Eastern nominate Nightingales *Luscinia m. megarhynchos* in Cyprus in 2011

CLIVE WALTON

Large Nightingales trapped in North Cyprus were attributed to the eastern intergrade of the nominate subspecies *Luscinia m. megarhynchos*, or with less certainty to the *africana* subspecies, on the basis of biometrics and plumage characteristics. It is recommended that large eastern Nightingales should be ringed using rings of internal diameter of 2.8 mm (BTO size B).

Passage Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos* (n = 4) were trapped in the Girne district of North Cyprus 13–16 April 2011. The birds were lured to mist nets by the song of the nominate subspecies and marked with Kuşkor unique metal rings. Consideration was given to their taxonomy.

Biometrics for wing (maximum length, mm to 1.0), mass (grams to 0.1), tail length (mm to 1.0) were taken following Svensson (1992) and Bairlein (1995). Fat scores were also taken using the classes in Bairlein (1995), rounded to the nearest 0.5 subclass. For two birds, tarsus depth was taken to 0.1 mm for the purpose of reviewing the British Trust for Ornithology convention that Nightingales should be ringed with 'A' size rings. Plumage characteristics were also recorded. The birds were aged with EURING Codes on the basis of feather generations (Table 1). Code 5 indicates birds which fledged in 2010 and code 6 indicates fledged in an unknown year before 2010.

Table 1 gives details of the data collected for the four birds. Weights are included, though are not considered significant due to the broadly overlapping ranges for the taxa given in the literature. Since degree of fat deposition is significant for weight in passage birds, fat scores are included to assist with future interpretation. Summaries of the measurement ranges derived from *BWP* (Cramp 1988) are included for comparison. Due to stated differences in measuring methods, those in square brackets have been calibrated for consistency of comparison across the table.

For the purposes of this note I follow Cramp (1988) who recognised only *L. m. megarhynchos* (Europe and the Levant, including Cyprus), *L. m. africana* (eastern and central Turkey, Caucasus and the Middle East) and *L. m. hafizi* further east (*L. m. golzii* in van Duivendijk 2010) and not the subtler forms proposed by some other authors.

Nightingales of the nominate subspecies are migrant breeders in Cyprus with a range restricted to the Troodos mountains (Flint & Stewart 1992) and not within the area of the present study (Flint 2000). The nominate is also a passage migrant in Cyprus, though the presence of eastern taxa appears unconfirmed (Peter Flint pers comm).

Table 1. Biometrics of four Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos* (identified by ring number suffix) trapped in the Girne district of North Cyprus, 13–16 April 2011. See text for further details.

	age	wing	tail	Wing/tail ratio	weight	fat
04	5	90	70	1.28	24.3	4.0
06	6	90	71	1.26	-	-
16	6	90	69	1.30	23.2	3.5
17	5	88	68	1.29	24.9	5.5
nominate BWP (western Europe)		78–87	58–68			
nominate BWP (eastern Europe)		81–90	58–72			
africana BWP (eastern Europe)		80–92	[63–81]			

Plate 1. An eastern Nightingale probably of the nominate subspecies *Luscinia m. megarhynchos*, Girne, North Cyprus, 13 April 2011. © *C Walton*

On the basis of the published biometrics for the Western Palearctic range, *BWP* noted the clinal nature of the species with eastern intergrades of the nominate and eastern taxa generally being longer-winged and longer-tailed than their western equivalents (Cramp 1988). However, some populations of *africana* have slightly shorter wings than the long-winged eastern intergrades of the nominate (Cramp 1988) and are separated by their longer tails (Özbahar 2005) which can be expressed in the form of a wing to tail ratio.

Some *africana* have wing lengths in common with the high end of the nominate *megarhynchos* range and can exceed these. The easternmost taxon *golzii/hafizi* has on average slightly longer wings and much longer tails (Cramp 1988, Özbahar 2005). If present in Cyprus these are likely to be vagrants (Peter Flint pers comm). The birds in this study appear not to be *golzii/hafizi* due to their shorter wing and tail, lack of pale supercilium, brown rather than sandy-coloured back and lacking conspicuous pale fringes to tertials and greater coverts (Cramp 1988, Mullarney *et al* 1999, Porter & Aspinall 2010).

In terms of plumage characteristics there was little to objectively separate *africana* from *megarhynchos* particularly with our small samples and without direct comparison in the field. Cramp (1988) and van Duivendijk (2010) noted that compared to the nominate subspecies, *africana* has grey-brown upper body parts and underparts paler with grey-brown breast. Certainly the individuals in this example conformed to this description (Plate 1) however it is doubtful these birds could be reliably attributed to either one of the taxa on this basis, given the natural variation within populations, temporal effects on plumage appearance and the likelihood of intergrading.

On the basis of the biometrics of the Cyprus birds (Table 1), western nominate Nightingales must be excluded but the measurements fall within the upper ranges of

eastern nominate birds and within those of *africana*. However, the wing to tail ratios suggest the birds belong to the nominate subspecies. In published studies *africana* has lower ratios—see Özbahar (2005) for a summary.

It became evident during ringing that the prescribed A size ring, with an internal diameter of 2.3 mm, would be tight on the tarsi of the birds, two of which had a tarsal depth of 2.4 mm. Ringers trapping eastern birds should either use B size rings (2.8 mm id) by default or measure tarsal depth in advance of applying rings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Peter Flint for invaluable advice that improved an earlier draft of this note.

REFERENCES

Bairlein, F (ed). 1995. *Manual of Field Methods*. European-African Songbird Migration Network. Wilhelmshaven, Germany.

Cramp, S (ed). 1988. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic.* Vol 5. Oxford University Press, UK.

van Duivendijk, N. 2010. *Advanced Bird ID Guide*. New Holland, London.

Flint, P (ed). 2000. *North Cyprus Bird Report 1999*. Kuşkor, Girne, Cyprus.

Flint, P & P Stewart. 1992. *The Birds of Cyprus*. British Ornithologists' Union, Tring, UK.

Mullarney, K, L Svensson, D Zetterström & PJ Grant. 1999. *Collins Bird Guide*. HarperCollins, London.

Özbahar, I. 2005. *Breeding Biology, Population Size and Spatial Distribution of a Common Nightingale (Luscinia megarhynchos Brehm, 1831) Population at Yalıncak (Ankara)*. MSc thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara.

Porter, R & S Aspinall. 2010. *Birds of the Middle East.* Christopher Helm, London.

Svensson, L. 1992. *Identification Guide to European Passerines.* Stockholm.

Clive Walton, c/o Kuşkor, PK 650, Vakıflar Carsisi Kat:2, No:3-4, Girne, Mersin 10, North Cyprus. info@kuskor.org