

STARLINGS

Family STURNIDÆ

THIS family, as already noted, is closely connected with the preceding, and differs from it only in minor characters, though the habits are rather different. Many of the species are migratory, others resident.

Though the family is large, and there are many Oriental species, it is not well represented in the Malay Peninsula. Two species are common winter visitors, and a third, a well-known resident bird, is described in this volume. A fourth form, *Ampeliceps coronatus* (the gold-crested mynah), is common in the north of the Peninsula. Both Oates and Baker include it in this family, but there are many arguments for placing it next or near to *Gracula*, amongst the tree-starlings.

Æthiopsar fuscus torquatus

The Buffalo Mynah

PLATE 25 (*lower figure*).

Acridotheres torquatus, Davison, *Ibis*, 1892, p. 102 (Pahang, Aberration).

Acridotheres fuscus, Moore, *P.Z.S.*, 1859, p. 445 (Penang and Malacca); Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xiii., 1890, p. 89 (part).

Æthiopsar fuscus, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1890, p. 539.

Æthiopsar fuscus torquatus, Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1924, p. 357.

Malay Name.—Burong gëmbala kerbau.

Description.—*Adult male.*—Head and crest, glossy black; upper surface, slaty grey, purer on the nape and upper tail coverts; wing coverts, bronzy brown; the primary coverts, white. Primaries, blackish brown, a white spot at the base; the secondaries browner. Inner aspect of wing, blackish, with a white patch at the base of the primaries; under wing coverts, dark grey, with paler edges; axillaries, ashy, washed with vinous buff. Tail feathers, black, slightly glossed with green, all except the centre pair, with white tips, increasing in extent towards the outermost. Lores, velvety black; sides of the face and ear coverts, greyish black. Throat and upper breast, dark grey, washed with vinous; lower breast and flanks, paler; centre of abdomen, whitish; vent and under tail coverts, pale creamy buff.

Soft Parts.—Iris, bright yellow; extreme base of bill, indigo-blue; remainder, orange-yellow; legs, orange-yellow; claws, greenish horn (Oates).

Dimensions.—Total length, about 9 in. ; wing, 4·6 in. ; tail, 2·9 in. ; tarsus, 1·4 in. ; bill from gape, 1·2 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From the Isthmus of Kra south to about Malacca ; Penang.

Extralimital Range.—It is rather doubtful how far north this race extends, probably as far as Pegu.

Nidification.—Nothing is known of the breeding habits in Malaya, and, in view of the fact that the general habits seem to be so different from those of the other races, it is possible that the eggs and nest may be equally different. Of the Pegu bird, of which Mr Oates says that it breeds by preference in holes of trees, and occasionally on the high roofs of monastic buildings, Ogilvie Grant describes the eggs as resembling those of *Acridotheres tristis*, very pointed, oval in shape, highly glossy, and pale to dark greenish blue in colour ; the measurements average 1·17 by 0·88 in.

Habits.—This bird is common only in the northern parts of the Peninsula, and its occurrence as far south as Malacca, as vouched for by Dr Cantor, is perhaps a little doubtful. We know of an isolated colony at Jeram, on the coast of Selangor, which existed in Davison's day, in 1879, and it is common on the outskirts of Taiping. In Negri Sembilan it does not seem to occur. So far as our experience goes, the species is found only in the open country and edges of ricefields, and in grazing-grounds. It is associated with buffalo and cattle, and is often seen on the backs of the beasts, presumably feeding on ticks, etc. I have never seen it in jungle country or on trees. The bird is not infrequently seen in captivity, and it is said can be taught to talk, but I know nothing of its note in a wild state. It is possible, of course, that birds in the British part of the Peninsula are derived from escapes.

The bird figured, two-thirds natural size, is a male from Ban Sai Kau, Patani States.