

RUBY-CHEEKS

Family CHALCOPARIIDÆ

THIS family has been instituted by Mr Stuart Baker (*Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, 2nd ed., iii., 1926, p. 368) for a single genus of small birds found in the Oriental region from the Himalayas to French Indo-China, south to the larger islands of the Malay Archipelago.

The family in some respects resembles the sunbirds, but the bill is straighter and heavier, without serrations at the tip; the nostrils are furnished with an operculum, and the tongue has small brushes at the tip. The wing is rounded, with a large first primary, and the tail is only slightly graduated. Feet, fairly strong, the soles slightly broadened.

The sexes are different, the male, when adult, having a vivid metallic plumage above. There is only one species, which has been divided into numerous local races, of which two are found in the Malay Peninsula.

Chalcoparia singalensis singalensis

The Malay Ruby-cheek

Motacilla singalensis, Gmel., *Syst. Nat.*, i., 1788, p. 964 (Ceylon, error: substitute Malacca, Oberholser).

Chalcoparia phoenicotis (part), Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 373.

Malay Name.—Këlichap bëlukar : nok ka-tate (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult male.*—Whole upper plumage, brilliant metallic green; lesser upper wing coverts, the same; median and greater coverts, black edged with green; primary coverts, primaries and secondaries, blackish brown, the inner primaries and secondaries edged with purplish black; inner aspect of wing, brownish, the inner webs of the quills edged with whitish; scapularies and under wing coverts, yellowish white, those at the edge of the wing, metallic green; tail feathers, black edged with metallic green, violet towards the tips; cheeks and ear coverts, metallic copper, edged below with a stripe of purplish amethystine. Below, chin, throat and breast, ferruginous; middle of belly and under tail coverts, bright yellow; flanks, olivaceous yellow; thighs, greyish.

Adult female.—Above, greyish olivaceous; sides of the head and ear coverts, greyer. Quills, brownish, with narrow greenish-yellow edgings. Tail feathers, greyish brown, blacker at the tips, broadly edged with greenish rufescent. Throat and breast, pale rusty, much lighter than the male and not so extensive; rest of the under surface, yellowish green, duller and more greenish than in the male, rather brighter on the middle of the abdomen and under tail coverts.

Immature.—Young birds have at first no rusty on the throat, which gradually appears, followed in the case of the male by the metallic feathers of the upper surface. The primaries are the last to be moulted, and some males, otherwise with their complete metallic plumage above, still retain the brown primaries with narrow yellowish edging of the immature bird.

Soft-Parts.—*Male*: iris, red-brown or chestnut; bill, black or greenish-black; feet, greenish sage or oil-green. *Female*: similar, but bill paler at base. *Immature*: iris, reddish chestnut to dark; bill, black to horn, yellowish at base; feet, sage-green; soles, gamboge-yellow.

Dimensions.—Total length, 4·3 to 4·5 in.; wing, 2·1 to 2·3 in.; tail, 1·7 to 1·8 in.; tarsus, 0·65 to 0·7 in.; bill from gape, 0·6 to 0·7 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From Perak south to Johore; possibly Penang, Singapore and adjacent islands; Tioman (?).

Extralimital Range.—Closely allied forms occur in the north of the Malay Peninsula, through Burma and Siam; Eastern Siam to Cochin-China, Tonkin and Annam; in Borneo, Sumatra and Java, and on the islands off the west Sumatran coast. *C. s. interposita*, the North Malayan bird, is brighter than *C. s. singalensis*, but less so than *C. s. koratensis*, found in East Siam to Cochin-China.

Nidification.—The nests and eggs of the Southern Malayan bird are not known. Herbert found *C. s. interposita* breeding near Bangkok from February to July, and considers that two broods are reared. His description is worth quoting: "the nest is generally built in a lime bush at about four to eight feet from the ground, and when hanging beneath the leaves at the end of a branch is not easily recognized as a nest. It is of quite a distinctive type, and the six nests I have taken have all been exactly the same, so there is no mistaking the identity. The portico is a very prominent feature, and is nearly as large as the egg chamber. The nesting material is fibre of varying degrees of coarseness, that of the interior being comparatively fine, while that of the outside presents quite a ragged appearance. Cobwebs are extensively used for keeping the numerous threads in their places."

"The eggs are much elongated and slightly pyriform ovals. The ground-colour is cream-colour, with a pinkish tinge in one case, and the greater part of the surface is mottled and clouded with pale purplish grey. The markings are sparsely dotted about in the form of specks and spots of purplish black. Some eggs are finely freckled in purplish grey, the freckling being confluent on the large end, while another pair are heavily marked with purplish-black spots and irregularly barred lines."

The average dimensions are 0·69 by 0·48 in.

Habits.—The ruby-cheek is very locally distributed in the Malay Peninsula, but haunts much the same localities as many of the sunbirds. It is numerous in many coastal districts, and on some, but not all, of the smaller islands, and is also found on the lower hills up to about 2500 ft., frequenting the drier situations. It haunts thick, low bushes in pairs or small parties, climbing about the boughs like a tit and feeding on small insects. I have never seen it in gardens or orchards, as is the case in Bangkok.

Note.—The systematic position of this little bird is very uncertain, and specimens carefully preserved in alcohol are much desired for anatomical purposes. In some respects—notably in its nesting habits and metallic plumage—it resembles the sunbirds, but is divided from these and from the flower-peckers by the fact that its mandibles are not serrated. The first primary is large, which distinguishes it from the white-eyes, and the bill is comparatively heavy. Possibly it should be associated with the Timaliine genus, *Cyanoderma*, which has very similar habits.