

THE TRUE FINCHES

Family FRINGILLIDÆ

SUPERFICIALLY this family presents an extremely close resemblance to the weaver-finches, and, as noted under that heading, the main difference lies in the fact that the true finches have only nine primaries, lacking the minute outer one of the *Ploceidæ*. The bill is short and conical, but the tail is usually square, or only slightly cuneate or rounded.

The Malayan species have only one moult in the year, and the sexes are not materially different, though in many forms the male is much more brilliantly coloured.

The family has its headquarters in the temperate and subtropical zones. It is totally absent from the Australasian region, but is otherwise cosmopolitan.

Only three species are in the Malayan list, a bunting (*Emberiza aureola*), a very rare winter visitor, a bullfinch (*Pyrrhula waterstradti*) confined to the highest mountains, and the bird described below, which is a very near relative of the European tree-sparrow.

Passer montanus malaccensis

The Malay Tree-Sparrow

Passer montanus malaccensis, Dubois, *Faun. Ill. Vert. Belge., Ois.*, i., 1885, p. 572 (Malacca); Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 177.

Passer montanus, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 240 (part); Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 524.

Passer malaccensis, Grant, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1912, p. 201.

Malay Name.—Pipit rumah.

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes similar. Crown and nape, vinaceous; mantle and scapulars, rusty brown, with broad black stripes; back, rump and upper tail coverts, uniform fulvous brown; lesser wing coverts, uniform chestnut-brown; median coverts, blackish, with broad white tips, forming a wing bar; greater ones blackish in centre, with broad, rusty brown edges and white tips, forming a second less-defined wing bar. Primaries, brownish, with paler brown edgings to the outer webs; secondaries, blackish, with much broader, rusty brown margins, and with paler tips. Inner aspect of wing, greyish; the

quills with pale inner margins, more buffy on the secondaries ; axillaries and under wing coverts, dusky with pale edges. Tail feathers, brown, with pale rufous margins, and an ill-defined dark area near the tip ; lores, a narrow line beneath the eye, a large patch beneath the ear coverts, chin and throat, black ; ear coverts, greyish ; a broad stripe from the gape running down each side of the throat, whitish. Breast, buffy grey ; flanks and thighs, fuscous, tinged with rufous ; middle of belly, whitish.

Immature.—Head, not vinaceous, but the same colour as the back ; wing bars not marked, the tips of the coverts, buffy ; pale inner margins of the secondaries much more conspicuous, and under surface greyer, with hardly any fulvous buff on the flanks ; black throat and chest reduced in area and duller.

Soft Parts.—Iris, brown ; bill, black ; feet, brownish flesh ; young with the bill corneous above, yellowish horn beneath.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 5·2 in. ; wing, 2·6 to 2·8 in. ; tail, 2·1 to 2·3 in. ; tarsus, 0·75 in. ; bill from gape, 0·55 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout its length, and in the larger island groups.

Extralimital Range.—Practically all Asia east of the head of the Bay of Bengal, including the eastern Himalayas ; Sumatra, Java and, rather doubtfully, Borneo.

Nidification.—Breeds throughout the earlier part of the year from February onwards, and makes its untidy nest of grass and rubbish, lined with feathers, in any convenient situation, such as the crown of a betel-palm, beneath the ceiling-boards of a verandah, or in a rolled-up chick. The eggs, in the Malay Peninsula, are rarely more than four in number, with a dull glossless surface of a greenish-grey ground-colour with numerous darker specklings and blotches. According to Stuart Baker the average size is 0·75 by 0·58 in.

Habits.—Tree-sparrow, as a name for the form of this bird inhabiting Malaya, is rather a misnomer, as the bird is strictly associated with houses and the habitations of men. It is found all over the Malay Peninsula and the larger adjacent islands, but only in the bigger towns and villages, and even then not to any great extent in those inhabited mainly or solely by Malays. Like the Straits robin it has, of course, spread along the main roads and railways that have of late years been driven through the primeval jungle, but apart from these arterial ways a comparatively narrow belt of old jungle forms a complete bar to its movements, and it is quite an open question whether the bird is a true native of the Peninsula. More probably it has found its way into the country with successive waves of aliens, Indian, Chinese and European. Whatever may be its true status it is now thoroughly at home, and in habits is precisely the same, cheeky, independent little bird as is its cousin, the house-sparrow, in Europe. It congregates in small flocks in gardens and orchards, and along the roads, picking up grain, etc., from horse and cattle dung, but in the ricefields cannot compete with the rice-birds, *Munia sp.*, and is only occasionally met with in such situations.