

Remarks on some records of the Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*)

Poznámky k některým nálezům kolihy tenkozobé (Numenius tenuirostris)

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A review of specimens of the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* in the collections in the Czech Republic, and of observations relevant to the occurrence of this species in the Czech Republic yielded the following results: (1) Czech collections contain three stuffed Slender-billed Curlews, originating from Poland, Spain and an unknown locality, respectively. (2) Four further curlews in the Czech collections labelled as *Numenius tenuirostris* represent the Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* in fact. (3) New records of the Slender-billed Curlew for Poland and Hungary were presented. (4) Two alleged records of the Slender-billed Curlew from Montenegro and Burma, respectively, are invalid. (5) None of the records of the Slender-billed Curlew from the Czech Republic is valid, and the species must be deleted from the national check-list of birds.

Revize exemplářů kolihy tenkozobé Numenius tenuirostris v českých sbírkách a revize pozorování vztahujících se k výskytu tohoto druhu v České republice vedly k těmto výsledkům: (1) České sbírky obsahují celkem tři exempláře kolihy tenkozobé, které pocházejí z Polska, Španělska a z neznámé lokality. (2) Čtyři další exempláře v českých sbírkách, které byly označeny jako Numenius tenuirostris, představují ve skutečnosti kolihu velkou Numenius arquata. (3) Byla popsána nová zjištění kolihy tenkozobé v Polsku a Maďarsku. (4) Dva údajné nálezy kolihy tenkozobé z Černé Hory a z Barmy jsou neplatné. (5) Žádný z nálezů kolihy tenkozobé na území ČR není platný, takže kolihy tenkozobá musí být vyškrtuta ze soupisu ptáků České republiky.

Keywords: Slender-billed Curlew, *Numenius tenuirostris*, faunal records

INTRODUCTION

The Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* Vieillot, 1817 is an extremely rare bird, with the world population estimated at less than 50 individuals (Stattersfield & Capper 2000, Gretton 2003). Its known breeding area is limited to western Siberia, Russia (Gretton et al. 2002), while its wintering range in-

cludes mainly coasts of the Mediterranean Sea (Vangeluwe et al. 1998, Riede 2001, Gretton 2003). In Central Europe, Slender-billed Curlews occur almost exclusively during autumnal migration, with records centered in Hungary and Vojvodina (Glutz von Blotzheim et al. 1977, Gresson 2003). Distribution of the Slender-billed Curlew is known from a rather small num-

ber of reliable observations, which requires their careful reconsideration.

In this paper I present a review of the records of Slender-billed Curlews from the territory of the Czech Republic, and of the specimens in Czech museums, which belong or were supposed to belong to the Slender-billed Curlew.

Museum acronyms are as follows:

- GMO = Gymnaziální muzeum [Museum of the Grammar School], Opava, Czech Republic
- MGOHR = Muzeum a galerie Orlických hor [Museum and Gallery of the Orlické Mountains], Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Czech Republic
- MVJ = Muzeum Vysočiny [Museum of the Czech-Moravian Highlands], Jihlava, Czech Republic
- NMP = Národní muzeum [National Museum], Praha, Czech Republic
- SZMO = Slezské zemské muzeum [Silesian Museum], Opava, Czech Republic.

RESULTS

Poland: a new record

An adult male curlew was collected at the San river in Olchowce (49°34'N 22°14'E), SE Poland, in September 1915 by Karel Plachetka (1877–1961), Czech ornithologist, who served as an army officer in Sanok in 1915–1917 (see Káda 1971). The specimen was identified as a Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (Linnaeus, 1758) and has been deposited, from 1948, in NMP (Nr. P6V-1799). I revised the specimen, finding that it is an unrecognised Slender-billed Curlew in non-breeding plumage. Its measurements are as follows: wing length =

243 mm, tail length = 94 mm, bill length = 75 mm (from the frontal feathering) and 63 mm (from the anterior end of the narial opening), tarsus length = ca. 64 mm, middle toe length = 36 mm.

Previously, Slender-billed Curlews were recorded only five times from Poland, with all records falling in the period of autumnal migration (Tomiałojć 1990: 193).

Another male curlew collected by Plachetka in Olchowce in September 1915 and deposited in MGOHR (Nr. 23-D-300) was catalogued by Káda (1971: 26) as a Whimbrel. My reexamination of the photographs of this specimen confirmed the taxonomic identity of this bird.

Hungary: a possible additional record

Reiser (1885) reported on an adult male *Numenius tenuirostris* shot at Eger on 8 March 1885, and bought in the food market in Vienna in early March 1885 (see also Reiser in Reiser & Dalla-Torre 1888: 331). Eger was German name then used for the well known Czech town of Cheb (50°04'N 12°22'E), which led Reiser (1885) to believe that the market trader had the latter town in mind. This information was accepted in subsequent surveys of the Czech avifauna (e.g., Kněžourek 1912: 316, Hudec & Černý 1977: 596, Hudec et al. 1995: 115). However, Eger is also German name for the Ohře river in the Czech Republic (50°04'N 14°01'E), and native name for a settlement in northern Albania (41°54'N 19°59'E), a settlement and a stream in SW Hungary (46°02'N 17°03'E, and 46°48'N 17°27'E, respectively), and a settlement and a stream in NE Hungary (47°54'N 20°23'E, and 47°38'N 20°39'E, respectively), to list only the European localities (Alexandria Digital Library 2004, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

2004). Considering that the specimen was delivered to the market in Vienna as food, and having in mind the limited possibilities of travelling in the 1880s, it is probable that the specimen originated from a locality close to Vienna. Cheb is very far (ca. 450 km), while the Eger area at southern Balaton is the nearest one (ca. 150 km). Hungary is known to have been lying on the route of the autumnal migration of Slender-billed Curlews (Snow & Perrins 1998, Riede 2001, Gretton 2003), so that the occurrence of this species is much more probable there than at Cheb. Circumstantial evidence thus indicates that the specimen originated from one of the Eger localities in SW Hungary. There is no evidence that it originated from the Czech Republic.

Another point is the taxonomic identity of the specimen, which has never been checked after Reiser (1885, Reiser in Reiser & Dalla-Torre 1888). The specimen was said to be deposited in the museum of "Marburg" = Maribor, Slovenia, by Reiser (in Reiser & Dalla-Torre 1888: 331), but it was not found there recently (J. Hudeček in Hudec et al. 1995: 115).

Montenegro: an invalid record

NMP possesses a stuffed curlew from "Cottoro" = Kotor (42°25' N 18°46' E), coastal Montenegro, which was identified as a Slender-billed Curlew by Frič (1866) and F. Hanák (in Hudeček et al. 2002). Hudeček et al. (2002: 74) stated that the specimen was collected by Frič in 1852, citing Štěpánek (1975) as the source for this information. However, I found nothing in Štěpánek (1975) in support of their opinion. Frič indeed visited the Balkans in 1852, but only its eastern part (see Frič 1853 for the itinerary of the trip). The specimen is not listed in the catalogue of the ornithological collection of NMP published in 1854

(Frič 1854), the preface of which was signed by Frič in April 1854, which also indicates that the specimen was not in the museum's collections prior to that date. It is much more probable, that this is one of the three alleged *Numenius*, which Antonín Frič (1832–1913), Czech zoologist and later director of NMP, bought during his expedition to the western Balkans between 7–10 April 1856 on the market of Kotor (Frič 1858: 414; see also Frič 1857). My reexamination of the specimen (NMP P6V-3417) showed that it lacks all characters of the Slender-billed Curlew, and that it represents a Whimbrel in its second year. Hence, this alleged record of the Slender-billed Curlew from Kotor, Montenegro, must be deleted from literature.

The specimen NMP P6V-3417 bears Frič's old catalogue number 1920 (Frič 1866). In the same catalogue, Frič (1866) listed - under the number 1993 - another "*Numenius tenuirostris*" from "Cottoro" as collected by himself. The former specimen was listed in a systematically arranged section of the Catalogue, while the latter in its continuation. This was perhaps another of the three alleged *Numenius tenuirostris* obtained by Frič in Kotor in 1856 (see above), but I found no additional evidence that the latter specimen did exist.

Burma: an invalid record

Another curlew specimen contained in the collection of NMP (P6V-100162) was originally identified only as *Numenius* sp. (Frič 1854, 1866). A subsequent curator labelled it as *Numenius tenuirostris*. This specimen, which bears old catalogue number 1374 (Frič 1866), was collected by Jan Vilém Helfer (1810–1840) in the late 1830s in Tenasserim, Burma (see Nostitz 1873). My revision showed that the curlew is an oriental *Numenius arquata* in fact.

Czech Republic: no valid record

Recent surveys (Hudec et al. 1995, Vavřík 2004) listed four possible records of *Numenius tenuirostris* from the Czech Republic, as follows:

1. An individual bought in March 1885 on the food market in Vienna. The bird was supposed to have been shot at Cheb, but it was probably shot in Hungary (see above).
2. An individual caught injured in September 1899 at Brno (Schade 1901). Zdobnitzky (1909: 263) doubted the validity of this record, because the taxonomic identity of the specimen has never been confirmed. Moreover, Zdobnitzky (1909: 261, footnote) detailed that Schade made no use of literature or collections in identifying birds he observed, that he wrote his *Ornithologische Notizen* (Schade 1901) from memory, and that all information contained in the latter paper is therefore suspicious. It is evident from these statements that Schade's record of the Slender-billed Curlew cannot be accepted as valid.
3. An individual shot in autumn 1934 at Svobodné Heřmanice (49°57'N 17°40'E). This specimen was deposited in GMO (Köhler 1935). Hudec et al. (1966: 172-173) accepted the record. However, the bird labelled as *Numenius tenuirostris* in the Opava collection was re-identified as *Numenius arquata* (J. Hudeček in Hudec et al. 1995: 116).
4. An individual observed on 7 April 1974 in Karviná (49°52'N 18°33'E) by J. Hudeček and O. Hudeček (Hudeček 1981). It is improbable that the bird was a Slender-billed Curlew for the following reasons: (i) It was observed in spring, but Slender-billed Curlews occurred in Central Europe in spring only until 1925 (Beretzky et

al. 1959, Glutz von Blotzheim et al. 1977), the only later possible record being from Hungary in 1996 (Ecsedi & Szilágyi 1996); (ii) The locality lies outside of migration routes of the Slender-billed Curlew; (iii) No evidence was presented in support of the bird's identity. The description can apply to young *Numenius arquata* as well. Hence, Hudeček's (1981) observation of the Slender-billed Curlew in Karviná is improbable and cannot be accepted.

5. In addition, Štěpánek (1975: 13) mentioned that the Buquoy collection in Nové Hradky was in possession of a Slender-billed Curlew shot in Bohemia and that it was destroyed in 1945. This record was not listed either by Hudec et al. (1995) or Vavřík (2004), and I thus suspect that Štěpánek's statement is erroneous. In any case, no evidence is currently available that such a specimen did exist in the Buquoy collection.

Reconsideration of the five alleged records of the Slender-billed Curlew showed that no one can be accepted. Hence, this species must be deleted from the check-list of Czech birds.

Czech Republic: list of collection specimens

Recently, Hudeček et al. (2002) listed three specimens of *Numenius tenuirostris* as deposited in collections in the Czech Republic. One of these specimens, however, was re-identified as *Numenius phaeopus* (see above), while another specimen of *Numenius tenuirostris* was discovered in the National Museum in Praha (see above). In addition, NMP has two further curlews from old collections (lacking any data on their provenience) labelled as *Numenius tenuirostris* (P6V-100163 and P6V-100164). Both are full-grown, still young *Numenius arquata* in

fact. Kněžourek (1912: 316) mentioned that a Slender-billed Curlew was on exhibition in NMP in his times. However, I found nothing in support of this statement in museum's files. Janda (2001) omitted Slender-billed Curlew from his list of extinct and critically endangered bird species contained in the collections of NMP.

The revised list of specimens of the Slender-billed Curlew in Czech collections is thus as follows:

1. NMP P6V-1799: adult individual in non-breeding plumage; collected by Karel Plachetka in September 1915 at the San in Olchowce (49°34' N 22°14'E), Poland (Mlíkovský, this paper).
2. MVJ D-357: juvenile male, collected by Friedrich Maria von Dalberg at "Malaca" = Málaga (36°48'N 4°45'W), Spain, in 1904 (Canon 1923, Hanák et al. 1999, Skřivan 2000). Note that geographic coordinates are given for the city of Málaga, while the specimen could have been collected anywhere in its wider surroundings.
3. SZMO 3647: adult male of unknown origin (Hudeček et al. 2002).

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