The story of the Somali Lark, *M. somalica*, (shown above), the recognised nominate known from the plains of Somaliland, is a confusing one. The bird we see in Tuuyo and Aroori Plains seems to be different from the one in the far eastern Ban-Cade and Saraar Plains.

Some of the experts who came through Somaliland have pointed out differences in hue and coloration between lighter western (Tuuyo and Aroori Plains) birds and the more rufous eastern (Ban-Cade and Saraar Plains) birds. The breast streaking is heavier on the western birds and the latter seem to be slightly larger and less confiding than the easily approachable western birds.

Even the sustained songs atop the Heel brushes in the west and on the Libaan evergreens and the occasional stunted Loot scrub bushes in the eastern plains are somewhat at variance in that neither bird is able to recognize and respond to the re-played songs of the other.

The enigmatic and assumed endemic other lark by the name of Sharpe’s, *M. sharpii*, may actually be one and the same to the M.Somalica of Tuuyo and Aroori Plains. Supposedly extant in the same open plains (like Tuuyo and Aroori) with the described behavior of perching and running among the brush rather than flying off on approach hints at a somalica.

But the sharpii, assumedly an entire inch smaller than the somalica, and with a much shorter bill and smaller head, could really be a gem awaiting re-discovery since it has not be reliably recorded in a long time.
Confusion Over Somali Lark.

Written by

John Miskell adds....

1. Regarding the Somali Lark; I see no reason why there should not be two different taxa on the western (squares 19d, 20cd) and the eastern (square 21d and eastwards) plains. The southern-most form rochei is almost certainly a separate species (see Ash & Miskell 1998). And the Lesser Hoopoe Lark has three subspecies - nominate hamertoni with virtually the same distribution as rochei, central & northeastern altera which goes as far west as square 21d (like eastern 'somalica ') and tertia with the same distribution (19d, 21cd) as the western nominate somalica. I think there is no doubt that 'new' Mirafra larks will be separated out once someone gets around to doing the DNA work on this difficult genus.

2. Where was your Augur Buzzard photo taken? The only place I have seen the bird with the white underparts in Somaliland was at Jifa Urey in the far west (shown as the eastern-most record in Nigel's 'Birds of the Horn of Africa'), where I also once saw the melanistic form, which does not seem to occur in archeri. Did you take the photo at Jifa Urey, or in Ethiopia?

3. In the Booking Information section you give your mobile number as 00 252 2 413 8813, but the new code for Somaliland is 252 63, not 252 2. So you should change this on your website, or people will have trouble calling you.

All the best,

John
Confusion Over Somali Lark.

Date: Thu, 13 Jun 2013 00:57:53 -0700