

**Systematic notes on Asian birds. 29.**  
**On the types of *Sitta sinensis* J. Verreaux, 1871**  
**and *Sitta montium* La Touche, 1899<sup>1</sup>**

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The type-series of *Sitta sinensis* Verreaux, 1871, included two specimens now housed in the collections of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (MNHN), Paris, which belong to two different taxa, *Sitta sinensis* and *Sitta montium* La Touche, 1899, one currently known as *S. europaea sinensis* Verreaux and the other usually treated as a synonym of *S. nagaensis nagaensis* Godwin-Austin, 1874. Lectotypes are selected for *S. sinensis* Verreaux, 1871 and *S. montium* La Touche, 1899.

**The types of *Sitta sinensis* J. Verreaux, 1871**

The description of *Sitta sinensis* J. Verreaux, 1871 is a short Latin text associated with a colour figure. In this text the author gave no indication of how many specimens he examined, but he mentioned that they came from the "mountains of Chinese Thibet" (Verreaux, 1871a). In a later publication, on the birds collected by Père (Father) A. David, Verreaux (1871b) gave a more detailed description in French and clarified that three specimens had served as types. One was a male from Kiu Kiang, Kiangsi, collected on 2.ix.1868; the other two were a male and a female from Moupin (= Muping, now Paohing), eastern Sikiang, collected on 14.xi and 11.xi.1869 respectively.

Two of these three birds are now dismounted specimens in the collection of the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle (MNHN), Paris, but the pedestals survive from the time when they were mounted. One, Catalogue Général (C.G.) 1868-1507 (A.C. 10799 A) is the male collected in Kiu Kiang in 1868, and the second, C.G. 1870-651 (A.C. 10794 D) is apparently the female collected in Moupin in 1869. The mention "*Sitta sinensis* J. Verr. Type" is written under the pedestal of both these specimens, certainly in Verreaux's handwriting for the first specimen, but less certainly so for the second. We could not now trace the second specimen from Moupin (C.G. 1870-660), but, according to the

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<sup>1</sup> This work is number 60 in the publications of the "Programme Pluriformation Faune d'Asie du Sud-est", Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris.

“Catalogue des Sorties”, this was given in exchange to Mr Severtzow in 1875.

There seems to be some confusion about the sex of these birds. The Kiu Kiang bird (C.G. 1868-1507) was reported to be a male collected 2 September 1868. In the Ancien Catalogue (A.C.) there is apparent confirmation that it was a male, but the pedestal has a female sign with the cross upward which was almost certainly used to indicate a male. We take this to be a male as published.

Of the two Moupin birds 1870-660 cannot be inspected, but the Ancien Catalogue has a definite female sign in it. In the case of 1870-651 the Ancien Catalogue has an inverted male sign as does the pedestal: the only reasons to suppose it to be male are the text in Verreaux (1871b), reporting there to be a male and a female, and the statement by La Touche that he examined the Moupin male (and at the time of his visit 1870-660 was no longer in Paris).

The Catalogue Général was the primary record at this time<sup>2</sup> and details were later copied to the Ancien Catalogue; there are no indications of sex in the Catalogue Général and the later entries in the Ancien Catalogue are not obviously safer to use than the details published by Verreaux. However, the pedestal label for 1870-651 has a barely legible date of “11 Nov. 1869” and according to Verreaux (1871b) this would make it the female.

In summary we simply cannot be sure whether one of the Moupin specimens was a male, but it seems evident that either La Touche was incorrect that it was the male that was still in Paris or that Verreaux mistook the sexes and erred in his publication.

### The composite nature of this type series

As already noted by Hartert & Steinbacher (1933), only the specimen from Kiu Kiang, C.G. 1868-1507, fits Verreaux’s Latin description and colour figure, having in particular the throat and cheeks whitish, the underparts reddish (now somewhat discoloured), and undertail coverts medium chestnut. The specimen from Moupin (C.G. 1870-651) differs in having no white on the cheeks and throat, the underparts greyish, with a slight reddish tinge on the vent, and the undertail coverts dark chestnut.

It is possible that when Verreaux first described the bird he had not yet received the Moupin birds and that later he neither remembered this nor noticed the differences. Although his description might have been of the Kiu Kiang specimen alone (and therefore be of a holotype) his later paper precludes this. One must therefore accept his statement that there were three syntypes. However, as two taxa are involved, it is necessary to designate one of the three syntypes as the lectotype.

Hartert & Steinbacher (1933) were not the first to notice the difference. Working on a series of specimens, among which were Verreaux’s types, La Touche (1899) came to the conclusion that “there appear to be two races ... a lowland and a mountain form” of *S. sinensis*. The Kiu Kiang male corresponded to the smaller lowland form, for which he proposed to retain the name *sinensis*, whereas the male from Moupin corresponded to his larger bird with paler underparts and for this he proposed the new name *Sitta montium*.

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<sup>2</sup> As shown by the handwriting used when copying information from one to the other.

Now *S. sinensis* is considered to be a subspecies of the Eurasian nuthatch and thus is known as *S. europaea sinensis* Verreaux, 1871, while the name *S. montium* is generally regarded as a synonym of the Naga nuthatch *S. nagaensis nagaensis* Godwin-Austin, 1874.

Neither Verreaux (1871a, 1871b) nor La Touche (1899) formally designated a lectotype for *Sitta sinensis*, but we believe that it is clear that La Touche identified the Kiu Kiang bird in such a way that he made it a lectotype. However, his terminology was less precise than is now expected by the Code (ICZN, 1999). In these conditions, and in order to ensure nomenclatural stability, we agree with the selection of the Kiu Kiang specimen (C.G. 1868-1507) and formally designate this the lectotype of *Sitta sinensis* J. Verreaux, 1871.

The inscriptions under its pedestal are as follows [/ = new line]:

1. [unreadable letter] Kiu Kiang / par M.A. David en 1868 / Cat. gener. n° 1507 / "voy. n° 29 (Type) / female symbol point upwards
2. One unreadable, crossed out line.
3. *Sitta sinensis*. J. verr. [J. Verreaux' handwriting] / *Sitta caesia* (Mey.).
4. Unreadable paraph [initials].

The second MNHN specimen, C.G. 1870-651, is a paralectotype of *S. sinensis* J. Verreaux, 1871. The inscriptions under its pedestal are the following:

1. M. Moupin [unreadable word] / A. David 1870-651 / Cat du Voy. n° 245 / *Sitta* [crossed out] *sinensis* J. Ver. Type / Iris brun / 11 novembre 1869 [this inscription very pale, small and difficult to read].
2. *Sitta caesia* / (mey) / var. [before "Type", obviously replacing the crossed out "Sitta" of the fourth line of 1].
3. Male symbol point downwards.
4. Paraph [initials].

It is important to recognise that this paralectotype is not representative of the taxon, and we believe the paralectotype exchanged with Severzow, which is presumably extant somewhere, would have the same relationship.

### **The types of *Sitta montium* La Touche, 1899**

The specimens examined by La Touche (1899) included all his birds from Kuantun (northwestern Fukien). These were at least ten males and three females, collected during the period 30 March to 19 May 1898 by La Touche or on exploratory trips made for him in 1895-1897 by a Chinese collector: the "male" type of *S. sinensis* Verreaux from Moupin (eastern Sikang, C.G. 1870-651); and an unspecified number of specimens from Yerkalo (Hsikang) and "Chentu" in the MNHN. As La Touche did not designate a type in his publication, all of these are syntypes and make up the type series of the taxon (ICZN 72.1, 72.4).

La Touche also noted that a few other specimens from Chentu in the MNHN seemed to be intermediate, but that the bad state of the skins prevented a satisfactory examination. We can date La Touche's visit to the MNHN from the second entry for

1899 in the 'Registre des Sorties' "Given in exchange to Mr de La Touche. Birds: 11". At this date the third syntype had been exchanged with Severzov some 23 years earlier.

La Touche's collection was acquired by the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ, Harvard, USA), and the type catalogue of this institution (Bangs, 1930) lists two "co-types" of *S. montium*, a male MCZ 128308 and a female MCZ 128309, both from Fohkien (now Fujian), Kuatun. In fact, six other birds (MCZ 128310 - 128315) examined by La Touche are to be found in the collections of the MCZ. They all bear on their labels "type" in La Touche's handwriting (see list below) and these are syntypes too.

We consider that there is a minimum of three syntypes in Paris. Apart from C.G. 1870-651 from Moupin the collections of the MNHN also holds two specimens of *S. montium* from Yerkalo which were no doubt examined by La Touche. These are n° C.G. 1877-182 and 183, and were collected by Father Desgodins, a missionary.

Four more specimens of this species from "Ching-dza", Tsékou, Yunnan nord (C.G. 1896-2284, 1896-2285, 1897-236 and 1897-237) were collected by Father Soulié. These were part of a consignment from Tsékou and although we have not traced it on any map, we believe that "Ching-dza" is a locality close to Tsékou. No MNHN birds are from "Chentu" or Cheng-du and so we must suppose that La Touche took "Ching-dza" to be Chentu. These specimens are not in a very good state, and all may have belonged to the group of birds that La Touche could not examine properly and did not include in his type-series, but one or more may have been considered to be *S. montium*. In these conditions, none can safely be considered as belonging to the type-series of *S. montium*. When La Touche was in Paris there was one other specimen from Ching-dza, Tsékou (C.G. 1896-2283); this might be recognisable as *S. montium*, but it is no longer present in the MNHN collection, and we have not traced its fate.

The type series of *Sitta montium* La Touche, 1899, comprises specimens from several localities, one of them also belonging to the type-series of another taxon (although not belonging to that taxon). It seemed desirable for the two museums known to hold syntypes to agree to designate a lectotype in order to ensure the stability of nomenclature. In view of the different collecting localities and what we know of them we agreed that it would be best to select a specimen from Kuatun, and we hereby designate specimen MCZ 128308 as the lectotype. The inscriptions on its labels are as follows:

1. White label. a EX MUS. J. DE LA TOUCHE [printed] / *Sitta sinensis* [*sinensis* streaked out] *montium* ♂ / sp. nov. / Loc. Kuatun N.W. Fukien / Date 7.4.98 ♀ ♂ Type / Type of / spring ♂ / plumage [La Touche's handwriting] /// iris dark brown, bill culmen blackish with ridge at base cad blue, lower mandible Cad blue at tip. legs light reddish brown, claws dark reddish gray. length = 5"2, wing = 3"05 ; (T = 44 t = 16.5 culmen 16.5) = 77. This is Bang's male "co-type".
2. Red label. No 128308 Museum of Comparative Zoology / *Sitta montium* La Touche / M. Cotypte.

The following specimens, housed in the collections of the MCZ, are paralectotypes of *Sitta montium*. Their labels are very similar to those of the lectotype, and are summarized below :

MCZ 128309. F. 19.4.98. Kuatun, N.W. Fukien. "Type of F Spring plumage". "with 5 eggs". This specimen is the other "co-type" of Bangs (1930). We are not sure where its eggs may be, but they would not be type material.

MCZ 128310. F. 1.10.96. "Autumn Type of *Sitta montium*". Co-type.

MCZ 128311. M. 16.5.98. Kuatun, N.W. Fokien. "Type of extreme form of *Sitta montium* (Spring)".

MCZ 128312 F. 2.5.98. Kuatun, N.W. Fukien. "Co-type". XXXX.

MCZ 128313. M. 7.4.98. Kuatun, N.W. Fukien. "Co-Type". Bill: culmen blackish with ridge cad blue at base, lower mandible Cad blue dark at tip. Legs, claws dark greyish brown.

MCZ 128314.M. 29.9.96. Chuan Ming Shan, Kuatun, N.W. Fukien. "Co-type", "M. autumn type of *Sitta montium*".

MCZ 128315 M. 13.10.96. Kuatun, N.W. Fukien.

"Cad blue" may stand for "Cadet Blue", a colour name used by Ridgway. / means "new line", and // "on the other side of the label".

It may be noted that the first visit by La Touche himself to Kuatun was in 1898 but he sent his collector on several exploratory visits first.

One of the two remaining Kuatun paralectotypes is in the AMNH (M. LeCroy pers. comm.): AMNH 683835. 'Jun.' (scratched). M. 26.4.97 (incorrectly copied onto the regular Rothschild label as 26.4.07). Kuatun, N.W. Fukien. 'Ex. Mus. J. de la Touche'. 'Rothschild Museum'. On the reverse of the LaTouche label there is writing in Chinese and a male sex symbol. It is not marked 'type'.

The three paralectotypes of *S. montium* in the collections of the MNHN are:

MNHN C.G. 1870-651, which is also is a paralectotype of *S. sinensis* J. Verreaux, 1871. The inscriptions under its pedestal have been given above.

MNHN C.G. 1877-182. Yer Ka Lo, M. Desgodins.

MNHN C.G. 1877-183. Yer Ka Lo, M. Desgodins.

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