

A Re-examination of the Types of *Trogon rossi*, and *Ensifera ensifera caerulescens*

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RESUMEN.- Una re-examinación de los tipos de *Trogon rossi* y de *Ensifera ensifera caerulescens*.

Los resultados de esta examinación permitieron determinar que *Trogon rossi* no es una especie válida, sino que constituye una variación individual de *T.v.violaceus*, mientras que *Ensifera ensifera caerulescens* tiene caracteres suficientes como para ser considerada una raza válida, a pesar de estar basada en un solo ejemplar. Aceptado el 7 de febrero de 1986.

Trogon rossi and *Ensifera ensifera caerulescens* were described by W.P. Lowe (1939) on the basis of two specimens of uncertain origin which he discovered while working among the collections of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, England, and there appears to have been no subsequent study of them. These specimens were recently re-examined by the author, and details on plumage and taxonomy are given below.

Trogon rossi Lowe (1939)

Unique type in Royal Albert Memorial Museum from the W. J. N. Smee Collection. Specimen from "S. America" number 140/1935.

General Walter N. T. Smee was an Indian Army officer who died in 1877 at Oakfield House, Reigate, Surrey. His collections were dispersed, but it does not appear to be known when or from what locality his South American specimens were obtained. Lowe's description of *T. rossi* is as follows:

"Nearest to *Trogon caligatus*, but at once distinguished from that bird by a blue metallic head, green tail, and golden metallic upper parts. Wing 117 mm, tail 114, exposed culmen 18. Type in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. Locality, S. America?. Named in honour of the late F.W.L. Ross, who contributed greatly to the accessions of the Museum."

Ross died on 20 December 1860, and his collections were presented to the Museum by his widow in 1865 (Lowe 1939), *Trogon caligatus* Gould, is currently regarded as a race of *T. violaceus* Gmelin (Peters 1945). The only apparent reference to the specimen subsequent to its description was by Peters (1945) who placed *T. rossi* in the synonymy of *T. violaceus violaceus* without comment. A search of the Zoological Record from 1939, the year of the type description, to 1945 inclusive, failed to reveal any reference to *T. rossi*, and the Exeter Museum has no knowledge of anyone else, prior to myself, examining the specimen.

A comparison of the type with a series of trogon species in the British Museum (Natural History) showed that it is closest to *T.v. violaceus*, but differs in having a distinct and very striking bronzy back, and a green rather than blue chest. This bronzy colour is evidently the same colour that Lowe described as "golden" though I would disagree with his terminology. Also, the head of *T. rossi* is greenish rather than blue as in *T.v. violaceus* and the upper surface of the tail and upper tail coverts are greenish in *rossi*, blue in *violaceus*. In other words *rossi* is bronze in the areas where *violaceus* is green, and green where the latter is blue. However, specimens of *T.v.violaceus* exhibit much individual variation, some tending to green on the tail, and these individuals also show a tendency to have a bronze

tinged back, but in general to nothing like the extent that this colour is present in *T. rossi*. In the British Museum (Natural History) collection, however, there is a specimen of *Trogon violaceus caligatus* (Reg. No: 1955.6.N.16.122 from "Tierra calicute of Atlantic", Mexico, collected by H. le Strange) that shows precisely the same bronze sheen on the back and a similar greenish suffusion on the normally blue chest. This specimen, therefore, appears to be a counterpart of *T. rossi*. Perhaps this abnormality is due to an excessive amount of a yellow lipochrome pigment, which appears to occur in variable amounts in races of *Trogon violaceus*.

Peters was correct, therefore, in treating *Trogon rossi* as a synonym of *T.v.violaceus* though there is no evidence that he ever saw the specimen.

Ensifera ensifera caerulescens (Lowe) 1939

Docimastes ensiferus caerulescens Lowe 1939

Lowe comments:

"This very distinct race of the Sword-bill Humming-Bird differs from *Docimastes ensiferus* by its smaller dimensions and by having the sides of the neck and band across the chest, when held to the light, bright metallic *blue*. Exposed culmen 77 mm, wing 74, rectrices, lateral 52, central 34. ♂ type, in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, no 25/1938 (South America?), Luget Bros."

Once again, an examination of the Zoological Record between the years 1939 and 1945 failed to reveal any further comment on this form until Peters (1945) listed it as a questionable race of *Ensifera ensifera* with the comment "Based on a single specimen of unknown locality; requires confirmation."

Examination of the type revealed that although it is indeed much smaller than normal specimens of *E. ensifera*, there are in the collection of the British Museum (Natural History) several apparently adult specimens of the nominate race which are as small as *caerulescens*, and one, a "Bogotá" skin from the Gould collection with a culmen length of 63 mm, is considerably smaller. However, the pale metallic or electric blue band across the chest constitutes a distinguishing character. Dr C.J.O. Harrison and I examined the specimen from all possible angles and agreed that there was no reason to suppose that the colour is due to an aberration. This confirms the likelihood that *E. e. caerulescens* may therefore be a valid taxon from an unknown locality, but until further specimens are found, Peters' comment must stand.

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LITERATURE CITED

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