

On the validity of *Acanthis flammea islandica* Hantzsch.

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(Med et dansk resumé: Om anerkendelsen af *Acanthis flammea islandica* Hantzsch).

In a taxonomic note published recently (1956) on the red-polls I questioned the validity of *Acanthis flammea islandica* Hantzsch, 1904, type locality, Iceland. I stated that a series examined by me from Iceland differed only slightly in coloration and bill measurements from *rostrata* COUES, 1862, type locality, Greenland. In addition, these differences were not constant, and it seemed to me that *islandica* was best synonymized with *rostrata*. A similar opinion had already been reached by WITHERBY (1938) who found also that the characters of *islandica* were not constant and questioned its validity.

The series examined by me from Iceland consisted of 10 adults and seemed adequate on which to base an opinion. Dr. SALOMONSEN believes, however, that *islandica* is valid and has kindly lent me 22 specimens from the collection of the Copenhagen Museum. After comparing the augmented series of 32 specimens with one of equal size and in various plumages from Greenland, I have now changed my former opinion and believe that it is desirable to recognize *islandica*, although I still think it is a rather poorly differentiated race.

The population of Iceland varies a great deal individually (see SALOMONSEN, 1951, pp. 515-516) and some specimens are indistinguishable from *rostrata*, but in series it is nevertheless true that it is paler throughout than the latter. The difference is most evident on the rump and under parts which are not so heavily streaked and the ground color of which is whiter. SALOMONSEN (*op. cit.*, p. 503) has found that the bill is distinctly shorter in *islandica*, but this is an average difference only and in the specimens I have measured (see below) the degree of overlap is very great and the difference in average very slight. *A. f. rostrata* has also a very slightly thicker bill than *islandica* (see SALOMONSEN, 1928, fig. 1), but this is also a difference in average only which is no more constant nor better marked than the difference in length. I believe therefore

that such differences as exist between the bills of the two races are not good taxonomic characters and that if the validity of *islandica* is accepted, it can be separated from *rostrata* only on the basis of the differences in coloration mentioned above.

I have purposely refrained from discussing the possible affinities of *islandica*. SALOMONSEN (1951, *op. cit.*) believes that it "must be regarded as a hybrid form between [the] two groups" of the redpolls, *hornemanni* and *flammea*, which he considers are conspecific. He states that the great individual variability of *islandica* furnishes important evidence that the two groups are conspecific, and he is supported by WILLIAMSON (1956). This question is not settled, but in view of its importance, and whatever the origins and affinities of *islandica*, attention should be called to the population characters in Iceland. This is the chief reason why I believe it is not desirable to synonymize *islandica* with *rostrata*, even though, as emphasized above, it is not well differentiated and is not constantly separable from the latter.

Individual bill measurements of adults of both sexes (taken from the anterior border of the nostril to insure greater accuracy), Iceland: 6.5, 6.5, 6.7, 6.8, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7, 7.2, 7.2, 7.2, 7.2, 7.2, 7.2, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.7, 8, 8, 8, 8.2 (7.23). Greenland: 7, 7.2, 7.2, 7.2, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.5, 7.7, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8, 8.2, 8.5, 8.5, 9 (7.76).

DANSK RESUMÉ

Om anerkendelsen af *Acanthis flammea islandica* Hantzsch.

Forfatteren antog tidligere, at den på Island levende Gråsirken (*Acanthis flammea islandica*) ikke var tilstrækkeligt afvigende fra den grønlandske form *rostrata* til at afsondres som en særlig race. Efter nu at have undersøgt et større materiale, lånt ham af Zoologisk Museum i København, mener forf. imidlertid, at *islandica* kan anerkendes. Han fremhæver, at *islandica* ikke er stærkt differentieret men alligevel bør anerkendes, idet denne race er interessant ud fra zoogeografiske synspunkter og kan kaste lys over det vigtige spørgsmål om de forskellige gråsirkenformers indbyrdes slægtskab.

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