *Oriolus striatus* Hermann, 1783, for a species since considered indeterminate, rendered *striatus* Quoy & Gaimard, 1830, unavailable.

bouroensis for a wider assemblage that included the Papuan species *O. sagittatus* Latham, 1802, White and Bruce tripped in their choice of a superspecies name, *sagitattus* has almost 30 years priority. They were followed in the scope of this superspecies by Sibley & Monroe (1990). Hartert's species is now seen as three species (*szalayi*, *bouroensis* and *melanotis*).

Nominate *bouroensis* was initially described unequivocally as a friarbird! Both friarbirds and orioles occur on Buru and they are so similar that post-voyage confusion is understandable. It was Wallace (1863a) who noted that the depiction of this bird showed an oriole[7]. Whether he actually saw the specimen is not now known, but he was correct (see Dickinson et al., 2004 – this volume).

Oriolus sagittatus (Latham, 1802)

Three subspecies were recognised by Meinertzhagen (1923) and by Greenway (1962). Although Bruce in White & Bruce (1986: 319) confirmed the identity of the one known specimen from the Lesser Sundas he did not identify it to subspecies[8]. Schodde & Mason (1999) report that the nominate form of eastern Australia is that showing the most migratory habits.

Oriolus xanthonotus Horsfield, 1821

Greenway (1962) listed Java as the type locality for the nominate form. Mees (1989) showed that Horsfield (1821-24) had supplied a more precise locality: Blitar[9]. Greenway (1962: 125-126) treated a broad species, sequencing the subspecies so that the Sulu form was listed between the taxon of the islands off west Sumatra and the Palawan form. Unlike these two forms the Sulu form belongs to the Philippine group of races, which is separated below.

Oriolus steerii Sharpe, 1877a

Separated from *O. xanthonotus* by Dickinson et al. (1991)[10]. Inskipp et al. (1996) pointed out that no reasons were given. This is so. This was an oversight; the split was actually derived from the Rand MS, mentioned in the introduction to Dickinson et al. (1991) and reference should somehow have been made to that, whence comes the following extract. "Greenway, 1962, includes both the black and the grey throated orioles of the Philippines in one species *O. xanthonotus*, with which I do not agree. There is no doubt that *O. xanthonotus* (in a restricted sense), *steerii* and *albiloris*, which I regard as three species, are closely related and allopatric. (1) *O. xanthonotus* in the male with its

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[7] Wallace (1863b), in *Oriolus*, used the spelling *bouruensis* (an emendation dating back to Bonaparte, 1850, who still thought it a friarbird and associated it in error with Sulawesi). In this paper Wallace described the real Buru friarbird and it would seem that Quoy & Gaimard did not obtain it, which would further explain their confusion.

[8] M. Bruce agrees (pers. comm.) that the specimen needs re-examination to determine its affinities.

[9] About 8°06'S., 112°09'E (U.S. Board on Geographic Names Gazetteer).

[10] A separation maintained in Kennedy et al. (2000) and in Dickinson (2003).

bold, bright pattern of black head, neck and upper breast, wings and tail contrasting with yellow back and white black-streaked underparts, and great sexual dimorphism; (2) *O. steerii*, both sexes with olive upperparts, dull folded wings and tail, grey throat and upper breast and white, black streaked abdomen; and (3) *albiloris*, both sexes, with olive upperparts and folded wing, yellow underparts with dark streaking on breast and flanks, and white areas in front of eye are too different to be included in one species on the basis of similar size, small red bill, streaking on abdomen, similar pattern on tails tips and allopatry."

In *xanthonotus* immature birds reportedly have the greater wing-coverts edged with rufous (Blyth, 1842, sub nomine *castanopterus*; see Blyth, 1852)[11]. No similar specimens of *steerii* have been examined.

Rand's views were re-examined with Bob Kennedy and Ken Parkes at the AMNH with specimens of *albiloris* Ogilvie-Grant, 1894, out in front of us. We agreed that the relationship between the closely similar forms of *xanthonotus* found in the Malay Peninsula and in the Greater Sundas obviously embraced the Palawan form[12]. In many species the Palawan form is very similar to a Bornean race or identical with it. In some such cases (e.g. *Phaenicophaeus curvirostris haringtoni* Sharpe, 1877a) the species is unrepresented in the main islands of the Philippines. In others, as here, there are distinctions between the Palawan and other Philippine forms that seem striking and suggest specific differentiation has occurred (e.g. *Sitta frontalis* where the Palawan form *palawana* Hartert, 1905, has a red bill typical of western forms but all the other Philippine forms have yellow bills)[13]. In this case, while size and general pattern of plumage are maintained, sexual dimorphism is greatly diminished and the strong black colouration of male *xanthonotus* is completely replaced usually by a rather pale grey.

However, although initially tending to agree with Rand's views about *albiloris* we chose to disagree with him after careful comparisons of specimens. The facial markings on *albiloris* are characteristic, but it is hard to see these as of specific importance given the closer overall resemblance to *steerii* and the sustained if rather faint streaking of the underparts. Luzon *albiloris* is a rare bird, but as far as we know it does not occur in southern Luzon and *steerii* has not been found north of Samar so that *albiloris* is actually not even parapatric. It is quite possible that molecular studies will show that Rand's three species concept should be accepted, and perhaps that *albiloris* is an older relict species. Until then however it is retained as a well-marked geographical race of *O. steerii* although treatment of *steerii* and *albiloris* as semispecies is an option for those not wishing to wait for molecular evidence.

The *terra typica* of the nominate form has been debated by several previous authors. Some argued that *steerii* was based on a bird from Negros, others on a bird from Basilan. There were two types one from each island. Dickinson & Kennedy (2000) reviewed the

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[11] Blyth (1842) was describing a skin recently taken in the Malay peninsula and foxing should not have been a consideration.

[12] Delacour & Mayr (1946) did not accept that the Palawan form was distinct, treating it as *consobrinus* Wardlaw-Ramsay, 1880, the Bornean form.

[13] Numerous species should be considered and compared as to their treatment in this context. Our understanding of Philippine zoogeography is still limited and a consistent methodology for evaluating variation across such important inter-island gaps was not attempted in Dickinson et al. (1991).

evidence and designated a lectotype settling the nominotypical name on the birds of Negros. The original citation given by Greenway (1962: 125) is correct, but Sharpe (1877b) in a delayed paper that appeared later that year also used this name and this time accompanied it with a description of the Basilan bird (see also Dickinson et al., 2004 – this issue).

Greenway (1962: 125) cited the type locality incorrectly for *cinereogenys* Bourns & Worcester, 1894. It was described from Tawi Tawi; Bongao was not mentioned.

Oriolus tenuirostris (Blyth, 1846)

Greenway (1962: 128) treated *tenuirostris* and *chinensis* Linnaeus, 1766, as a single species. Vaurie (1959: 118) did not and treated *invisus* Riley, 1940, as a race of *tenuirostris*. Greenway gave the range of *invisus* as Southern Annam. Vaurie gave it as 'Burma with the possible exception of the north, hills of Assam, south of the Brahmaputra (?) and southern Indochina', an unusual range if only because of its implied absence in intervening Thailand. Both Greenway and Vaurie assigned *tenuirostris* a Himalayan range east to Yunnan and Vaurie speculated that it 'may breed only at high altitudes in northern Yunnan'[14].

One reason why this presents problems is that Blyth (1846) did not know where his type came from. He suggested Central India and this was cited by Greenway (1962: 128), but in fact Blyth (1852) retreated from this and did not mention Central India in connection with the specimen. Deignan (1945) corrected the type locality to Assam[15].

Deignan (1945) considered both *tenuirostris* and *diffusus* as winter visitors and as conspecific. His description of *tenuirostris* included two lines on the immature plumage, but this was not directly contrasted, or contrastable, with immature *diffusus*. The description of *invisus* by Riley (1940), differentiated by wing length and the size of the yellow tips to the inner secondaries, is flawed by the presumption that Yunnan birds are typical of nominate *tenuirostris*. In fact the wing measurements offered by Riley are essentially those of *tenuirostris* from India (Abdulali, 1977a) where Yunnan birds have longer wings and he should perhaps have named the Yunnanese bird (except that Blyth's type, by now probably lost or inaccessible, could have been a migrant from there).

David-Beaulieu (1940) reported that both *diffusus* and *tenuirostris* occurred in Tranninh in northern Laos, but that there appeared to be intermediate birds present as

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[14] Baker (1926: 9), accepting a Central Indian type locality, associated the characters of *tenuirostris* (a narrow nape band, a duller, greener back in the male, and the bill 'decidedly more slender') with birds from the lower Himalayas and across Burma to Yunnan and Thailand - birds he had himself found breeding in the hills of Assam, south of the Brahmaputra and Hopwood had found breeding in Upper Burma at between 3000 and 4000 ft. Vaurie (1959: 119) wrote of 8500-14,000 ft. in Yunnan and undoubtedly referred to Forrest's birds, including a nestling, listed by Rothschild (1926: 336). But why Vaurie attached birds from Assam to *invisus* is unexplained. Perhaps he noted the similar wing lengths.

[15] Deignan did not explain this, except to say that central India had been an error, but he was very probably influenced by Baker's discovery of breeding in Assam (see above). Greenway (1962) did not list this correction.

well. David-Beaulieu (1944) expanded this information slightly, stating that *diffusus* was present from April to September and *tenuirostris* from April to October and to this form he attached the birds that seemed to him to be intermediate. His comparisons between the two focussed on plumage: he saw *diffusus* as having a broader black nuchal band and *tenuirostris* as having the back much greener. Although he treated both as subspecies of *O. chinensis*, Delacour (1951) pointed out that subspecies do not breed in sympatry (as was implied by the dates supplied). David-Beaulieu did not present evidence of nests, eggs or paired birds at the nest, nor did he offer any views on vocal differences. No critical comparisons have been traced that compare the features of the conflicting Tranninh birds in greater detail and follow-up studies there are not on record. Although the structure of the bill of *tenuirostris* differs from that of *diffusus* David-Beaulieu did not comment on this. His collected specimens[16] also need to be re-examined to distinguish birds in first year plumage from full adults. Perhaps when this is done the 'intermediates' will be found to be first year birds. Inskipp et al. (1996) suggested that this might be so.

Delacour's separation into two species was followed by Vaurie (1959) and by Deignan (1963)[17]. Ripley (1961, 1982) and Ali & Ripley (1972) did not accept this split, but the map in Ali & Ripley (1972: 105) shows that they failed to appreciate that long-winged '*tenuirostris*' breed in Yunnan. Authors on China have differed: Cheng (1958) accepted two species but following the publication by Greenway (1962) adopted a single species (Cheng, 1976, 1987). A single species was also preferred by Etchecopar & Hüe (1983), but Meyer de Schauensee (1984) followed Delacour[18].

What is to be drawn from this confused and contradictory patchwork? This, of course, is a situation typical of the problems now faced when we try to draw together conclusions that seemed valid in national works, but which break down when examined in a pan-Asian context. The following points can be retained: a) the reports of sympatry in the breeding season in northern Laos need to be substantiated or rebutted and unless rebutted they provide a reason to list two species; b) the *tenuirostris* breeding at high elevation in Yunnan may or may not be equivalent to Blyth's type, but Deignan's correction of Blyth's type locality to Assam associates the name with the shorter-winged birds breeding there; c) birds from south Vietnam need to be compared with those of Assam to validate or invalidate *invisus*.

In summary the case for two species remains hypothetical. The two are retained here mainly to provide a further stimulus to attempts to substantiate the hypothesis. The current much increased amount of field observation throughout south-east Asia should lead, and is already sometimes leading, to focussed problem resolution.

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[16] Now partly in Yale and partly at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, but perhaps not all accounted for.

[17] Deignan (1965, pers. comm.) wrote that the characters of the intermediates implied limited local hybridisation.

[18] Although Delacour was confused about the Philippines, stating that some northern populations of *Oriolus chinensis* reached there as winter vistors.

Oriolus chinensis Linnaeus, 1766

The *terra typica* of the nominate form, the Philippines not China, was the subject of a previous note (Dickinson, 2000).

The breeding range of the species is still not well understood; the northern migrant form (*diffusus* Sharpe, 1877a) seems not to breed in Thailand (Lekagul & Round, 1991). The Malay Peninsula was apparently invaded from the south by *O. c. maculatus* Vieillot, 1817, from about 1927 onwards (Medway & Wells, 1976) and some northward expansion has occurred. The breeding range of *diffusus* in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, if it breeds there at all, needs definition. The range gap in southern South-East Asia may signal that the current species is over-lumped.

During the first quarter of the 20th century when ornithologists were exploring the expansion of trinomial systematics the broad species *Oriolus chinensis* as we now know it came together in steps. The different patterns of black markings on the crown offered some opportunities to group regional taxa, so too did the distribution of yellow in the secondaries and wing coverts and the overall tone of the yellow in the plumage which reaches a golden-orange hue in some Wallacean forms. By the time of Meinertzhagen (1923) all the original 'species' had been brought together, although Oberholser (1926) continued to resist this degree of lumping. Taking *chinensis* and *tenuirostris* together Meinertzhagen listed 21 subspecies. Since then only *sipora* Chasen & Kloss, 1926, *invisus* Riley, 1940, and *saani* Jany, 1955, have been newly described and were retained by Greenway (1962). Some consolidation has occurred; White & Bruce (1986) felt that a single form sufficed for Sulawesi and placed *macassariensis* Hartert, 1925, in synonymy. They also placed Tukang Besi birds (*oscillans* Hartert, 1903) with those of Bonerate and other islands in the Flores Sea, and considered *saani* Jany, 1955, of 'Majau' Island[19] best included with *formosus* Cabanis, 1872, of the Sangihe Islands[20]. The name applicable to birds from the Banggai Islands (Peleng), *stresemanni* Neumann, 1939, was placed in the synonymy of the Sula Islands form *frontalis* Wallace, 1863b by Greenway (1962: 129) but the population has been re-examined by Eck (1976) and shown to be smaller than that of the Sula Islands, with a higher wing-tip index, and *stresemanni* is here accepted as distinct.

In the Philippines southern birds described as *yamamurae* Kuroda, 1927, were considered merely intergrades between nominate *chinensis* and *suluensis* Sharpe, 1877a, by Greenway (1962), following Rand (1951), but *yamamurae* was accepted by Parkes (1965, 1973), whose views[21] were reflected by Dickinson et al. (1991). The two subspecies proposed by Gilliard (1949), *fugaensis* and *sorsogonensis*, have not been accepted since the review by Rand (1951). Parkes (1965) did not accept the validity of *palawanensis* Tweeddale, 1878, and its recognition in Dickinson et al. (1991) was accidentally derived from Greenway. This requires correction and Palawan birds should be assigned to nominate *chinensis*.

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[19] This isolated island, now spelled Mayu (The Times, 2000), lies in the Molucca Sea, halfway between Sulawesi and Halmahera.

[20] Bruce (in litt.) now feels that the Mayu population should be re-examined.

[21] Parkes (1965) showed that Rand's measurements of Sulu birds contained errors and that Sulu birds are not just shorter-tailed but also longer-winged.

Oriolus xanthornus (Linnaeus, 1758)

Students of the early literature on Indian ornithology will find that the name *Oriolus melanocephalus* Linnaeus, 1766, was used until it was accepted that zoological nomenclature should date back to the 10th edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* when it was eventually noticed that it was necessary to use the earlier name *Coracias xanthornus* Linnaeus, 1758 (see Hellmayr, 1919)[22]. It was also briefly referred to as *Oriolus luteolus* (Linnaeus, 1758), see Baker (1921, 1926).

This is a species that has suffered from a location associated with the type material attributed to the nominotypical form, namely 'Bengal'[23]. South Asian birds vary in the extent of yellow in the wing. The Sri Lankan form, *ceylonensis* Bonaparte, 1850, has comparatively less yellow. Legge (1879) argued against drawing a boundary between that form and the Indian form at the strait between Ceylon and India. In his view birds from peninsular India were much like those of Ceylon and they were quite distinct from those of the Himalayas. The nominate form was believed to be based on a specimen from Bengal, which might of course have been collected elsewhere. Legge believed that the plate and supporting text in Edwards (1747), drawn upon by Linnaeus for his description, was of a bird from peninsular India. In Legge's view Himalayan birds, which implies those of the lower Himalayas, needed a new name and for them he proposed *himalayanus* Legge, 1879. He did not however recommend that the type locality should be 'corrected', and so, over the years, comparisons have usually been based on the concept that 'Bengal' must imply northern India. Thus the nominate form is constantly assumed to be that of the Himalayas.

Whistler & Kinnear (1933) sought to overcome this by extracting the old synonym *maderaspatanus* Franklin, 1831, for application to Indian birds from both the peninsula and the Gangetic plain[24], but they also failed to restrict the type locality of the nominate form to a locality north of the Gangetic plain. The use of *maderaspatanus* was rejected by Biswas (1947) on the grounds that the distinction suggested was not valid and was questioned by Rand & Fleming (1957), but Ripley (1961), who was able to draw on MSS work prepared by both Whistler and Ticehurst, accepted the device of an intervening form. Greenway (1962) followed suit, but his range included the Andamans. Abdulali (1977a) contended that Orissa birds appeared to be of the northern form and that restriction of the type locality of *maderaspatanus* to Jubbulpore did not suffice.

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[22] Baker (1926) wrote that Hartert had recently discovered this.

[23] '*Coracias Xanthornus*' Linnaeus, 1758, was provided with a brief description and three indications. The last of these referred to a work by Catesby, which led Linnaeus to give a *terra typica* of 'America'. However, the first indication is to Edwards (1747) and he explicitly wrote 'Mr. Joseph Dandridge in Moorfields obliged me with this bird; he received it from a relation of his at Bengal, in the East-Indies'. Ripley (1961: 285) brought Chandernagore into the story based on Stresemann (1952: 517) who associated Brisson's name 'Le Loriot de Bengale' with Pierre Poivre and thought Chandernagore a probable locality. However Linnaeus (1758) did not mention Brisson. He first did so in connection with the junior synonym *Oriolus melanocephalus* Linnaeus, 1766. Poivre was collecting in and after 1751 and Edwards described his 'Black-headed Indian Icterus' in 1747! In summary, Chandernagore, although possible as a restricted type locality for the 1766 name, cannot be validly applied to the 1758 name.

[24] Which stretches through the northern plains and east and south to Calcutta the capital of 'Bengal' at the time.

Majumdar (1980) re-examined the merits of *maderaspatanus* and supported its recognition, but his comparison was between north Indian birds and south Indian birds. There is no sign that he considered whether the latter were so close to *ceylonensis* as to be doubfully distinct and nor did he take into account the possible impact of variation across the extensive south-east Asian range of nominate *xanthornus*. In the context of India alone his review may have seemed useful, but against the broader picture it is found wanting and a thorough review is still required, for which one objective should be a decision on whether to restrict the type locality of nominate *xanthornus* to that part of Bengal that lies within the Gangetic plain[25] or to that part which lies in the Himalayan foothills[26]. Account would have to be taken of probability, but by 1745 the East India Company was strongly established in Calcutta and much of present day Bihar and West Bengal would have been an accessible source for birds brought to market or collected. Legge (1879) was right in arguing that the characters discussed and depicted by Edwards must inform this. In the meantime it seems best to retain Whistler & Kinnear's treatment.

Whether the Andaman population is a resident one was not clear to Whistler & Kinnear (1933: 585) although they noted that birds from there were smaller. Abdulali, (1967) wrote 'this oriole has been accepted as a migrant to the Andamans' but went on to name it *andamanensis*. By inference then he must have been satisfied that it is a resident form, especially as he selected a February specimen as his type. The name first proposed proved to be preoccupied and Abdulali (1977b) renamed it *reubeni*.

In the Greater Sundas the distribution of this species is curious. It is absent from Java and from much of Sumatra and Borneo. In Sumatra van Marle & Voous (1988) thought it likely to be no more than a winter visitor, principally to the east coast and in recent times at least only in small numbers. In north-eastern Borneo[27] there is a resident population (*tanakae* Kuroda, 1925) with a restricted range near the coast and on some of the islands (Smythies, 2000[28]). Both in Borneo and in Sumatra it has been found in mangroves as well as secondary forest.

It is hard to see how there can be any current gene flow between this population and those of the Asian mainland. Further examination is obviously needed. There may be very few specimens; if so and further collecting were to be complemented the population size should be assessed first.

Oriolus hosii Sharpe, 1892[29]

This is the least known Asian oriole, restricted to Borneo and there confined to the forested middle slopes of mountains essentially just in Sarawak. It is apparently absent

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[25] In which case the race of the Himalayas should be called *hodsoni* Swainson, 1838, and *xanthornus* might be used either for the birds of peninsular India alone, or as Legge (1880) preferred for those of the peninsula and of Ceylon.

[26] In which case either the present nomenclature could be more safely retained; otherwise it might seem easier to submerge *maderaspatanus* in *ceylonensis*.

[27] In fact in south-east Sabah and adjoining Kalimantan.

[28] Dated 1999 on the title page but put on sale about May 2000 (G. Davison pers. comm.).

[29] Widely emended to *hosei* as used by Smythies (1957, 1960, 1981, 2000).

from Sabah (Smythies, 2000). It comes into contact, probably geographically very limited contact, with *O. cruentus* but that is typically a bird of higher elevations. These two are the only black orioles and yet we do not seem to have any clear evidence that they are closely related, although Smythies (1957) noted that Tom Harrisson (former Curator of Sarawak Museum) thought they might even be conspecific.

Oriolus traillii (Vigors, 1832)

The races in this species are well marked. Particular interest centres on the relationship between the 'maroon' forms and the silvery *mellianus* Stresemann, 1922, discussed below, which was originally described as a race of this species.

A winter record from south-east Thailand has recently been shown by Round & Nadee (2001) to be attributable to *nigellicauda* (Swinhoe, 1870) rather than to *robinsoni* Delacour, 1927, as first suggested in plate 91 of Lekagul & Round (1991).

Oriolus mellianus Stresemann, 1922

The shining white adult male was described by Delacour (1930). As Stresemann (1931) explained, this was eight years after this form was described, as a race of *traillii*, based on an adult female. This is a migratory form with a rather limited breeding range. Not much more is known now than was summarised by Stresemann (1931), when he gave this form specific status. He presented in evidence drawings based on microscopic examination of the feathers in *mellianus* and *traillii* which satisfied him that the difference was not just a loss of lipochrome, but was one accompanied by a structural development in the feathers changing the texture to a more silky one. This he felt showed that there had been a long and gradual change setting the two apart. A re-evaluation of this, using modern technology, and based on current understanding of pigmentation, is needed to validate the separation of this species from *O. traillii.*

Sphecotheres vieilloti Vigors & Horsfield, 1827

The arrangement of this genus employed by Greenway (1962), who recognised four species, has been discarded by later authors. Ford (1975) proposed that all the fig-birds be treated as conspecific. This approach was accepted by White in White & Bruce (1986), but Bruce had reservations.

Greenway (1962) considered this species to be restricted to New Guinea and northern and eastern Australia, for which reason no doubt it was not discussed by White & Bruce (1986).

Schodde & Mason (1999) examined what White & Bruce (1986) and others had written about the genus and said that relationships were still controversial. They attached *flaviventris* Gould, 1850, to *vieilloti*. White & Bruce had discussed *flaviventris* in a different context. White not only made this a subspecies of *S. viridis* Vieillot, 1816 – the appropriate name for Ford's broad species – he also submerged *cucullatus* (von Rosenberg, 1866) of the Kai islands in *flaviventris*. Mees (1980) declined to do this on the grounds that the two taxa were too widely separated geographically for this to be comfortable when there was a distinction apparent in bill depth. Ford's synonymization

of *cucullatus* seems to be well supported by the wing lengths cited for the Kai population (White & Bruce, 1986: 320) and for the Arnhem Land birds (*ashbyi* Mathews, 1912) by Schodde & Mason (1999: 595), but the views of Mees should be re-examined with a larger sample.

Sphecotheres viridis Vieillot, 1816

Bruce in White & Bruce (1986) dissented over the treatment of *hypoleucus* Finsch, 1898, believing this to be distinct enough for recognition, as had Mayr (1944). Schodde & Mason (1999) accepted that *hypoleucus* is a derivative of *viridis* and treated these two monotypic species as a superspecies.

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I should also record the help provided by Herbert Deignan in the late 1960s as his notes from that time have also informed this paper and to thank my co-authors on Philippine birds Ken Parkes and Robert S. Kennedy for their involvement in discussions about *Oriolus steerii* and *Oriolus albiloris* and Joe T. Marshall Jr. for making available a copy of Rand's draft for a checklist on Philippine birds.

Thanks also go to Gerlof Mees who years ago warned me that not every conclusion offered by Stresemann (1952) could be accepted without further research. Finally, I extend my particular thanks to Murray Bruce and Robert S. Kennedy for their comments on a first draft, and to David Wells for his helpful comments as a referee.

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[31] Stresemann (1930) referred to this as pp. 1-4 based on a separate.

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[32] Not all authorities accept the date 1802; for the present we follow Browning & Monroe (1991) in doing so.

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[33] For the use of 1832 see Browning & Monroe (1991).
[34] Not volume 17 as cited by Greenway (1962: 131).
[35] This paper is listed with the date 1866 in Zool. Record Aves for 1867.

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