The taxonomy and nomenclature of Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapillus* (Hartlaub)

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Summary.—All authorities over the past century have cited Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapillus* as having been named by Hartlaub in 1854, but in fact the name dates from 1850. The type locality has been given as Sierra Leone, while the population in Senegambia has been separated as race *morelorum*. However, Hartlaub's name is based on a type from Gambia, while analysis of a series of specimens from Nigeria to Gambia suggests individual variation in the species is extensive and does not support Érard's (1991) claim of a subspecific difference. We believe that the species should be considered monotypic.

Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapillus* (Hartlaub) was considered monotypic until Érard (1991) proposed that populations in Senegambia were, when compared with material from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, sufficiently distinct to merit subspecific recognition. Although he initially named Senegambian birds *moreli*, Érard (1992) emended this to *morelorum*, in accordance with Art. 31.1.2 of the *International code of zoological nomenclature* (ICZN 1999: 37), as the name explicitly honoured a husband and wife team.

Moreover, Érard's proposal appears to have assumed that the locality of Hartlaub's type was Sierra Leone, albeit not explicitly. The citation for Hartlaub's type is given by Rand (1960: 274) as: *Trichophorus canicapillus* Hartlaub, 1854, *J. Orn*. 2: 25 – Sierra Leone, Gambia. The correct citation for *Bleda canicapillus* is to Hartlaub's publication in 1850, and the reference to Sierra Leone stems from Hartlaub's (1850) citation of 'Brimstone-bellied Thrush, Lath. *Gen. Hist*. V: 103'. Latham (1822: 103) reads: 'Thrush 112.—BRIMSTONE-BELLIED THRUSH. Length seven inches. Bill stout, dusky, at the base a few hairs; top and sides of the head ash-colour; rest of the plumage above olive-green; beneath from the chin pale yellow; tail rounded, the three outer feathers with the ends pale yellow, but chiefly on the inner webs; the wings reach to the middle of the tail; the first quill is half the length of the others, the second reaches three-fourths, but the fourth is the longest; legs brown. Inhabits Sierra Leone.'

The reference here to Latham's 'Brimstone-bellied Thrush' is sufficient to provide a description for Hartlaub's bird (F. D. Steinheimer *in litt*. 2007), based on Art. 12.2.1 of the *Code* (ICZN 1999: 16). Thus, it is incorrect to treat—as Sclater (1930) did—Hartlaub's 1850 citation as a *nomen nudum*. Rand regarded Latham's picture and the specimen in the Überseemuseum Bremen as syntypes. Previously, however, Sclater (1930: 378), though also citing the 1854 paper, had given the type locality as 'Sierra Leone (ex Beitr. Orn. Westafr. p.25 [=24],1852, nom. nud.)'. In fact, the correct date of the first part of Hartlaub's *Beitrag zur Ornithologie Westafrica's*, published in *Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der Naturwissenschaften* vol. 2(2): 1–56, is 1850 (www.archive.org/stream/12beitragzurorni00hart#page/n5/mode/2up). On p. 24 of this work is: '*Trichophorus canicapillus*, nob[is] n[ova] sp[ecies].- Brimstone bellied Thrush, Lath. Gen. Hist. V 103. - Sierra Leone. Mus. Brem.' The correct citation is therefore: *Trichophorus canicapillus* Hartlaub, 1850, Beitrag zur Ornithologie Westafrica's [Erster Beitrag]. *Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der Naturwissenschaften* 2(2): 24.

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TABLE 1
Bill measurements of *Bleda canicapillus* specimens at BMNH, Tring: length from tip to skull, width at distal edge of nares. Data for Senegal taken from Érard (1991).

	Males		Females	
	Bill length	**Bill width**	**Bill length**	**Bill width**
Senegal				
Range	19.5		19.5–20.5	
n	1		2	
Gambia*	20.9	5.0		
n	1			
Guinea Bissau				
Mean	22.55	5.25	19.15	4.65
Range	21.4–23.7	4.8–5.7	19.0–19.3	4.5–4.8
n	2		2	
Sierra Leone				
Mean	21.74	4.94	19.47	4.7
Range	20.6–22.4	4.3–5.6	19.0–20.3	4.5–4.8
n	7		3	
Liberia				
Mean	21.88	4.80	20.50	5.13
Range	20.1–23.1	4.4–5.3	18.8–21.6	4.9–5.6
n	5		9	
Ghana				
Mean	22.1	5.27	19.60	4.5
Range	21.6–22.9	5.2–5.3		
n	3		1	
Nigeria				
Mean	22.93	5.34	21.09	5.03
Range	21.0–24.7	5.0–5.5	19.8–22.5	4.6–5.4
n	8		8	
Total (BMNH)	26		23	

* The sole Gambian specimen at BMNH is unsexed, but inferred from measurements to be male. Other unsexed specimens (Sierra Leone = 3, Ghana = 7) excluded.

There is also the reference in Hartlaub (1850) to 'Mus. Brem.'. This clearly points to a specimen, and we have confirmed that specimen no. 8213 in the Überseemuseum, Bremen is Hartlaub's type. It has two labels: an orange one: '*Trichophorus canicapillus* Hartlaub, 1852 / Fundort: Gambia, Westafrica', and an older, brown label: 'Criniger 8213 / *Trichophorus canicapillus* Hartl. Beitr. W. Afr. 1850 / p.24. W. Afr. Sp. 254. / Finsch Monog. J. f. Orn. 1867 / p.31. / Typus der Art! / Westafrica / Gambia.' This specimen is undoubtedly the type. Rand (1960: 274) was incorrect in positing two syntypes, one of them being Latham's (1822) 'Brimstone-bellied Thrush'.

As mentioned above, Érard (1991) assumed that Sierra Leone was the sole type locality attached to Hartlaub's name. Instead, the type locality of Hartlaub's type specimen is Gambia, which makes Érard's (1992) *morelorum* a junior synonym of Hartlaub's name.

There remains the issue of whether two subspecies can be recognised. Érard (1991) maintained that birds from Senegambia differ from the nominate over the rest of the species' range (Guinea-Bissau to Nigeria) in having; (i) paler yellow underparts, (ii) paler terminal spots on the outer rectrices, (iii) a paler grey head, (iv) browner or greyer, less

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green upperparts, and (v) a shorter and wider bill. Based on an examination, independently by both authors, of the 59 specimens of *Bleda canicapillus* in the Natural History Museum (BMNH), Tring, which, significantly, include material from Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau, we conclude that the species is monotypic. Taking the differences claimed by Érard (1991) in order.

(i) Underparts coloration.—While there is little overall difference in specimens from Nigeria to Liberia, there is a significant amount of variation in the breast, belly and flanks of the 13 specimens from Sierra Leone. For example, the underparts of BMNH 1930.12.3.322 (male, from Buedu near Kailahun) are, like those from further east, bright yellow with darker olive-green patches confined to the breast-sides and flanks. In the underparts of BMNH 1930.12.3.321 (female, Kamasigi), the amount of olive-green on the breast-sides and flanks is more extensive and the correspondingly more restricted area of yellow on the central breast and belly is duller. This trend is continued in BMNH 1904.6.5.232 (unsexed, Bo), where only the central breast and belly is dirty yellow. Lastly, the palest underparts of all 59 specimens at Tring occurred in a specimen from Sierra Leone (BMNH 1966.16.1632 Benguema, male). Furthermore, the label on this specimen records 'testes enlarged', so any possibility that this is merely a young bird is discounted.

Tring has four specimens from Guinea Bissau (BMNH 1910.5.6.625–628, Gunnal, Portuguese Guinea) and one from Gambia (unsexed, Vellum Cat. XV.440a, no precise locality). The underparts of the former, all from the same locality and collected within one month of each other, vary in the saturation of the yellow and in the amount of olive-green suffusion on the flanks and lower breast in particular. The underparts coloration and pattern of the Gambian specimen are comparable with those of the Benguema, Sierra Leone specimen, if somewhat darker. Overall, therefore, specimens from the western range of *canicapillus* exhibit much variation in this character, and there is no clear, geographically restricted difference in underparts coloration consistent with that described by Érard (1991).

(ii) Terminal spots on outer rectrices.—Variation in the colour of the terminal spots on the outer tail feathers broadly mirrors that described for the underparts. Thus, in specimens from Liberia eastwards, the spots are yellow, while in those from Sierra Leone west, they are yellow or obviously more pale. They are palest in BMNH 1930.12.3.322 (Buedu near Kailahun, Sierra Leone) and Vellum Cat. XV.440a from Gambia. However, the variation in the intensity of colour in the material from Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau is again at odds with what Érard (1991) suggested.

(iii) Head colour.—We found relatively little variation among all 59 specimens at Tring—although the Gambian specimen mentioned above was among the darkest—and conclude that this character is invalid.

(iv) Upperparts coloration.—Variation in the material in Tring is modest and only partially consistent with Érard's findings. Thus, while birds from the west (Gambia and Guinea Bissau) are dull green or dull brownish green, and those from Liberia east trending greener, there is again variation in the Sierra Leone material, with BMNH 1930.12.3.322 (Buedu near Kailahun) greenest, BMNH 1966.16.1632 (Benguema) brownest, and the rest intermediate. However, there is also variation in specimens from Nigeria, where at least four have dull greenish-brown backs (BMNH 1966.16.1634, female, Ede; 1966.16.1638, female, Mamu Forest Reserve; BMNH 1947.24.17–18, female and male, Owerri). Once more, therefore, the validity of this character is questionable.

(v) Bill size.—Érard (1991) also stated that bill size is 'shorter, appearing conspicuously wider' in *morelorum*. Our measurements of bill length (Table 1) of a much larger sample indicate that it is at least equally likely that birds in Senegambia are at the end of a cline of

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decreasing size from east to west, and do not support Érard's suggestion that bill width in Senegambia is greater than in birds from elsewhere.

Finally, we also compared the Gambian specimen (Vellum Cat. XV.440a) with Érard's type of *morelorum*, using photographs of the latter (CG 1984, no. 528) kindly supplied by A. Préviato of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris. This generally resembles the coloration of the BMNH specimen ventrally, but the central upper breast is noticeably paler. We also compared these two specimens from Senegambia with photographs of Hartlaub's type. This specimen, also from Gambia, is rather yellower than the other two, although still dingy. In view of the above, we conclude that there is no subspecific variation in *Bleda canicapillus* and the species should be treated as monotypic.

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