

## New locality for the endangered Blackthroat *Calliope obscura*

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**Abstract** This study provides new distributional and morphological data for one of the world's most poorly known species, the Blackthroat *Calliope obscura*, which, until recently, was only known from fewer than ten museum specimens and a few field observations. Three previously mis-labelled male specimens collected during the breeding season at a presumed breeding site slightly further to the northwest of the formerly known range were recently found.

**Keywords** Blackthroat · Black-throated Blue Robin · Conservation · Vulnerable

### Zusammenfassung

### Neues Vorkommen der gefährdeten Schwarzkehl-nachtigall *Calliope obscura*

Wir beschreiben ein neues Vorkommen sowie morphometrische Daten einer der weltweit am wenigsten bekannten Vogelarten, der Schwarzkehl-nachtigall *Calliope obscura*. Sie war bisher nur von weniger als 10 Museumspräparaten und einigen wenigen Felddaten bekannt. Jüngst wurden aber drei ehemals falsch gekennzeichnete

Präparate bekannt, die zur Brutzeit nordwestlich des bisher angenommenen Brutareals gesammelt wurden.

The Chinese endemic Blackthroat *Calliope obscura* (previously *Luscinia obscura*, but suggested to be placed in *Calliope* by Sangster et al. 2010), is classified as Vulnerable (Collar et al. 2001; IUCN 2012). Until recently, there were only a handful of observations since the species was first observed in 1886, including fewer than ten museum specimens in the world (summarised by Song et al. 2014). In 2011, seemingly healthy breeding populations were discovered in Foping and Changqing national nature reserves, Qingling mountains, Shaanxi province, China (Song et al. 2014), and these have been monitored since then (Ning et al. 2014). Alström et al. (2013) showed that the Blackthroat is sister to the Firethroat *Calliope pectardens*, and that these are at least mostly parapatrically distributed in the breeding season, rejecting earlier suggestions that they are merely colour morphs (Goodwin and Vaurie 1956; Cheng 1958; Vaurie 1959; Etchécopar and Hüe 1983).

We here report the existence of three previously unknown specimens of Blackthroat in the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing. These were collected at Lianhua Shan, Gansu province (approximately 34°94'N, 103°77'E; exact locality not given on the labels) between 21 May and 12 June 1987, at 2500 m a.s.l. (Table 1; Fig. 1), but they have gone unnoticed as they were mis-labelled. Two of these are adult males, whereas the third is a first-summer (second calendar-year) male. The first-summer male is easily distinguishable from the adult males by its browner remiges, primary coverts, alula, and greater coverts. The first-summer male also shows a small white spot on the side of the neck, which is a feature

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**Table 1** Data on the three specimens in the Institute of Zoology, Beijing

IOZ number	Sex	Age	Date	Elevation (m)	Measurements					
					Weight (g)	Body length (mm)	Wing length (mm)	Tail length (mm)	Bill length (mm)	Tarsus length (mm)
63847	Male	Adult	1987-06-12	2500	15	130	68	47	12.2	26.6
63848	Male	Adult	1987-05-21	2500	14	142	69	51	12.6	27.6
63849	Male	1st-summer	1987-05-23	2500	15.5	132	69	51	13.4	26.7

Measurements of wing and tail to nearest mm; bill length to skull; measurements by Peng He, except for weight and body length, from labels



**Fig. 1** The three specimens from Lianhua Shan in the Institute of Zoology, Beijing. **a, b** adult male IOZ 63847; **c, d** adult male IOZ 63848; **e, f** first-summer male IOZ 63849. Photos: Min Zhao

not previously noted in this species, but which is shown by the Firethroat (although larger).

As the Blackthroat has been observed on its breeding grounds in the Qinling mountains from the first week of May (Song et al. 2014), it seems most likely that the three specimens at Lianhua Shan were on their breeding grounds. Although there is no information about the habitat in which they were collected, there used to be plenty of bamboo at Lianhua Shan (Yue-hua Sun in litt.), which is the favoured habitat in the Qinling mountains (Song et al. 2014). The elevation at which the birds were observed at Lianhua Shan is at the upper limit of that observed in the Qinling mountains, but lower than in the Minxian in Gansu (Song et al. 2014). Lianhua Shan is only approximately 60 km northwest of Minxian, where the Blackthroat was first observed, and approximately 380 and 420 km from Changqing and Foping, respectively, and represents the most northwesterly record so far.

Although there is now very little bamboo left at Lianhua Shan (Sun et al. 2008; Yue-hua Sun, in litt.), if the

Blackthroat is not fully dependent on bamboo (like its sister species the Firethroat; pers. obs.), it seems possible that the Blackthroat may still occur there. Field studies are urgently needed.

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