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Cooperative breeding in captive Emerald Starlings *Coccycolius iris*: an update

In my paper with the above title (Wilkinson 1996, *Malimbus* 18: 134-141), I suggested, on the basis of the relative frequency of provisioning behaviour, that the Emerald Starling "O", which fed chicks at the 1993 nest but not in 1992 or 1994 may have been a female. Post-mortem examination has since shown it to be a male. This indicates that the complement at the 1993 nest was two males and one female. This is consistent with helping in the Chestnut-bellied Starling *Spreo pulcher* in which most adult helpers are male. The immature helpers in 1994 were therefore the offspring of the female parent and of at least one of the males O and Unb, all of which were present at the 1994 breeding attempt.

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The Mali Firefinch *Lagonosticta virata* in Senegal

The Mali Firefinch *Lagonosticta virata* is found near Bamako and elsewhere in Mali (Bates 1934, Lamarche 1981, Nicolai 1982, Goodwin 1982). Like the Chad Firefinch *L. umbrinodorsalis* of Chad and northern Cameroon (Erard & Roche 1977, Brunel *et al.* 1980, Payne & Louette 1983) it occurs on rocky slopes of hillsides in shrubby vegetation, denuded laterite slabs, patches of grass and scattered trees (Nicolai 1982, Wheatley 1995). The calls of *L. virata* (Nicolai 1982) are similar to those of *L. umbrinodorsalis* (Brunel *et al.* 1980) and differ from those of Jameson's Firefinch *L. rhodopareia* of the dry bush in east and southern Africa, in lacking the "purr" churring alarm of *L. rhodopareia*; the calls of *L. virata* also differ from those of African Firefinch *L. rubricata* (Payne 1973, 1982, Payne *et al.* 1993) which occurs in more humid grassland and bush. Following Nicolai (1982), *L. virata* has been recognized as a distinct species (Sibley & Monroe 1990, Clement *et al.* 1993).

Senegal records of *L. rubricata* (Morel & Morel 1990) are based on an observation south of Ziguinchor and a specimen taken in eastern Senegal in a scrub woodland drier than the usual habitat of this species. The specimen is number 1403 in the ORSTOM collection at Mbour, Senegal (formerly housed at Richard-Toll). I examined and photographed the skin and later compared the description and photos with *L. virata* from Mali in the British Museum at Tring, *L. virata* taken at Bamako (Mali) in the Copenhagen Museum, *L. umbrinodorsalis* from Chad in the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, and *L. rhodopareia rhodopareia* from Eritrea and Kenya in the Copenhagen Museum and the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology. The Senegal specimen, which was taken in the "region 100 km sud de

Goudiry" (about 13°48'N, 12°40'W) in May 1966 by P. Surdel, is a Mali Firefinch *L. virata*, in adult plumage. The outer primaries are broad, not narrow and emarginate as in *L. rubricata polionota*; they are short (22 mm), growing in sheath, and not retained juvenile feathers. The label indicates that the bird is male (with gonads "indiff."), the bill blackish blue, the feet brown, weight 8 g and wing 49 mm (short because in moult). The upperparts are grey-brown, the crown grey, and the underparts red with small, white flank spots, traits which are characteristic of both *L. virata* and *L. r. polionota*. This appears to be the first Senegal record of *L. virata*. Its occurrence in southeast Senegal suggests that it may occur in close contact with *L. rubricata* near the northern Fouta Djallon.

The ORSTOM collection includes other grass-finches taken by Paul Surdel at the same locality and date, including Black-faced Firefinch *L. larvata vinacea*, Bar-breasted Firefinch *L. rufopicta* and Red-winged Pytilia *Pytilia phoenicoptera*. G.J. Morel informs me that Surdel was a bird dealer in Dakar, whose collectors worked within Senegal, and he provided several specimens for the ORSTOM collection. The bird was captive long enough to lose and simultaneously partially regrow the outer four primaries; wild firefinches usually moult their outer primaries one at a time (Morel 1973, Payne 1980).

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