

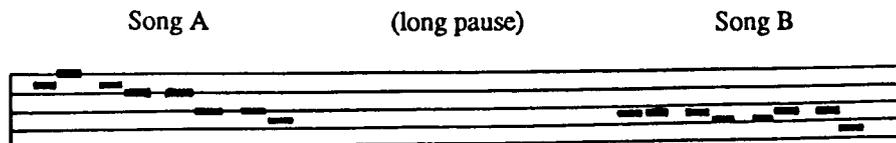
“COUNTER-SINGING” BEHAVIOUR OF THE LESSER GROUND-ROBIN *AMALOCICHLA INCERTA*.

STEPHEN F. BAILEY

The Lesser Ground-Robin *Amalocichla incerta* is typical of many terrestrial forest birds in being difficult to see. It is said that its voice is “the best means of discovery” and that “often two birds will counter-call” (Beehler *et al.* 1986). On 18 September 1989 I watched a single Lesser Ground-Robin singing in such a manner that it sounded as if two birds were counter-singing. Therefore I suggest that at least some previous records of two birds of this species counter-singing may instead have been based on a single bird singing to itself.

I was bird-watching on the ridge track above Myola, Northern Province, at c. 2450 m. The topography was a steep slope with small “steps” or flat areas, covered by variously thick forest floor vegetation. At 08:35 I heard a beautiful and distinctive whistled song I had not heard before. Eventually it became clear that the singers were on or near the ground and were moving about between songs. By waiting quietly on the track, I was eventually able to see the single bird responsible for all the songs. I observed this bird until 09:08. Not only did the bird come into view but at times it walked within 4 m of me, in clear sight.

The bird continually shifted its location in short movements of 1 - 3 m, at a fast walk or slow run. It foraged like a plover, with each short run abruptly ending in a frozen stop of a few seconds duration, except that the ground-robin also sang at its stops. It alternated two 8-note songs, giving each at consecutive stops. Thus, no two songs were given from the same location. Each note was a short, clear, and pleasant whistle of equal duration and the notes were delivered in pairs of equal length and separation. Song “A” was followed by a long pause, during which the bird moved to a new location from which song “B” was given. Both songs were of the same duration. I estimate that each was c. 2.2 seconds long and the inter-song interval (A to B) averaged c. 5 seconds. Unfortunately, I cannot remember whether the interval B to A was longer. The relative pitches and timings of the songs can be depicted as follows:



The two parts seemed to complement each other beautifully, in the form of statement and answer. The whole performance was one of the most aesthetically pleasing that I have heard from a bird.

As songs A and B were never given from the same location and because they sounded like two different birds, each singing its own stereotyped song, it sounded as if two birds were moving about, counter-singing. Only because I had an extended view of the single bird moving about and delivering the entire performance could I tell that the “counter-singing” was an illusion.

The identification of this Lesser Ground Robin was based on its distinctive long-legged and short-tailed shape, reddish-brown colouration, whitish throat and forehead, and terrestrial behaviour. It was recognised from the illustration in Beehler *et al.* (1986), although it was darker and more contrastingly patterned than portrayed. In particular, the dorsal plumage was a darker, more chestnut in colour, and the forehead appeared to be more sharply defined at the lores. The whitish throat was most noticeable when puffed out in song with the head thrown up and back. The bill also seemed slightly larger.

I thank the Christensen Research Institute, the California Academy of Sciences, the people of Myola, Roger and Jenny Hicks and the participating PNGBS members for making my trip possible and rewarding.

This is CRI publication number 48.

Beehler, B.M., T.K. Pratt & D.A. Zimmerman. 1986. *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton University Press.

Address: Dept of Ornithology and Mammalogy, California Academy of Sciences, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, CA 94118, U.S.A.

EXTENSION OF THE KNOWN RANGE OF GOLDEN-HEADED *CISTICOLA CISTICOLA EXILIS*

LEN TOLHURST

At 11:30 on 26 March 1989 I, in the company of two others, saw two Golden-headed Cisticolas in the Tari Gap area, Southern Highlands Province. They were in tall pit-pit grass, beside the highway, c. 0.5-1 km above the Bailey Bridge. This would be at c. 2666 m, *i.e.* 1266 m above its recorded highest limit (Beehler *et al.* 1986).

Beehler, B.M., T.K. Pratt & D.A. Zimmerman. 1986. *Birds of New Guinea*. Princeton University Press.

Address: c/o Pacific Adventist College, Private Mail Bag, Boroko, NCD.