

BEE-EATERS

Family MEROPIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 110.

FOUR bee-eaters are found in the Malay Peninsula, but three of these are more or less open-country birds, are never found in thick forest, and therefore are never met with on the hills. The fourth, which is a much larger bird than the others, is here described.

Nyctiornis amicta

The Red-bearded Bee-eater

Merops amictus, Temm., *Pl. Col.*, 1824, pl. 310 (Bencoolen, Sumatra).

Nyctiornis amicta, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 378; Kelsall, *Journ. Straits Branch, Roy. Asiat. Soc.*, No. 24, 1892, p. 169; Dresser, *Mon. Merop.*, 1884, p. 3, pls. 1, 2; Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iii., 1895, p. 117.

Bucia amicta, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iv., 1927, p. 243.

Malay Name.—Berek-berek or bēberek tunggal.

Description.—With broadened dependent breast plumes; larger than other Malayan species.

Adult male.—Extreme forehead, edging the bill to the chin, and a spot on the chin, bluish, rest of the forehead and crown to behind the eyes, lilac; lores, throat and breast plumes, vermilion. Rest of upper and lower surface, bright grass-green, the abdomen and tail coverts, paler green, the bases of the feathers of the former, whitish; centres of the vermilion breast plumes, dark green. External aspect of the wings as the back; the primaries, darker green on the outer webs, black on inner; internally, the primaries, blackish, edged with pale golden buff; axillaries and under wing coverts the same; tail, beneath, with a broad apical black band, the remainder, bronzy yellow, the shafts of the yellow portion, white.

Adult female.—As the male, but with a narrow vermilion band across the forehead; the breast plumes rather shorter and with larger dark green centres.

Immature.—With no trace of scarlet or lilac on the head; chest and breast,

darker green, the dark centres of the breast plumes not so defined; belly and under tail coverts, yellowish buff with a greenish cast. Yellow of under surface of tail duller, and the black apical band narrower and not so clearly defined.

Soft Parts.—Iris, orange; bill, black, whitish at the base; feet, pale green-grey; immature birds have the iris deep or brownish yellow.

Dimensions.—Total length, 12 to 13 in.; wing, 4·8 to 5·3 in.; tail, 4·7 to 5·1 in.; tarsus, 0·5 to 0·55 in.; bill from gape, 2 to 2·3 in.; culmen, 1·8 to 2·1 in. Females are usually slightly smaller than males, with shorter, straighter bills.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the Peninsula to its southern extremity. Possibly on Penang Island but not on Singapore.

Nidification.—Kelsall found this large and handsome bee-eater nesting in holes in a sandy bank at Kota Glanggi, Pahang, in August; the clutch consisted of two white eggs, with a pearly translucent shell, laid at the end of the burrow, without any pretence at a nest. Kellow found three clutches, in February, near Taiping, Perak, in tunnels four feet deep, on the banks of forest streams. Two clutches were of five eggs and the other of three, and the average dimensions were 1·13 by 0·98 in. (*Baker*).

Habits.—This species is a very common forest bird, affecting hilly jungle with not too much undergrowth, and ascending the mountains to an altitude of 4000 to 5000 ft., though it is more numerous at lower elevations. It is found practically everywhere, usually in parties of four or five, but sometimes alone. It feeds largely on wasps and bees, termites and butterflies, and large cockroaches, but, after capturing its prey, frequently returns to its perch to devour it. The flight is somewhat laboured, and not nearly so swift as that of the smaller bee-eaters, and, as *Baker* notes of the allied *N. atherloni*, the bird clammers about on the creepers and branches, like a malkoha, which other bee-eaters never do. The note is loud and harsh, “*kă ka ka, kă ka, kah,*” frequently repeated, and is often heard at night, and is then said by Malaysians to be the baying of the hounds of the Spectral Huntsman, the *hantu raya* or *hantu pemburu* of Malay mythology. The bird is also an omen bird of the aboriginal Sakai tribes.