

Muscicapidae: subsume the genus *Humblotia* into *Muscicapa*

Proposal from African RAG, December 2025

The flycatcher genus *Humblotia* is restricted to Mt Karthala, Grande Comore, where its sole member is Humblot's Flycatcher *H. flavirostris*. In his review of the 'tribe Muscipapini' (as then constituted), [Vaurie \(1953\)](#) considered it very closely related to *Muscicapa*, with streaked plumage and short, broad bill as in that genus, but no conclusive evidence had until recently been found to justify changing the status quo of acceptance. However, recent genetic work ([Zhao et al. 2023](#)) has provided a clear recommendation to subsume *Humblotia* into *Muscicapa*. No major work since then appears to have adopted the recommended lump; the final pre-AviList IOC checklist (2024) mentioned the genetic work and the resulting recommendation to lump but did not follow it. On the basis that genera cannot be paraphyletic and the trees in Zhao et al. (2023) are accepted as valid (but see the final caveat in this proposal), the African RAG proposes that we follow this recommendation.

Morphology

See [Benson \(1960a\)](#), Safford (2013), field guides and Birds of the World online for descriptions and illustrations, and the [Macaulay Library](#) for photographs. According to Vaurie (1953), *Humblotia* differs from *Muscicapa*, and other flycatchers, in the extremely soft and fluffy texture of plumage and in having the feathers of the forecrown squamose and semi-erect, and the rest of the feathers of the crown distinctly elongated, these slight modifications forming the beginnings of a crest. The tarsus is barely scutellated or showing only a faint trace of scutes, and is slender, and longer than that of *Muscicapa* (c. 25% of wing-length against c. 13–20% in most *Muscicapa*), with rather weak claws. Bill typical of a flycatcher: depressed above and very broad at base, moderately hooked, feathered over nostrils, and with long, strong rictal bristles. Wing well rounded. Plumage dull but well marked, not outside bounds of some *Muscicapa*. Benson (1960a), Louette (2004) and Safford (2013), like Vaurie, continued to recognise the genus *Humblotia*, but all noted its similarity to *Muscicapa*.

Bioacoustics and behaviour

Benson (1960a), unlike Vaurie (1953), had information (at first-hand) of its behaviour and found it not untypical of *Muscicapa*. No observer since then has disputed this (e.g. Safford 2013). [Herremans et al. \(1991\)](#) described the nest, found it 'close to that described for *Muscicapa sethsmithi* [Yellow-footed Flycatcher of central African forest]' and concluded that there was, 'based on information on the nest alone, no strong reason for sustaining the genus *Humblotia* apart from *Muscicapa*'. The eggs, described more recently (Louette 2004), also appear not to be unusual for *Muscicapa*.

Two sound recordings are available on xeno-canto, and another in Herremans (2021) and Hugué & Chappuis (2003); no detailed comparisons have been made with other flycatchers but African RAG member F Dowsett-Lemaire (pers. comm.) notes that the most characteristic call, a very high-pitched rattle, is reminiscent of some vocalisations of other African flycatchers, e.g. Chapin's Flycatcher *Fraseria* (or *Muscicapa*) *lendu*. The other call recorded, a high- or very high-pitched, slightly rasping *siiiiii*, or *tseeeuuu*, seems similar to some undisputed *Muscicapa* species. As with behaviour, voice provides no strong reason for sustaining the genus *Humblotia* apart from *Muscicapa*.

Biogeography

Under the status quo, *Humblotia* was the only bird genus endemic to the Comoros (Louette 1996). In other words, apart from this taxon, any bird endemism on the Comoros is considered to be only at species or subspecies level, and no endemic genus has ever been suggested for any other bird there. The claim of an endemic genus therefore needs examining. Benson (1960b) suggested an African origin although an Asian origin could not be ruled out (Louette 2004). Clearly it has no close relative in Madagascar; the same is true of some other Comoro-endemic species, notably Comoro Thrush *Turdus bewsheri*, which represents a genus otherwise absent in the Malagasy region. Therefore, on biogeographical grounds there is no obstacle to sinking *Humblotia* into a similar genus present in Africa but absent in the rest of the Malagasy region, i.e. *Muscicapa*.

Genetics

The above criteria were inconclusive on the taxonomic status of *Humblotia*, and genetic information was needed to determine its phylogenetic position. This was finally provided by Zhao et al. (2023). Quoting almost verbatim: Cytb was sampled, and concatenated (ML & Bayesian) and single-locus analyses all strongly supported that *H. flavirostris* is nested within *Muscicapa* and is sister to the clade containing three African *Muscicapa* species and Palearctic-breeding *M. striata* (BS = 97; PP = 1.00; BS = 100 in Cytb gene tree); see below for a crop from their Figure 1 (maximum likelihood tree; but see [their paper](#) for full explanation and other figures). This also rules out an Asian origin. Zhao et al. (2023) therefore recommended on genetic evidence that *Humblotia* should be subsumed into *Muscicapa*.



Caveat

We are submitting this proposal and have confidence in it as long as the relationships inferred from genetic evidence presented in Zhao et al. (2023) meet the criteria of the TaxCom, recognising that only Cytb was sequenced from Humblot's Flycatcher.

English name

AviList v1, BirdLife and IOC checklists, and also Birds of Africa 8, all used the name Humblot's Flycatcher. Clements/eBird used Grande Comore Flycatcher. The African RAG proposes to maintain the long-established name Humblot's Flycatcher, in the interests of stability.

References

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