

## FLYCATCHERS

### Family MUSCICAPIDÆ

IN terms of geological time the whole of the passerine birds are very modern, and many of the families have not as yet become clearly differentiated, so that there are, in many cases, genera or species possessing the characters of more than one family, in varying degree. This is especially true of the large and important family of the flycatchers (*Muscicapidæ*) amongst which may be found species verging towards the thrushes (*Turdidæ*), the warblers (*Sylviidæ*), the shrikes (*Laniidæ*), and lastly the babblers (*Timaliidæ*), a large and heterogeneous assemblage, which will probably be ultimately greatly reduced in numbers. At present, as a late eminent ornithologist once described it, the *Timaliidæ* are "the waste-paper basket of the puzzled ornithologist." But this is by the way.

Flycatchers have really no very salient characters. All are small birds, none so large as a thrush, not many larger than a sparrow. The bill is broad and flattened, often, in plan, almost an equilateral triangle, the upper mandible slightly notched; the nostrils are covered with long hairs or soft bristles directed forwards, sometimes reaching beyond the tip of the bill; there are also stiff bristles at the gape, directed laterally.

The wing has ten primaries, the first often short, but never vestigial, as in some of the warblers; the shape of the wing is variable, more pointed in migratory, rounded in sedentary forms. Tail of twelve feathers also variable, sometimes very short, the middle tail feathers in some genera greatly lengthened, three times the length of the bird. Tarsi, very slender, smooth behind, the feet with four toes, always weak (in which the flycatchers differ from the thrushes, where they are strong).

The plumage is very diverse, and many flycatchers are brilliantly coloured birds; the sexes are sometimes alike, sometimes different, but there is no distinct breeding or seasonal plumage. The young, however, are nearly always spotted or mottled, a difference between this family and the warblers, where the young are more or less like the parents, sometimes brighter in colouring.

The breeding habits of the whole family are somewhat similar, the nests being usually small cup-shaped structures of moss lined with tendrils, hairs and the like, and placed either in crevices of rocks, holes in trees or among the

branches; the eggs, which may be up to seven or more in number, but usually much fewer in tropical forms, are almost always much mottled and speckled.

The food is invariably insectivorous, often caught on the wing, the bird returning to one perch or point of observation—usually a projecting twig or bough—after each flight. Sometimes food is sought for on the boughs and trunks of trees or among leaves and creepers, but hardly ever on the ground.

Song is often sweet though feeble; some species have little more than a twitter, and the notes of some others are decidedly harsh.

The family is a very large one of many hundreds of species spread over the whole world, except the Arctic regions. The majority of the species are sedentary, but those inhabiting the colder zones of necessity migrate to warmer zones in winter.

Nearly fifty species are found in Malaya, in every kind of country: some are permanent inhabitants of the mangrove swamps, others are familiar village birds, not a few are confined to the higher mountains, and many are merely winter visitors.

I have selected ten species for description in this volume including all the commonest forms. It should be mentioned that *Muscitrea cinerea* is considered by Mr Baker to be a warbler, not a flycatcher, while I myself regard it as a somewhat aberrant shrike. For convenience, however, I have retained it in its present position pending a revision of the allied forms.

#### KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

1	{	Central tail feathers greatly elongated . . . . .	2	
	{	Central tail feathers not greatly elongated . . . . .	3	
2	{	Mantle, back and tail, white, or mainly so . . . . .	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi affinis</i>	(adult male), p. 179
	{	Mantle, back and tail, chestnut . . . . .	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi affinis</i>	(sub-adult male)
3	{	Head more or less glossy black and crested; mantle and tail, chestnut; size larger . . . . .	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi affinis</i>	(female and male immature)
	{	Head not glossy black, not crested, mantle and tail not chestnut; smaller . . . . .	4	
4	{	Plumage with more or less blue or grey . . . . .	5	
	{	Plumage with no blue or grey . . . . .	10	
5	{	Breast rufous . . . . .	6	
	{	Breast not rufous . . . . .	7	
6	{	Plumage above, vivid blue . . . . .	<i>Cynoris tickelliae sumatrensis</i>	(male), p. 181
	{	Plumage above, grey, faintly blue . . . . .	<i>Cynoris tickelliae sumatrensis</i>	(female)
7	{	Feathers on crown more or less glossy . . . . .	8	
	{	Feathers on crown not glossy . . . . .	9	

8	{	A patch of close-set velvety black feathers on nape ; a black gorget	}	<i>Hypothymis azurea prophata</i>	(male), p. 183
		No patch of close-set velvety black feathers on nape ; no black gorget		<i>Hypothymis azurea prophata</i>	
9	{	A maroon patch on breast	}	<i>Drymophila velata caesia</i>	(male)
		No maroon on breast		<i>Drymophila velata caesia</i>	(female), p. 185
10	{	Plumage largely green	}	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis anti-oxantha</i>	p. 185
		With no green in plumage			
11	{	Tail, fan-shaped, not shorter than wing, a distinct white eyebrow	}		12
		Tail not fan-shaped, shorter than wing, no distinct white eyebrow			
12	{	Plumage spotted below	}	<i>Rhipidura perlata</i>	p. 188
		Plumage not spotted below		<i>Rhipidura javanica javanica</i>	
13	{	Larger wing not less than 3·2 in.	}	<i>Muscitrea grisola grisola</i>	p. 189
		Smaller wing not more than 2·9 in.			
14	{	Plumage more or less ferruginous	}	<i>Hemichelidon ferruginea</i>	p. 190
		Plumage not at all ferruginous		<i>Alseonax latirostris latirostris</i>	

*Terpsiphone paradisi affinis*

**The Burmese Paradise Flycatcher**

*Tchitrea affinis*, Hay, Blyth, *Journ. Asiatic Society Bengal*, xv., 1846, p. 292 (Malacca).

*Muscipeta affinis*, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 508 ; Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iv., 1879, p. 340.

*Terpsiphone affinis*, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 47 ; *id.* in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), ii., 1890, p. 26 ; Oates and Reid, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1903, p. 280.

*Terpsiphone paradisi affinis*, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), ii., 1924, p. 267.

**Malay Names.**—Burong murai bangau ; murai (or merbah) ekor gading.

**Description.**—*Adult male.*—Head, chin and throat, black, with a greenish gloss, the feathers of the head lengthened, with rounded tips forming a crest. Primaries, black, in all except the outermost, with the outer webs white and with an increasing amount of white on the inner webs ; secondaries, the same but with more white ; innermost, entirely white with a broad white shaft streak. Upper wing coverts, white, with broad, black centres ; under wing coverts axillaries and edges of wing, white. Mantle, back, scapulars and upper tail coverts, white, often uniform, often more or less heavily streaked with black

and with narrow black edgings. Tail feathers, white, always with black shafts and generally with black edges, which vary in width. Black shaft stripes generally continuous to the tips of the centre feathers, but not invariably so. Under surface and under tail coverts, uniform white.

*Male in second plumage.*—With elongated centre tail feathers. Head all round, chin and throat, black, with a greenish gloss, as in the white stage. Primaries, brownish black, edged with chestnut-bay on the outer webs, and with paler bay on the inner webs; upper wing coverts and inner secondaries, pale chestnut-bay; axillaries, greyish; under wing coverts dusky with buffy edges. Mantle, back, rump and tail, rich, rufous chestnut, under surface of tail rather paler. Beneath breast, dark steel-grey; centre of abdomen, greyish white; under tail coverts washed with chestnut.

*Adult female.*—Centre tail feathers not greatly elongated. Crest shorter than in male. Throat rather less dark than in rufous plumage of male. Wing coverts and inner secondaries with broad dark centres, and flanks slightly washed with buffy.

*Immature.*—Younger birds of both sexes have practically no crest, with the head only slightly glossy; the sides of the breast are washed with fulvous, and the upper surface is much browner, less rufous, chestnut, especially on the mantle. Young males often have the centre tail feathers projecting an inch or so beyond the rest.

*Fledgeling.*—Uniform cinnamon-bay above, including the head, the latter with ill-defined shaft stripes; wings as in the immature bird. Beneath, white, the feathers of the breast mottled and edged with smoky buff.

*Note.*—The stages passed through by this bird are, even now, not fully understood, but it is evident that the white plumage is not attained until the third year. There is great variation in the amount of black on these white birds, especially on the tail and on the back. Possibly as they age they tend to lose the black edging to the feathers.

**Soft Parts.**—Iris, green or emerald, dark brown or dark; eye, wattle and bill, smalt blue; the inside of the mouth, green; feet, blue or slaty grey or purplish grey. We have birds from widely separated localities, Bandon, the west coast of Siam and Sumatra, with the iris recorded by ourselves as green, though other observers record it as dark brown or dark. Possibly this colour fades rapidly or is assumed only during the breeding season.

**Dimensions.**—Wing, 3·5 to 4 in.; tail, including long feathers, up to 15 in. or more; females, 4 to 4·2 in.; tarsus, 0·65; bill from gape, 1 to 1·3 in.

**Range in the Malay Peninsula.**—Throughout its length. Junk Zeylon, Langkawi, Penang and the Bandon Islands (Koh Samui). Not recorded of late years from Singapore Island, but probably occurring there at times.

**Extralimital Range.**—The Eastern Himalayas, the whole of the Indo-Chinese countries to Annam and Tonkin, Sumatra. The status of the Javan form is uncertain, but slightly different races inhabit Borneo, the lesser Sunda Islands (Flores, etc.) and the Andamans and Nicobars.

**Nidification.**—Breeds in the Malay Peninsula from March to June. The nesting situation is usually in old jungle, and one nest I obtained in the Patani States on the 8th May was in the fork of a small sapling about eight feet from the ground, and, externally, a deep, crucible-shaped cup covered with bright green moss; internally, a shallow, oval cup, lined with the fine black tendrils of a creeper.

Eggs from the north and south of the Peninsula in the British Museum are pointed ovals, slightly glossed, of a faint pinky white tint, with small spots and specklings of dark brown and pale pinkish brown, much thicker towards the larger end. Stuart Baker gives the average of one hundred Burmese eggs as 0.78 by 0.6 in. The four eggs in the British Museum from the Malay Peninsula are a little smaller than this.

**Habits.**—Very common throughout the Malay Peninsula, though in the southern half it does not come into garden- and orchard-land, and is, therefore, not such a familiar bird to the European resident as are its congeners in India and Burma. For the most part it frequents old jungle and jungle clearings, from sea-level to about 4000 ft., though it is rare at the higher elevations, and perhaps commoner at from 1000 to 2000 ft. than it is in the plains. It frequents, for choice, more open situations where there is not much close undergrowth. The flight is low and undulating, though, as Baker notes, the bird is capable of very quick turns when hawking for insects, but the males often seem rather incommoded by their long tails. They have the usual habits of flycatchers, and feed on all kinds of insects and moths, including adults of the evil-smelling bug, such as the Coreid (*Acanthocoris scali*er).

The adult males are very proud of their white plumage and display it by perching across a bough, depressing and half spreading the wings and raising and expanding the tail.

This species is sedentary, but another form, characterized by its smaller bill and a maroon-washed mantle, in the rufous phase, is migratory, arriving from the East in October and staying some months. This is *Tersiphone paradisii incii*, whose breeding haunts are China. Another Chinese species which never attains a white plumage, but is purple-black above and grey beneath in the adult, is *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* (Eyton), but this latter is very seldom met with except on the coasts. Young and immature birds can be distinguished from the other two forms by their dull *brown* tail.

It is impossible to distinguish with certainty between white specimens of *T. p. affinis* and *T. p. incii*. Distinctions that I, at one time, thought to exist are illusory.

### *Cyornis tickellia sumatrensis*

#### Sharpe's Blue Flycatcher

*Siphia sumatrensis*, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iv., 1879, p. 451 (Sumatra).

*Cyornis tickellia sumatrensis*, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), ii, 1924, p. 234.

**Malay Name.**—Kélichap ranting.

**Description.**—*Adult male.*—Feathers next the bill and lores, very deep blue, almost black; sides of the face, ear coverts, and a line bordering the throat, bluish black, almost black on the chin. Forehead, a line over the eye and the coverts at the angle of the wing, bright shining blue, the forehead with glistening points, rest of the upper surface clear blue, rather dark. Quills and wing coverts, brownish, edged with blue, very narrowly on the primaries. Inner aspect of the wing, lead; axillaries and under wing coverts, white, the greater series smoky, with pale edge. Central pair of tail feathers, blue, as the back, the remainder, black, with the outer webs blue. Throat and breast, ferruginous, with the sides of the breast, blue; remainder of under surface, including under tail coverts, pure white, sharply defined from the rufous of the upper breast; flanks, but slightly infuscated; thighs, white, with dark bases.

*Adult female.*—General distribution of the colours as in the male, but with no glistening or bright blue; the whole upper surface bluish grey, bluer on the upper tail coverts; hardly any blue edging to the wing; sides of the face, pure grey. Under surface with the flanks heavily infuscated with greyish brown, and the white not so sharply defined from the breast.

*Immature.*—Greyish brown with no tinge of blue above, and heavily mottled with buff and fulvous beneath, with the throat paler, and with most of the feathers with dusky edges, giving a spotted effect.

**Soft Parts.**—Iris, dark; bill, black; feet, purplish flesh.

**Dimensions.**—Total length, 5·4 to 5·6 in.; wing, 2·5 to 2·8 in.; tail, 2·3 to 2·5 in.; tarsus, 0·7 in.; bill from gape, 0·65 to 0·7 in.

**Range in the Malay Peninsula.**—From its northern boundary to Malacca, but not, apparently, much farther south. Common on the Langkawi group and on the Bandon Islands, but not yet obtained on Penang, Junk Zeylon or Singapore islands.

**Extralimital Range.**—Central Burma, south through Tenasserim, the greater part of Siam, Annam, and also Sumatra, where its occurrence has now been verified.

**Nidification.**—Mr Seimund and I obtained a nest on Koh Pennan, on 25th May, with the parent bird. The nest was placed in a crevice in a rock about six feet off the ground, and was of the usual flycatcher type—a hemispherical cup, about four inches in external and two in internal diameter, made of dead leaves and fragments of ferns and lined with tendrils. The eggs were three in number, hard set. In shape they are blunt ovals, the shell almost without gloss; ground-colour, olive-grey, clouded with mottlings of reddish brown, which in two eggs are fairly distributed over the shell, and in the third forms a zone at the larger end. Average dimensions, 0·70 by 0·54 in.

**Habits.**—This little flycatcher is most numerous along the coasts of the Peninsula, but not in the mangroves, where its place is taken by a larger form with a uniform, deep rusty under surface, *C. rufigaster* (Raffles). It is also very abundant in scrubby brushwood on many of the larger islands towards the north of the Peninsula, but becomes continuously scarcer

towards the south. It is not found in deep jungle or at any height on the hills, but occurs frequently in gardens, etc., especially during the winter months, though I do not think that it is in any sense a migrant.

It is found singly or in pairs, frequenting low trees and bushes, and is singularly tame and fearless. Its habits and food are those of the family in general, and it has a very pleasant little song, often uttered on the wing.

*Hypothymis azurea prophata*

**The Malaysian Black-naped Flycatcher**

*Hypothymis azurea prophata*, Oberholser, *Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus.*, 39, 1911, p. 597 (Karimon Island).

*Hypothymis occipitalis*, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iv., 1879, p. 275; Whitehead, *Ibis*, 1889, p. 197; Oates and Reid, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1903, p. 273.

**Malay Name.**—Not ascertained.

**Description.**—*Adult male.*—Feathers of the head very short, nape patch dense and velvety. Crown and sides of the head, turquoise-blue; frontal plumes, a narrow line on the forehead and a patch on the nape, dense, velvety black, as also a narrow gorget on the throat. Upper surface, including wing coverts, more purplish blue. Primaries and secondaries, black, all except the outer two of the former narrowly, and the latter broadly, edged with ultramarine blue; inner aspect of wing, brownish black, paler on the inner webs, which have indications of whitish edges; axillaries, silky greyish white; under wing coverts the same, blue along the edge of the wing. Tail feathers—except the central pair, which are dark blue—blackish, the outer webs blue, very narrowly tipped with white on the inner web; beneath, greyish black, the basal two-thirds of the shafts, white. Beneath, extreme point of chin, black; throat above the black gorget, azure blue; breast beneath the gorget more purplish blue; flanks, belly and under tail coverts, white, strongly washed with purplish blue; thighs, greyish blue.

*Adult female.*—No velvety black nape patch. Much duller than male. Forehead and point of chin, dull black; head and nape, blue; rest of upper surface, including wings and tail, greyish brown; a faint wash of blue on the wing coverts; upper tail coverts richer brown, inner aspect of wing paler than in the male, and with more decided white edges to the inner webs of the feathers. Under surface, throat, purplish blue; breast, greyish blue. Rest of under surface, white, with a faint greyish-blue wash; under tail coverts pure white.

*Immature.*—Young females have very little blue on the crown and throat; young males are at first like females and gradually acquire the black nape gorget, and the brighter blue of the back. I have not seen *very* young birds, which are probably spotted or mottled.

**Soft Parts.**—Iris, mostly recorded as dark or reddish brown, though I have seen birds with red or carmine eyes; tumid ring round eye, Cambridge

blue; bill, smalt, yellowish green inside; feet, purplish cobalt or greyish blue. *Female*: without the eye ring and with the bill generally duller.

**Dimensions.**—Total length, about 6·2 in.; wing, 2·8 in.; tail, 2·9 in.; tarsus, 0·62 in.; bill from gape, 0·73 in. Females average slightly smaller than males.

**Range in the Malay Peninsula.**—From about the latitude of Penang south to Johore; Singapore Island and Penang; the Tioman group (Pulau Tinggi).

**Extralimital Range.**—Sumatra and Borneo. The status of the Javan bird is at present uncertain. The species, as a whole, has a very wide range, from Western India to Hainan and throughout the Malay Peninsula to the Philippines; very many insular races have been named.

**Nidification.**—I am not acquainted with any records of the nests and eggs of this southern form from the Malay Peninsula. There is a clutch of five eggs from Labuan, or more probably the adjacent mainland of Borneo, in the Hugh Low collection in the British Museum. These are rather pointed ovals, smooth in texture; the ground-colour is very white, with a faint pinkish tinge with reddish-brown markings varied in size, with confluent edges, mostly congregated towards the large end of the egg; the size is about 0·74 by 0·52 in. A clutch of three eggs, taken by J. Darling, in Junk Zeylon, on 10th March, are more strongly coloured and marked, and rather broader. There is also a clutch attributed to this species collected by Mr Aagaard at Bangnara, Patani States, on 11th June, which is now in the Raffles Museum, Singapore. The nest of the closely allied races is the usual deep cup, built in the forks of saplings on the undergrowth of deep forest, ornamented outside with moss, spiders' egg caves and webs, and lined inside with fine tendrils.

**Habits.**—Common everywhere, in jungle, old and secondary, to a superior limit of about 3000 ft., and strictly resident. It is found in pairs, generally on the lower trees or among creepers on the edge of clearings, and has the usual habits of the smaller flycatchers. It is perhaps commoner in or near bamboo forest than in other situations. The song is a pleasant little trill, uttered on the wing as well as when perching.

*Note.*—In the north of the Peninsula and in Junk Zeylon and the Bandon Islands this race is replaced by a slightly larger form, with a greater extent of pure white on the belly. This race, *H. azurea styax* (Hartl.), is found over the greater part of Northern India, the whole of Indo-China, Southern Yunnan and Hainan. In the Peninsula there is a broad belt, including Perlis, the Langkawi Islands and parts of Patani, in which the birds can be indifferently referred to either race.

### *Drymophila velata caesia*

#### The Maroon-breasted Flycatcher

*Monarcha caesia*, Lesson, *Rev. Zool.*, 1839, p. 167 (Sumatra).

*Philentoma velatum*, Temm. (part), Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iv., 1879, p. 365; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 43; Stuart Baker (*op. cit.*) (2nd ed.), ii., 1924, p. 262.















