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A PALE-TAILED PURPLE-CRESTED TURACO

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AVIAN PLUMAGE

A PALE-TAILED PURPLE-CRESTED TURACO

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The family Musophagidae (Turacos) is generally a brightly coloured group of birds where different colours are attributed to both reflective and pigmented colours (Church 1869). In the Purple-crested Turaco *Gallirex porphyreolophus* the bright-red on the flight feathers, attributed to copper-based uroporphyrin (turacin) pigmented feathers, are most obvious in flight (Rimington 1939). The greens of the upper body and head are similarly attributed to uroporphyrin pigments (turacoverdin), while those of the tail have colours attributed to the structural properties of the feathers, giving them a “metallic” iridescence (Moreau 1959; Ralph 1969). While these pigments are reputed to leach out, resulting in likely colour changes, when exposed to rain, Chapin (1939) noted that this was never observed in the wettest of forests.

Colour aberrations are not unusual in birds but we feel that the following example warrants reporting, firstly because we know of no other case where this has been reported previously and secondly the striking nature of the aberration in contrast to its mate.

For at least 8 months in 2013/2014 a bird with a pale tail (Figure 1) was observed at Leshiba Wilderness (22.986°S 29.558°E, c. 1200 m a.s.l.) in the western Soutpansberg Mountains, South Africa, on a number of occasions in the same area. Its mate had a normal tail.



Figure 1 – Purple-crested Turaco *Gallirex porphyreolophus* pair in flight, with the former having a pale tail, the latter a dark tail.

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