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The type locality of *Otomys angoniensis* Wroughton, 1906

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Abstract. The type locality of *Otomys angoniensis* Wroughton, 1906 has never been satisfactorily defined. Although it is not possible to be definite it seems most likely that it is the place today known as the Matipa Forest, Malawi in quarter degree square 0933-C-2.

Key words. Mammalia, Muridae, *Otomys angoniensis*, type locality, Malawi.

Ansell & Dowsett (1988: 101) were unable to trace the type locality of *Otomys irroratus angoniensis* Wroughton (currently regarded as a species, *O. angoniensis*), and we are still unable to settle the question definitely. The following, however, amplifies the footnote to page 101.

The label of the type specimen has **A. Sharpe Esq. C. B., B. C. Africa** and **Collector** printed on the obverse side, and written in ink are **2.1.6.22, *Otomys irroratus*** with *irroratus* crossed out and *angoniensis* **Wr.** added, also **Type** and a figure **33**. On the reverse side is written **Mkombui** with an indecipherable letter following the i (which is not dotted), *Otomys irroratus* and **HF 30, E. 21**.

The original description (Wroughton, 1906: 274) gave the locality as: M'Khom-buie, B.C.A., (*Sir H. Johnston*). Alt. 8000', and Skead (1973: 106) wrote:

"Kombe, Dedza, S. Angoniland, Malawi 1414/3422
Syn. Mkombjuie; M'kombwe; Kombi; M'kombhuie;
Mamm. *Otomys agoniensis* (sic), Wroughton, 1906.
Bds. *Seicercus ruficapillus johnstoni*, Sclater, 1927"

The type locality of *Seicercus ruficapillus johnstoni* is clearly given in the original description as "Kombi, Masuka (sic) Range, north-west of Lake Nyasa at about 7000 ft" We have ascertained from the bird section of the British Museum (Natural History) that the label on the type specimen (Number 97.11.4.73) records the collector as A. Whyte, the date of collection as July 1896, and the locality as KOMBI (though the writing on the label is not very clear). Alternative names Kekombe, Khombwe, Komba, Kombe, and Kombo for the Matipa Forest were listed by us in our gazetteer (Ansell & Dowsett, 1988: 143) — we think it likely that they are no more than later misspellings of Kombi, itself now apparently no longer in use. "Kombe Forest, Masuku Range, 7000 feet" is the type locality of the squirrel *Paraxerus lucifer* (Thomas, 1897), the type specimen, BM 97.10.1.80, having also been collected by Whyte in July 1896. Whyte left the country some time after his journey to the north, his last recorded collecting site being Mount Malosa, near Zomba in 1896 (Thomas, 1898: 926).

The type series of *Otomys irroratus angoniensis* does not have any indication of the date of collection and neither do specimens of *Pelomys fallax* and *Dasymys incomtus* also attributed to M'Khombhuie. Thomas (1898: 935) mentioned speci-

mens of *Otomys irroratus* (= *O. angoniensis*) collected by Whyte in June and July 1896 from only the Nyika Plateau, Fort Hill (= Chitipa) and Zomba, so Whyte evidently did not collect the type and paratypes of *Otomys angoniensis*. They were registered at the BM in 1902 among a series numbered 2.1.6.1 to 2.1.6.30 presented by Alfred Sharpe; while specimens 2.1.6.31, 2.1.6.33 and 2.1.6.34 immediately following were noted as having been collected by J. McClounie. Though the register could be clearer on the point it seems likely that the whole series 2.1.6.1 to 2.1.6.34 was collected by McClounie and presented by Sharpe. Wroughton (1906) attributed the specimens of *angoniensis*, as well as its synonym *nyikae*, described in the same paper, to Johnston but, while this was correct for *nyikae*, he overlooked Sharpe's name on the labels of the *angoniensis* series.

Lawrence and Loveridge (1953: 66–670) discussed the type locality of *O. angoniensis* and concluded, on the basis of information given by the late C. W. Benson, that it was unlikely to be in the Misuku area, but probably Kombe about 15 miles north-northeast of Dedza boma at an altitude of 5000 feet; or possibly Khombe near the shore of Lake Nyasa about 25 miles northeast of Dedza at 1600 feet. There is a Khombe (sic) at 14°09' S, 34°19' E, which is clearly one of the places indicated by Benson, though due north rather than northeast of Dedza. The National Atlas of Malawi (Survey Department, Government of Malawi, 1983) does not give any indication of a site of that name near the lake shore to the northeast of Dedza. The only other Khombe in the National Atlas is in the Mchinji District, 13°45' S, 32°59' E, altitude 1100 m, which clearly has no bearing on the type locality question. Skead (1973: 106) recorded 14°14' S, 34°22' E, as the co-ordinates for Kombe but this is the site of Kapesi. Clearly the Kombe at 14°09' S, 34°19' E, comes nearest to the indication given by Lawrence and Loveridge but, even allowing for the fact that many of the heights recorded in early accounts of Malawi were over-estimated, the discrepancy in altitude is much too great. The only place in "Angoniland" which comes anywhere near the 8000 feet mentioned in the original description of *O. angoniensis* would be Dedza Mountain, of which the summit is 2198 m (about 7200 feet). Although the species does occur on the mountain there is no reason whatever to connect it with "M'Khombuie".

While Skead (loc. cit.) must have been relying on Lawrence and Loveridge (1953: 66–67) as far as *Otomys angoniensis* is concerned, it is not at all clear why he associated the Dedza District with *Seicercus ruficapillus johnstoni* in view of the type locality given in the original description, as already mentioned above. On the other hand it seems reasonable to suppose that "M'Khombuie", also Mkombjuie and M'kombwe, could be yet other obsolete synonyms for the present Matipa Forest notwithstanding Benson's rejection, of which see further below. McClounie may have collected the specimens of *Otomys angoniensis* there, though he took only two and a half days to reach Fort Hill (present day Chitipa) from Karonga, and his map (McClounie 1903: 425) shows Musuku Hill (sic) north of Fort Hill though not on his indicated route.

Allen (1939: 343), followed by Ellerman, Morrison-Scott and Hayman (1953: 309), added "Angoniland" to the description of the type locality, apparently with no other justification than the name "*angoniensis*" itself. It is also clear from Benson's letter to Loveridge (Lawrence and Loveridge 1953: 66–67) that it was the name which

caused him to reject the Misuku area as the type locality. *Prima facie* this seems reasonable enough because the Misukus were not part of "Angoniland" even in the rather imprecise way the name was applied (Ansell & Dowsett 1988: 128). However, a possible explanation is that Wroughton, who did not know the country personally, gave the name *angoniensis* simply because at the time the administration was, or had recently been, engaged in military confrontation with the Angoni people. While this may appear somewhat tenuous, there is a parallel in the name *Scotophilus dinganii* (A. Smith, 1833) — the Zulu warrior chief can hardly have had anything to do personally with the discovery of the bat.

Although it is not possible to be definite about the type locality of *Otomys angoniensis*, we think that on balance it is probably the vicinity of the place today known as the Matipa Forest, in square 0933-C-2.

Zusammenfassung

Das Verbreitungsgebiet der Art *Otomys angoniensis* Wroughton, 1906 wurde nie zufriedenstellend definiert. Obwohl eine endgültige Zuordnung nicht möglich ist, ist es höchstwahrscheinlich das heute Matipa Forest (0933-6-2) genannte Gebiet in Malawi.

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