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Apparent sympatry of *Stiphornis pyrrholaemus* Schmidt & Angehr, 2008 and *S. xanthogaster* Sharpe, 1903 (Passeriformes: Muscicapidae) in Gabon, and taxonomic implications

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Abstract

We report the occurrence of the recently-described *Stiphornis pyrrholaemus* in the Makokou area, northeastern Gabon, more than 600 kilometers NE from its type locality, in areas covered by dense primary to secondary forest. The previous records of *Stiphornis* from the same area were referred to *S. xanthogaster*. We confirm this attribution on the basis of museum specimens. Although several recent sources treat all *Stiphornis* as a single species, our findings strongly suggest the sympatric coexistence of two *Stiphornis* species and thus that they should be treated as separate species under the Biological Species Concept.

Key words: African forest robin, *Stiphornis*, Makokou, Gabon

Introduction

The genus *Stiphornis*, along with *Sheppardia*, *Pogonocichla*, *Swynnertonia*, *Cossypha*, and *Alethe* are usually considered “Africa forest-dwelling robins” (Irwin & Clancey 1974), but the exact membership of this assemblage varies. Some authors assign certain genera to the chats within the Muscicapidae (e.g., Jensen 1989; Sibley & Monroe 1990) and Zuccon & Ericson (2010) support a single origin of the African forest robins (*Cossypha*, *Pogonocichla*, *Pseudalethe*, *Sheppardia*, *Stiphornis*) in the subfamily Saxicolinae of the family Muscicapidae. The various *Stiphornis* taxa are distributed in the understory of dense forest of western and central Africa, from coastal forests to montane forests at 1800 m ASL (Collar 2005).

Sharpe (1903) recognized *Stiphornis* as a polytypic taxon comprised of Western Forest-robin *S. erythrothorax* Hartlaub, 1855, Gabon Forest-robin *S. gabonensis* Sharpe, 1883, and Eastern Forest-robin *S. xanthogaster* Sharpe, 1903, while Sclater (1930), followed by White (1962), ranked the latter two as subspecies within *S. erythrothorax*. Although geographic variation in *Stiphornis* has been long recognized, Hall & Moreau (1970) considered *Stiphornis* monotypic.

More recently, Beresford & Cracraft (1999), on the basis of relatively high among-taxon mitochondrial DNA divergences in the genus, and supported by morphology, recognized four phylogenetic species within *Stiphornis*: *S. erythrothorax*, from Sierra Leone to the Niger Delta, primarily in lowland forest but also in riverine and savannah habitats within the Upper Guinea region (Keith *et al.* 1992); *S. gabonensis*, limited to evergreen coastal forest, ranging from just east of the Niger River Delta south to Gabon and east to Malen, Cameroon, and the island of Bioko, Equatorial Guinea; *S. xanthogaster*, the most widespread member of the genus, ranging from the River Dja in Cameroon south through NE Gabon to Lukolela, Democratic Republic of Congo east through southern Central African Republic, Sudan, the Ituri forest, and Uganda to W Kenya, mainly in lowland primary forest, but in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo *S. xanthogaster* occurs in transitional forest up to 1400 m (Keith *et al.*