

FLOWER-PECKERS

Family DICÆIDÆ

THE *Dicæidæ*, or flower-peckers, agree with the sunbirds in having the mandibles very finely serrated at the tip, but the bill is much shorter and stouter, and the tongue is apparently non-tubular. The wing is short, with nine primaries with an additional vestigial first in some genera. Tail very short, of twelve feathers. Feet relatively stouter than in the sunbirds, with the tarsus shorter. Size always small.

The plumage is often very bright in the males, but some species are dull-coloured in both sexes. The young are like the females. There is often some gloss, but never any metallic iridescence.

The family includes about a hundred species spread over tropical Asia, through the Malay Archipelago to New Guinea and Australia, with a few outlying species in West Africa.

The Malay list comprises about a dozen forms, of which two are here included.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

1	{	Beneath, white or buffy white	2
		Beneath, bright yellow, breast patch, orange	. <i>Charitociris i. ignicapillus</i> (male), p. 310
		Beneath, greyish olive	. <i>Charitociris i. ignicapillus</i> (female), p. 310
2	{	Head to rump, scarlet	. <i>Dicæum cruentatum ignitum</i> (male), p. 309
		Rump only, scarlet	. <i>Dicæum cruentatum ignitum</i> (female), p. 309

Dicæum cruentatum ignitum

The Malayan Scarlet-backed Flower-pecker

PLATE 23 (*upper figure—right, male; left, female*)

Nectarinia ignita, Beugie, *Ann. and Mag. Nat. Hist.* (i), xvii., 1846, p. 408 (Malacca).

Dicæum cruentatum, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 376 (part).

Dicæum cruentatum ignitum, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 423.

Malay Name.—Burong supa putri ; nok a-chip-suan (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult male.*—Head, mantle, back, rump and upper tail coverts, scarlet ; wing coverts and outer edges of the quills, black, with a purplish gloss. Quills, brownish black ; axillaries and under wing coverts, white ; tail, black, with a greenish gloss, purplish in some lights ; lores, sides of the head and neck and a patch on each side of the breast, dull black, the flanks greyish ; rest of the under surface white, with a buffy wash, more pronounced on the under tail coverts.

Adult female.—Above, greyish brown ; feathers of the head with darker centres ; mantle and back strongly washed with ochreous brown ; rump and upper tail coverts scarlet, as the male. Wing coverts with dark centres, edges ochreous ; the lesser ones inclined to a greenish gloss ; primaries and tail feathers, black, with a greenish gloss, the former with greenish-brown edges which become broader on the secondaries ; under wing coverts and axillaries, white. Beneath, chin, middle of throat and belly, greyish white ; patches on the sides of the breast, grey ; flanks, greenish grey with a strong ochreous-buff tinge ; under tail coverts, white. Broadly speaking, the ochreous-brown wash on the upper surface and the buff tinge on the lower parts become stronger the farther south one proceeds, but there are exceptions. The series of good adult females, in the British Museum and other collections, is very deficient.

Immature.—Very young birds of both sexes are less white beneath and have the sides of the head mottled, and no red at all on the rump. Young males, after passing through a plumage almost identical with the adult female, gradually assume the scarlet of the head and back, and the glossy wing coverts and scapulars, of the fully adult bird.

Soft Parts.—Iris, brown ; bill and feet, black.

Dimensions.—Total length, 3·5 to 3·8 in. ; wing, 1·8 to 1·9 in. ; tail, 1·2 to 1·3 in. ; tarsus, 0·5 in. ; bill from gape, 0·45 to 0·5 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From the neighbourhood of Junk Zeylon Island south to Singapore and all the islands, especially the Tioman group.

Extralimital Range.—Possibly in Java and parts of Sumatra, though the records from these islands are open to suspicion. Slightly different races occur in the north of the Malay Peninsula, Siam, Tenasserim, India and China.

Nidification.—Not recorded from the Malay Peninsula. In Pegu the nest is an egg-shaped structure of down and fibre, built high up in trees on the outer branches, under leaves, and the eggs are white with a greyish tinge when fresh. Herbert found the northern form¹ breeding near Fangkok in January and February in fruit trees fifteen to twenty feet from the ground, but once in a bush only four feet high. His eggs averaged 0·58 by 0·41 in.

Habits.—Common throughout the Peninsula from about lat. 8° N., and on all the islands. Found in varied situations, but not in heavy or wet jungle or at any height on the hills. It is occasionally found in mangrove forest but is commonest along the coast and in low scrub, where it is met with in parties of five or six. Stuart Baker says of the allied Indian bird that it

¹ *Dicaeum cruentatum siamensis*, Kloss.

frequents high trees, and keeps much to the tops even of these, but this is not true of the Malayan bird. It feeds on insects and also on mistletoe berries, and is said to do much harm by transferring the seeds of these injurious parasites to fruit-trees. Flight is strong, and the note the usual twitter of the family.

Note.—The male bird figured is from Malacca and the female from Chong, Trang, Peninsular Siam.

Charitociris percussus ignicapillus

The Crimson-breasted Flower-pecker

Dicæum ignicapillus, Eyton, *P.Z.S.*, 1839, p. 105 (Malacca).

Prionochilus percussus (*nec.* Temm.), Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 506.

Prionochilus ignicapillus, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, x., 1885, p. 65 ; Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 437.

Charitociris percussa ignicapilla, Oberholser, *Ohio Journ. Sci.*, xxiii., 1923, p. 289.

Malay Name.—Not ascertained.

Description.—*Adult male.*—Whole upper surface, blue-grey, including the lesser wing coverts. Primary coverts, primaries and secondaries, blackish brown, all except the outer primaries narrowly edged with pale yellow-green or bluish grey ; inner secondaries, bluish grey on the whole of the outer web ; inner aspect of wing, dusky, the quills edged with white on the inner web ; axillaries and under wing coverts, silky white ; edge of wing, blackish ; tail feathers, black, bluish grey on the outer webs and at the tips. A flame-coloured patch on the middle of the crown ; lores and sides of the face, blackish ; a white stripe from the angle of the jaw, bordered below by a narrow stripe of blackish grey. Below, extreme point of chin, white ; rest of under surface, bright yellow, greenish grey on the flanks, and whitish on the middle of the belly and the under tail coverts ; a large flame-coloured longitudinal patch on the middle of the breast ; thighs, greenish grey.

Adult female.—Duller. Above, greyish olive-green, brighter on the rump and upper tail coverts ; a small patch of dull orange, with dull tips on the middle of the crown ; wing coverts, olive-green, with dark centres and bronzy edges. Primaries, brown, with dull green edges to the outer webs, becoming paler towards the tips. Inner aspect of wing, dark ashy brown, with pale edges to the inner webs of the feathers ; under wing coverts and axillaries, whitish, with a blackish spot near the edge of the wing. Tail feathers, brownish black, with greenish edges. Lores, and sides of the face, olive-grey ; a narrow greyish stripe from the nape bordered below by a broader olive-green one. Beneath, throat and chin, grey ; middle of the breast and abdomen, brighter pale orange ; rest of under surface, greyish olive, the under tail coverts lighter.

Immature.—Duller and darker above and below, without the crown patch or the orange-yellow on the breast and abdomen. Throat, the same colour as the rest of the under surface, which is almost uniform dull greyish.

Remarks.—Some birds, apparently adult, have the primaries edged with greenish yellow, and not blue-grey, probably the remains of the immature plumage.

Soft Parts.—Iris, chestnut; bill, black; lower mandible, slate, except at tip; feet, slaty black.

Dimensions.—Total length, 4.2 in.; wing, 2.3 in.; tail, 1.4 in.; tarsus, 0.55 in.; bill from gape, 0.45 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the Peninsula; Penang and possibly, though doubtfully, Singapore.

Extralimital Range.—Just crossing the Pakchan estuary into Southern Tenasserim, its northernmost limit; Sumatra. Bornean records are more than dubious.

Nidification.—The nest and eggs of this flower-pecker have not been obtained. Those obtained by Moulton in Sarawak and described by Stuart Baker (*loc. cit.*) are those of the closely allied *P. zanthopygius* (Salvad.), but there is no reason to suppose that those of the Malayan bird will differ materially. The nest was made of a sort of reddish vegetable-down (probably from the fronds of tree-ferns), and lined with a well-matted mass of the same material. Outside it was decorated with all sorts of oddments. The single white egg it contained measured 0.52 by 0.4 in.

Habits.—Well distributed throughout the Peninsula in heavy jungle up to about 2000 ft., but occasionally higher, as I obtained one bird near the summit of Kedah Peak. It is usually met with singly or in pairs, and keeps to the tops of lofty trees, and is, therefore, difficult to obtain or study. Like most of the family it feeds largely on the berries of plants allied to mistletoe. Flight is rapid and direct.