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AN UNCOMMON BLUE WAXBILL *URAEGINTHUS ANGOLENSIS*

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The current Atlas of Southern African Birds (Harrison et al. 1997) notes four subspecies for the Blue Waxbill *Uraeginthus angolensis*, but it also maintains that the species is allopatric from the Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu *U. bengalus*. However, according to the distribution maps in Sinclair & Ryan (2003, 2010) there is some degree of sympatry between the two congeners, although that region is shown as well north of South Africa. There is some hybridisation between the two species in southern Tanzania which results in males with a red patch on the ear-coverts, and del Hoyo et al. (2010) notes that northern South Africa has also produced males with red ear-coverts even though this is an area in which *U. bengalus* is not found. (del Hoyo et al. 2010 only recognises three subspecies of *U. angolensis*, not four.)

On a ringing weekend in mid February to the Rust-de-Winter district, I was very surprised when opening a bird bag to find an intensely coloured Blue Waxbill, which also sported red feathered patches on its cheeks (fig. 1), albeit these were not as large as those I had previously seen on Cordon-bleus. The culmen colour, which can vary as noted in Hockey et al. (2005), was also distinctly pinkish.

According to Kelsey and Barnard (1988) this aberrant feather colouring may represent a phenotypic 'throwback' resulting from the relatively recent divergence of *U. angolensis* and *U. bengalus*.

This bird was ringed at 10h03 on 18/02/2012 with SAFRING ring L39853. The coordinates of capture and release were 25°21'S 28°29'E. It would be interesting to see if any further such "rare" specimens come to light. Because only males show the red feathering, Blue Waxbills carrying the gene responsible may be more prevalent than previously thought.

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Figure 1: Blue Waxbill with red cheek feathers