

## PERCHING BIRDS

### *Order* PASSERIFORMES

WE now come to the great group of perching birds or passeriformes. This order probably comprises anything between two-thirds and three-fourths of all existing birds, but as a whole its characters are exceedingly homogenous, and the differences between the families comprising it are really very slight and interlaced. Such differences as do exist are largely anatomical and cannot be properly discussed in an elementary work like the present, nor have I found it feasible or desirable to include a key to the families such as has been attempted by Oates and Baker in the two editions of the *Fauna of British India*, to which the more serious student may be referred.

I have, however, given in short compass various characters which it is hoped will assist the reader to place any common bird he may come across in its proper family. In the case of the smaller and less conspicuous birds he will not always succeed at the first attempt, but may have to proceed by the method of trial and error. The number of "difficult" species in the present volume is, however, by no means large, and no serious trouble which cannot be overcome by a reference to the exhibition galleries of the local museums need really arise.

## PITTAS OR GROUND THRUSHES

### Family PITTIDÆ

THIS family is separated from other passerine birds by certain anatomical peculiarities and by the shape of the wing, which has ten primaries, the outermost falling but little short of the tip of the wing. The legs are very long, with no visible scaling, and the feet large. The tail is very short. The plumage in most species is very gaudy, with patches of brilliant blue, green or scarlet, but a few are birds of sombre coloration. The nests are large balls of leaves, grass and tendrils of plants, situated on or near the ground, and the eggs, usually four or five, are much spotted and blotched.

The family ranges over the whole of tropical Asia, through the Malay Archipelago to North Australia, and north to China and Japan. One group has its headquarters in West Africa, but extends eastward nearly across the continent.

Several species are found in the Malay Peninsula, of which two are included in this volume.

#### KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

- |                       |   |   |   |   |                                      |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| Breast, ochreous buff | . | . | . | . | <i>P. moluccensis</i> , p. 167       |
| Breast, green         | . | . | . | . | <i>P. sordida cucullata</i> , p. 169 |

### *Pitta moluccensis*

#### The Lesser Blue-winged Pitta

##### PLATE 14

*Turdus moluccensis*, P. L. S. Müll., *Natursyst. Suppl.*, 1776, p. 144.

*Pitta moluccensis*, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 509; Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii, 1926, p. 450; Herbert, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, vi., 1924, p. 297.

*Pitta cyanoptera*, Sclater, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xiv., 1890, p. 420; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 392.

**Malay Names.**—Burong pachat (leech bird); burong lah; burong kubong; nok tao-rao (*Siamese*).

**Description.**—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. Top of head to nape, dirty light brown,

palest at edges; lores, centre of the crown, a narrow superciliary stripe, sides of the head and a broad band, encircling the head, jet-black; back, mantle and scapulars, green, separated from the black of the nape by a narrow brownish edging; rump, upper tail coverts and the lesser wing coverts, shining pale ultramarine blue; bastard wing and primary coverts, black; greater coverts, green, edged and tipped with bright blue. Primaries black, with a diagonal band of white, increasing in extent inwardly, secondaries, black, edged with blue on the outer web; under wing coverts and axillaries, black. Tail, black, with a narrow tip of peacock-blue above.

Beneath, point of chin, black; throat, buffy white fading into the rest of the under surface, which is rich ochreous buff, a stripe down middle of belly and under tail coverts, crimson; thighs, greyish brown.

*Immature.*—Wing coverts and rump with no shining ultramarine; the tail with a broader tip of greenish blue; under surface, dirty greyish buff; darker, with a greenish flush, on breast. No scarlet but only the faintest trace of pink in the middle of the abdomen; thighs, mud-coloured.

**Soft Parts.**—Iris, dark hazel; bill, black; feet, pinkish flesh, yellowish flesh or mauve. Immature birds have the tip and base of the bill orange-red.

**Dimensions.**—Total length, about 8 in.; wing, 4·8 in.; tail, 2·1 in.; tarsus, 1·6 in.; bill from gape, 1·3 in.

**Range in the Malay Peninsula.**—Throughout the Peninsula and all the adjacent islands except the Tioman group, where, however, it probably occurs in winter.

**Extralimital Range.**—North to Pegu and Aracan; Central and South Siam and French Indo-China, Sumatra, Borneo and Java—the latter somewhat doubtfully.

**Nidification.**—I have no records of the nesting of this species in the south of the Peninsula, though possibly it does so in the north of Perak. At Bandon, in Siamese Malaya, I found a nest with hard set eggs early in June. It was about the size of a football—a roughly globular mass of dead leaves and plant tendrils lined with leaves, with the entrance at the side. It was situate in thin jungle between two rocks at the foot of a limestone cliff. The eggs, three in number, were hard set, and were obtuse ovals, fairly glossy. The ground-colour was yellowish white, thinly spotted, mainly towards the larger end, with small rounded spots of reddish brown. They measure about 1·04 by 0·82 in., rather smaller than the sizes given by Oates and by Herbert for eggs from Central Siam.

**Habits.**—It is possible that a certain number of this species are resident in the southern parts of the Peninsula throughout the year, but this is doubtful. In the winter months, however, commencing about October, vast flocks arrive from the north, travelling along the Straits of Malacca on the west coast and crossing the Gulf of Siam on the east. These migrants are found for a short time among the mangroves and on small islands, and then seem to disperse inland to low-country forest, jungle and scrub. They do not, however, ascend the hills, but frequent by preference patches of forest, or even garden-land in the neighbourhood of ricefields.

The diet is insectivorous, especially ants, but large snails are also eaten, and I am inclined to think that the huge accumulations of shells often found at the bases of limestone cliffs, all with the apex broken in, are, in part, due to this bird, which has the habit of selecting a particular rock for cracking the snail-shell. This trait it shares with the dark blue whistling thrush, *Myiophonus dicorhynchus*. In captivity the birds will live on boiled rice, plantains and cockroaches, but they do not, as a rule, survive long and are very wild, injuring themselves against the bars of their cages.

They are not particularly shy, but run with great rapidity with their tails cocked up. In Tenasserim, Davison states that they perch much on trees, and are very noisy birds with a fine, clear double note. In the migration season this is often heard late at night, but in Malaya the birds seem to keep mainly to the ground, and Davison's observations probably refer mainly to breeding birds. The feathers of the head are much lengthened so as to form an occipital crest in the skin. In life, however, I have never seen this crest erected.

*Note.*—In the plate, by an oversight, the bill of the right-hand figure is shown too light, it should be almost dead-black. The figures are two-thirds natural size. The male (right) is from Trang, Peninsular Siam, 13th December 1909, the female (left) from Patani, 3rd November 1901.

*Pitta sordida cucullata*

**The Green-breasted Pitta**

*Pitta cucullata*, Hartlaub, *Rev. Zool.*, 1843, p. 65 (Malacca); Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 509; Sclater, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xiv., 1890, p. 443; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 395; Stuart Baker, *op. cit.* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 455.

*Pitta sordida cucullata*, Herbert, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, vi., 1924, p. 297.

**Malay Name.**—Unrecorded.

**Description.**—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. Crown, rich brown; lores, sides of the head, a narrow superciliar stripe, a collar on the hind neck and the chin and throat, black; mantle, back and scapulars, grass-green; lesser upper wing coverts and upper tail coverts, pale shining silvery blue; median wing coverts as the back; primary coverts and primaries, black, the latter with a large band of white nearly reaching the tips in the inner primaries; secondaries, black, bluish green on the outer webs. Inner wing coverts and axillaries, black; tail, black with a very narrow tip of blue. Under surface below the throat, pale greenish blue, with a verditer sheen; middle of the upper abdomen with a large black spot, rest of the abdomen and under tail coverts, crimson; thighs, ashy green.

*Immature.*—I have seen no very young birds, but the not quite adult have the abdomen and under tail coverts more pinky, less scarlet. Still younger birds have the throat white or mixed with white, and the upper wing coverts largely spotted with white, the shining silvery blue absent.

**Soft Parts.**—"Iris, dark hazel; bill, black or dark corneous; feet, fleshy

pink, fleshy white or grey" (Jacobson and van Heyst); purplish flesh (H. C. R. and C. B. K.).

**Dimensions.**—Total length, about 7 in.; wing, 4·4 in.; tail, 1·5 in.; tarsus, 1·6 in.; bill from gape, 1·1 in.

**Range in the Malay Peninsula.**—That of *P. moluccensis*.

**Extralimital Range.**—North, through Burma to the Himalayas; east, through Siam to Cochin-China; Sumatra.

**Nidification.**—Not recorded from the Malay Peninsula. Herbert's collector obtained a clutch of four eggs in South-East Siam at the end of July from a nest of the usual type at the foot of a bamboo clump. They were very like those of *P. moluccensis*, but with a white ground-colour, and measured 1·05 by 0·79 in.

**Habits.**—Exactly those of *P. moluccensis* with which it occurs, though a larger number seem to stay with us, possibly throughout the year. The bird frequents deeper forest, and is not seen so often near villages, nor is it quite so common as its congener