

Systematic notes on Asian birds. 6. A re-examination of the application of the name *Oriolus steerii* Sharpe, 1877

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Keywords: *Oriolus steerii*; Philippine oriole; type locality; lectotype; citation.

There has been some confusion over whether the name *Oriolus steerii* Sharpe, 1877, should be attached to the population of Basilan or the population of Negros of the Philippine oriole. Two separate descriptions appeared (Sharpe, 1877 a, b) and differed. A decision on which was the prior description was taken by Dickinson et al. (1991) and a fresh review of the facts shows that they were incorrect in selecting Basilan as the type locality of the nominate form. That decision was in contradiction to the approach taken by Greenway in Mayr & Greenway (1962). As there, the name must be assigned to the population of Negros. As a result, the population of Basilan must be called *O. s. basilanicus* Ogilvie-Grant, 1896, or if a broader species-concept is preferred *O. xanthonotus basilanicus* Ogilvie-Grant, 1896. The name *nigrostriatus* Bourns & Worcester, 1894, returns to the synonymy of nominate *steerii*. The specimen in Tring is designated as the lectotype of *steerii* Sharpe, 1877, because the Michigan specimen, from Isabela de Basilan, is not representative of the nominate population of *steerii*.

Introduction

At the time of the preparation of the BOU Check-list to the Birds of the Philippines we believed that it was possible to demonstrate that Basilan was the correct choice as the type locality of *Oriolus steerii* Sharpe, 1877. Our reasons were given in a note under this species.

Our view, at that time, was based on the evidence from the Basilan type. This was treated in Sharpe's paper on the novelties from the first Steere Expedition to the Philippines (Sharpe, 1877b). In that paper there is a description in Latin of *Oriolus steerii*; it was our view that this was the original description. It lists two specimens, a male from Isabela de Basilan and an unsexed bird from Negros. Following the description there is a statement of how the Negros specimen differed. This infers that the description was taken from the Basilan specimen. Above the description in Latin appears the text "*Oriolus Steerii*, Sharpe, Cat. B. iii. p. 213, pl. x."

The two specimens listed were proposed as types; a male from Basilan, which is in Michigan (UMMZ B. 120a), although it was listed there, with some doubt, as from Negros (Storer, 1988), and an unsexed Negros bird in Tring (BMNH 1876.8.28.10) (Warren & Harrison, 1971).

The specimen in Michigan had been examined (K.C. Parkes in litt. 8 Sept. 1986) and it had five labels attached to it:

1. Old dark card label lettered "Type *Oriolus Steerii*, Sharpe. Beale-Steere coll."

2. An old large Michigan University Museum label saying "No. B120a. *Oriolus steerii* Sharpe. Basilan, Philippine Isls. Beale and Steere." Above "B120a" is written "6677" and "Basilan" is crossed off and "Negros" written on.
3. Sharpe's label, with "*Oriolus steerii*, Sharpe, Type" in his writing.
4. A 1903 University of Michigan Museum label with "Negros, Phil. Isl. B. 120a" on recto and "The B. M. Cat. gives Isabella de Basilan." on verso. "Negros" has been lined out in pencil; again "6677" has been written above "B.120a".
5. A new red type label.

The original label data and the original 'UMMZ entry', or register entry, both gave "Isabella de Basilan" and the amendment to the locality on the label is incorrect. It was caused, presumably, by some misunderstanding over the nature of earlier debate as to the correct type locality. In the BOU Check-list (Dickinson et al., 1991) we considered this specimen to be the holotype on the grounds that the Latin description related to it and that the differences in size, colour and striping below in the associated Basilan bird were made clear — although not thought sufficient by Sharpe to warrant a separate name.

However, the specimen in Tring, which is undoubtedly from Negros, has also been listed as the holotype (Warren & Harrison, 1971).

Re-examination of the evidence

The Negros population was earlier reviewed on the basis of the work of the Menage Expedition and the name *Oriolus nigrostriatus* Bourns & Worcester, 1894, was given to birds from Negros and Masbate. These authors wrote "the first specimen of this species was obtained by Dr. Steere in the island of Negros in 1874, and was described by Dr. Sharpe ... who called attention to certain differences between it and *O. steerii* from Basilan, but did not care to found a species on such slender evidence as he had to hand."

Soon after John Whitehead collected in Negros and obtained a series (Ogilvie-Grant, 1896). This author considered Bourns & Worcester "mistaken in supposing that the type of *O. steerii* comes from Basilan" and pointed out that the original description was the nearly simultaneous one in the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum (Sharpe, 1877), and that the description there and the accompanying plate make it quite clear that the Negros bird was the specimen described. However, this view was not initially accepted (Worcester & Bourns, 1898), and as these two authors had accompanied Steere on his second expedition to the Philippines it is likely that their views were formed by his. Indeed, Steere was alive and may have been consulted.

There was, one can imagine, room for doubt over the exact dates of the two published descriptions, although the inclusion of the page reference to the Catalogue in the text of the Transactions of the Linnean Society article meant that the former should have appeared first.

Indeed, the next thorough work on Philippine birds (McGregor, 1910) shows evidence of further research on this point. In this the name *Oriolus steerii* is credited to "Sharpe, Cat. Bds. Brit. Mus, 3, 1877 (Oct. or earlier)", based on a "description of the adult from Negros" and the same name appears, in the synonymy of *Oriolus basilani-*

cus Ogilvie-Grant, 1896, with the reference to the Transactions of the Linnean Society paper and a date of November 1877.

After a careful comparison of the Negros type with the description in the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum we are now satisfied that this approach was correct. The description in English (Sharpe, 1877a) is, we agree, of the Negros type in the Natural History Museum in Tring. It is not a translation from the Latin, which was of the Basilan bird (Sharpe, 1877b); it has clearly been written, and we believe rewritten, with the Negros specimen in hand. The plate in the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum is also apparently painted from the Negros bird. Sharpe (1877a) gave a range that included Negros and Basilan.

We have not been able to further substantiate the dates of publication, but believe the dates suggested by McGregor (1910) should be accepted and that, priority having been accorded to the description in the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum, the type locality must of necessity be that of the bird described. This does not change our view that what Steere and Sharpe both *originally intended* was to describe a new form from Basilan with a closely similar population on Negros. Sharpe (1877b) only provided descriptions in Latin for taxa that were proposed as new, and in his introduction under the heading 'Negros' he listed this species as new (not doing so under Basilan). We believe that this proves that this paper was written first. However, because the new volume of the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum appeared first the original intent was not quite what was achieved. The result was one new taxon, as intended. The importance of whether its type locality was Basilan or Negros was not foreseen, both specimens being made types. In the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum the specimen in the BM is referred to not as "type of species" (the standard term employed – usually for a holotype) but as "one of the typical specimens". Sharpe's written "type" on the Basilan specimen in Michigan probably indicates the earlier intention, but is consistent with it being one of the typical specimens as it was declared to be (Sharpe, 1877a).

The island of Basilan is now considered to hold a distinct population, and the opportunity (presented by the confirmation that the name must be attributed to the birds of Negros) is hereby taken to designate the Negros specimen (BM 1876.8.28.10) as the lectotype. The Basilan male, although not representative of the population named *Oriolus steerii*, was declared a type and is now therefore a paralectotype.

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to K.C. Parkes for his work on this problem; following his recent illness we have tried unsuccessfully to obtain confirmation one way or another on whether he wished to co-author this paper. In the absence of this we must leave him the freedom to disagree with our conclusions. We hope, of course, that this will not prove necessary. We would also like to acknowledge constructive and helpful discussion with Michael Walters at the Natural History Museum, Tring, Herts., U.K.

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Received: 20.ix.1999

Accepted: 10.i.2000

Edited: C. van Achterberg