

WEAVER-FINCHES AND RICE-BIRDS

Family PLOCEIDÆ

THIS group has the conical-shaped beak of the true finches, from whom it is separated by the fact that the birds comprising it have ten, not nine, primaries, the first being sometimes very minute, and always less than half the second in length. The tail is sometimes square, but in many species sharply pointed; none of the Asiatic species has the enormously elongated tail feathers which are developed in certain African genera known as widow-birds.

In habit these birds are gregarious, and feed on grain and grass seeds. The depredations the smaller species commit on the ripening rice are in many districts very serious, and entail constant vigilance on the part of the cultivators.

The nests are sometimes very elaborate, and the eggs usually white, though a few species have them coloured and spotted.

One section of the group has a distinct winter and summer plumage, in some the sexes are different, and in many there is a distinct juvenile livery. The colours are very varied, a certain proportion, notably of African and Australasian forms, being very gaudy birds.

They are very largely traded in as cage-birds and many records of localities in the Malay Peninsula and elsewhere are, therefore, due to imported escaped birds, which have succeeded in establishing themselves.

The majority of the family are African, many occur in Australia, comparatively few are Indian or Malayan.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

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| 1 | { | First primary normal; generally with yellow in the plumage | } <i>Ploceus passerinus infortunatus</i> , p. 286 |
| | | First primary very minute; with no yellow on the plumage | |
| 2 | { | Bill, pink; much pale grey on plumage | } <i>Munia oryzivora</i> , p. 288 |
| | | Bill, slaty or black, no pale grey on plumage | |
| 3 | { | Squamulated and streaked below; head, dark | } <i>Uroloncha striata subsquamicollis</i> , p. 289 |
| | | Uniform below; head, whitish | |

Ploceus passerinus infortunatus

The Malay Weaver-Finch

Ploceus passerinus infortunatus, Hartert, *Nov. Zool.*, ix., 1902, p. 577 (Kelantan).

Ploceus atrigula, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xiii., 1890, p. 491.

Ploceus baya, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 521.

Ploceus megarhynchus (*nec.* Hume), Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 177.

Ploceus philippinus passerinus, Herbert, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, vi., 1923, p. 115.

Malay Names.—Burong tempūa ; chak raya : nok a charp (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult male.*—Head and nape, bright golden yellow ; rest of upper surface, rufous tawny brown, the feathers with large blackish centres, more uniform on the lower back and upper tail coverts ; wing coverts, dark brown, with lighter edges ; the primaries and secondaries, darker ; inner aspect of wing, paler brown, the primaries with lighter edges ; under wing coverts and axillaries, tawny ; tail feathers, dark brown, all except the centre pair with marked light edges ; sides of the head and throat, blackish grey ; upper breast, pale tawny ; sides of the breast and flanks, rich rufous tawny ; the middle of the abdomen and under tail coverts much paler ; thighs, yellowish buff.

Adult female.—Different from the male, lacking all yellow ; head streaked with black and brown ; a pale buff superciliary stripe from the nostrils to the ear coverts, widening posteriorly ; sides of the head and throat, buffy white, the former with fine dark streaks ; rest of the under surface paler than in the male ; the flanks with dark streaks.

Non-breeding plumage.—Like the female, but the centres of the feathers of the upper surface paler, and the edges and superciliary more buff. Under surface less tawny.

Soft Parts.—*In breeding plumage.*—*Male* : iris, chestnut ; bill, black ; tarsi and claws, pale pinkish horn. *Female* : iris, warm brown ; bill, yellowish horn ; tarsi, dirty flesh. Both sexes in non-breeding plumage have the bill yellowish or pinkish horn.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 6 in. ; wing, 2·6 to 2·8 in. ; tail, 1·9 in. ; tarsus, 0·75 in. ; bill from gape, 0·7 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the whole length of the Peninsula, Junk Zeylon, Penang and Singapore.

Extralimital Range.—Southern Burma, Siam, probably Annam ; Sumatra and Java.

Nidification.—In the Malay Peninsula the breeding season is from March to June, earlier in the north. The nest of this bird is one of the most elaborate examples of avian architecture, and has been well described by several observers. It is a large retort-shaped or bottle-shaped structure made of woven grass, the bottle mouth pointing vertically downwards and circular in cross-section. The birds build in colonies of twenty or thirty, generally in trees overhanging rivers or water, and about twenty feet above the ground. Sometimes the nests are attached to the tips of the leaves of coconut or areca palms ; they are weighted with circular lumps of clay or mud. A feature is the number of incompleting or deserted nests comprised in the colony, which, it is supposed, are built as playgrounds or swings, by the male, and not intended for use. The Malays state, and I have on occasion found the statement to be true, that the colonies are generally situated in the neighbourhood of the nests of the large

and vicious hornet, *Vespa cincta* and those of the kěringa ant (*Ecophylla smaragdina*). The eggs, two or three in number, are long ovals and fairly well pointed towards the small end, pure white, with little or no gloss; the average dimensions are given by Herbert as 0·8 by 0·65 in. For details of the building of the nest readers may be referred to Herbert's careful account of birds from Central Siam (*loc. cit. supra*).

Habits.—Common in the rice districts of the Peninsula, this weaver-bird is never found far from the paddy-fields or from the banks of the larger rivers. At all seasons it consorts in large flocks, up to fifty or sixty individuals. Outside its peculiar nesting habits there is little to be noted. Like others of its family it has no particular call beyond a chattering twitter when in company. The food is almost exclusively rice and grass seeds, though Malays say that on occasion it eats figs, as almost any bird will do.

Munia oryzivora

The Java Sparrow

Loxia oryzivora, Linn, *Syst. Nat.*, i., 1766, p. 302 (Java).

Amadina oryzivora, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 524.

Munia oryzivora, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xiii., 1890, p. 328; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 182 (footnote); *id.* in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 128 (footnote); Grant, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1912, p. 332.

Malay Name.—Bělatek.

Description.—Top of the head, a line behind the ear coverts, upper throat, lower back, upper tail coverts and tail, black; remaining upper parts, pale lavender-grey; lower throat and breast the same; abdomen and flanks and thighs, vinaceous, paler in the centre; under tail coverts, white. Primaries and primary coverts, black, narrowly edged with grey; inner aspect of wing, dark grey; the axillaries and under wing coverts, pale vinaceous, the edge of the wing white. A large patch on the sides of the face and ear coverts, pure white.

Soft Parts.—Iris, crimson; bill, pale pink, white at the edges; feet, purplish pink (Jacobson).

Dimensions.—Total length, about 5·5 in.; wing, 2·6 in.; tail, 1·8 in.; tarsus, 0·7 in.; bill from gape, 0·55 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—An introduced species that has now naturalized itself in certain areas.

Extralimital Range.—Probably really wild in Java, Bali and Sumatra, but now established in many parts of the world from West Africa to China.

Nidification.—Kelham records it as breeding under the eaves of the Tanglin barracks, Singapore, in July. In Madras it is described as making a globular nest of fine grass, with a small circular side entrance in a thorny bush some eight feet from the ground. The clutch was of five eggs, pure white, glossless, regular ovals in shape, measuring 0·7 by 0·55 in.

Habits.—An introduced species, which is now thoroughly established in several localities in Singapore, where it is often seen in flocks of considerable

size. Elsewhere, a few specimens are on record from Malacca. At one time it was not uncommon in Kuala Lumpur, in the goods yard of the railway station, but does not seem to have maintained itself there.

Munia maja maja

The White-headed Munia

PLATE 24 (*upper figures, female and male*)

Loxia maja, Linn., *Syst. Nat.*, i., 1766, p. 301 (Malacca).

Munia maja, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 522; Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xiii., 1890, p. 332; Grant, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1912, p. 334.

Malay Names.—Pipit padi, chiak.

Description.—*Adult male.*—Head and neck, all round, pure white; upper surface, including the wing coverts and external aspect of the wing, chestnut-brown; the lower back and upper tail coverts with a maroon gloss; centre of the breast grading from white to brown, which becomes deep chestnut on the flanks and black on the abdomen, thighs and under tail coverts; inner aspect of wing, greyish brown, the feathers edged with pale chestnut on the inner webs, the axillaries buffy rufous.

Adult female.—Very like the male, but the white parts with a suffusion of greyish brown; belly and under tail coverts not so black.

Immature.—Almost uniform *café-au-lait* colour; sides of the head and middle of abdomen a good deal lighter.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark hazel; bill, pale French grey; tarsi, slate.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 4 in.; wing, 2.1 in.; tarsus, 0.6 in.; bill from gape, 0.5 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From Patani, south to Johore; Penang and Singapore islands.

Extralimital Range.—Java and Sumatra.¹

Nidification.—Builds a globular nest of grass and dead bamboo leaves, lined with finer grass, with an entrance at the side, in hedges and bushes four or five feet from the ground. The eggs are four or five in number and pure white without much gloss. Javan eggs, according to Grant, measure 0.68 by 0.47 in. Breeds in the first half of the year.

Habits.—Common all over the country, except in forest-land and in jungle. Except when it is breeding, is met with in very large flocks, especially when the rice is ripening. At other times feeds on grass seeds, etc. The note, uttered in company, is a low chirping twitter.

The male figured is from Kuala Tembeling, Pahang, the female from Ban Sai Kau, Patani States.

Uroloncha striata subsquamicollis

The Malayan Sharp-tailed Munia

PLATE 24 (*lower figures: right, male; left, female*)

Uroloncha acuticauda subsquamicollis, Stuart Baker, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, xlv., 1925, p. 59 (South Tenasserim).

¹ The birds from both these islands are considered subspecifically distinct by Mr Oberholser, *Four. Wash. Acad. Sci.*, 16, 1926, p. 522.

Uroloncha striata subsquamicollis, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 86.

Uroloncha acuticauda (?) subsp., Herbert, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam.*, vi., 1923, p. 121.

Munia acuticauda, Hodgs., Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 522.

Uroloncha acuticauda lepidota, Oberholser, *Journ. Wash. Acad. Sci.*, 16, 1926, p. 520 (Trang, Peninsular Siam).

Malay Names.—Pipit padi, chiak : nok a charp ki mu (*Siamese*).

Description.—Sexes alike. Tail feathers much graduated, not rounded ; middle pair pointed. Head and nape, dark brown ; the forehead and lores almost black ; mantle and upper back, paler brown, the feathers with narrow white shaft stripes ; rump, whitish ; upper tail coverts, brown, with white shaft stripes and edges, the longest ones darker. Upper wing coverts and primaries, blackish brown. Inner aspect of wing with the quills edged with buff ; the axillaries and under wing coverts richer buff. Tail feathers, blackish, the central pair more glossy. Beneath chin and middle of the throat, deep black ; sides of the breast and neck, brown with broad white edges, giving a scaly effect ; breast, a pale creamy white, with paler stripes on the flanks ; vent, thighs and under tail coverts, sienna-brown, with white shaft stripes and vermiculated with whitish.

Immature.—General colour paler, less blackish on the head and face, the white rump clouded with buffy ; the chin and foreneck black in patches only.

Soft Parts.—Iris, rich sienna-brown ; bill, bluish lead, black along the culmen ; feet, greyish black.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 4·5 in. ; wing, 1·9 in. ; tail, 1·8 in. ; tarsus, 0·5 in. ; bill from gape, 0·4 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Over the whole length of the Peninsula and on all the islands except the Tioman group.

Extralimital Range.—From Central Burma, through the Malay Peninsula to Sumatra ; eastwards to Yunnan, Siam, French Indo-China, Hainan and Formosa.

Nidification.—Breeds in the Malay Peninsula from February onwards, earlier in the north. The nests are similar to those of *M. maja*, but are usually placed higher above the ground. Kelham found one at Tanglin, Singapore, on 29th July with fully fledged young, a large oval mass of bents in the crown of a betel-nut palm. The eggs are four or more in number, pure white, oval in shape, and measure about 0·65 by 0·44 in.

Habits.—Not nearly so common as the white-headed munia, and less of a ricefield bird. It is found, as a rule, in small flocks of a dozen or more, and affects brushwood and lalang plains interspersed with patches of secondary jungle. It ascends the hills to an altitude of 3000 ft. or more, and Butler found it breeding in April at the edge of open spaces, on the Larut Hills near Taiping. The flight is quick and jerky, and when flying the white rump patch is very conspicuous. The note is the usual low, chirping twitter.

The male figured is from Kuala Tembeling, Pahang, and the female from Singapore Island.