

CROWS, JAYS AND MAGPIES

Family CORVIDÆ

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OF the five Malayan representatives of this family, *Crypsirhina varians*, the racquet-tailed magpie, a bird of uniform, glossy green-black plumage, is found only in the extreme north of the Peninsula, possibly just entering Kelantan. Two others are true crows of very ordinary appearance, one of which, *Corvus coronoides macrorhynchus*, the southern large-billed crow, an open-country bird, has already been fully described, while the other, *Corvus enca compilator*, the Malaysian slender-billed crow, is more of a jungle species, which may possibly work its way up to clearings on the hills. It is characterized by smaller size, the smaller, less deep bill, and by the greyer under plumage and absence of bifurcated feathers on the neck and upper breast.

The white-winged jay, *Platysmurus leucopterus*, is also a jungle species, but frequents low country, and is not likely to be met with on the hills. It is black, with a rather long tail, the feathers of the forehead bushy and velvety, with a white bar on the wing, and a total length of about 16 in. The remaining species, which is strictly confined to the higher mountains, is here described.

Cissa robinsoni

The Malay Hunting Crow or Blue Magpie

Cissa robinsoni, Ogilvie-Grant, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, xix., 1906, p. 9 (Gunong Tahan, Pahang, 5000 ft.); id. *Journ. Fed. Malay States Mus.*, iii., 1908, p. 16, pl.

Malay Name.—Gagak gunong.

Description.—Tail highly graduated, the middle pair of feathers much elongated; head, crested, the feathers of the occiput much elongated and narrowed.

Adult.—Sexes alike. General colour, above and below, greenish yellow, much more yellow on the crown and forehead; a broad black band from the lores through the eye and ear coverts encircling the head; lesser upper wing coverts, bluish green, the remainder, primaries and secondaries, maroon-red, the secondaries with successively broader bluish green tips; edge of the wing,

axillaries and under wing coverts, greenish grey. Pale tips to the secondaries generally indistinctly margined internally with blackish, but sometimes quite broadly so. Central tail feathers, bluish green, with white tips; the remainder with broad black subterminal bars.

Immature and juvenile.—Hardly differ from the adult, except that the black band encircling the crown is duller in colour and reduced in breadth.

Note.—Birds of this genus are more liable to fading than almost any others. In a very short time after death the greens and yellows fade to a pale sky-blue, and the maroon-red of the wings to a nondescript brownish grey. Comparisons of various races are on this account unsatisfactory, and I have therefore left the present bird under a binomial name, though I am convinced in my own mind that its relationships to *C. minor* of Sumatra are extremely close.

Soft Parts.—*Adult*: iris, red, sometimes whitish; eye wattle, carmine or sealing-wax red; bill and feet, orange-vermilion. *Young*: iris, hazel; bill, horn; orbital skin, dull yellowish orange; feet, yellowish orange; claws, lead.

Dimensions.—Total length, up to 15 in.; wing, 5'35 to 5'7 in.; tail, 6'1 to 7'5 in.; tarsus, 1'6 to 1'75 in.; bill from gape, 1'6 in.; culmen, 1'35 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—The Selangor main range, the Larut Hills and Gunong Tahan in Pahang.

Extralimital Range.—Hunting crows, closely related to each other, are found throughout Indo-China and in Sumatra, Borneo and Java, and differ a good deal *inter se*. Owing to causes mentioned above, their exact relationships are not fully understood, and the application of a trinomial nomenclature is at present a little premature. The Javan bird, *C. thalassina*, seems distinct, but the Sumatran, Bornean, Malayan and South Burmese birds may probably be correctly regarded as forms of one and the same species, *C. chinensis* (Bodd.).

Nidification.—Unknown. The breeding season in Selangor, judging from the young birds obtained, commences in December and January. Birds of the genus build cup-shaped nests in trees or high bushes, and lay from four to six eggs, very like those of the common magpie.

Habits.—This handsome hunting crow, originally discovered on the plateau of Gunong Tahan, has also been found on Gunong Ijau in the Larut Hills, Perak, but has not yet been met with on the Perak main range, though it doubtless occurs there. On Fraser's Hill and along the Selangor main range it is fairly common, but nowhere does it occur below about 4000 ft. In Malaya the bird is very shy and wild, and is found in pairs or singly towards the tops of the hills and in rocky places, preferring more open spaces where such occur. It is found on trees among scrub, and frequently on the ground, and is omnivorous in its diet. On Gunong Tahan small snakes, lizards and big *lucanid* beetles have been eaten, and on the Larut Hills large cicadas and small mammals and nestling birds. The birds are very noisy, especially in the morning, and have many notes, a harsh whistle and a clanking call, like the sound of a cracked bell.