

## Notes on some Migratory Birds from Pulau Pisang, West Coast of Johore

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The routes followed by migrating birds in Malaysia are, like all migratory phenomena in that subregion, very little understood. Certain broad principles can, however, be enunciated. We know, for instance, that streams of migrants in the autumn work their way to the south by two main routes, one along the range of mountains running like a backbone down the Malay Peninsula and the other down the Straits of Malacca by way of a number of conveniently spaced small islands. Largely with the object of discovering more about this latter line of migration the Malayan Museums have, in the past, made several collections at appropriate times on islands in the Straits of Malacca and working from north to south reports have been published on material from the islands of Langkawi, Terutau (and neighbouring islets), and Paya, all off the west coast of Kedah<sup>1</sup>; Penang<sup>2</sup>; Rumpia (one of the Sembilan Islands) off the mouth of the Perak River;<sup>3</sup> Jarak on almost the same latitude but further out to sea;<sup>4</sup> the One Fathom Bank Lighthouse off the coast of Selangor;<sup>5</sup> and the Aroa Islands a little further south but nearer to the Sumatran than to the Malayan coast<sup>6</sup>.

Among the migratory land-birds obtained on these islands two outstanding assemblies can be separated.

The first group consists of species which shun the mountains but which are commonly met with in the lowlands of the Malay Peninsula during the winter months: such are *Accipiter virgatus gularis*, the forms of *Eudynamis scolopacea*, *Pitta brachyura cyanoptera*, *Terpsiphone paradisi incei*, *T. a. atrocaudata*, the various forms of *Lanius cristatus*, and *Dicrurus annectens*.

1. "On a collection of Birds from Pulau Langkawi and other islands on the north-west coast of the Malay Peninsula", *H. C. Robinson*, Journ. F. M. S. Mus., VII, 1917, pp. 129-191.

2. Birds from Penang Hill, *F. N. Chasen and C. Boden Kloss*, Journ. Mal. Br. Roy. Asiat. Soc., VI, pt. 3, 1928, pp. 73-74.

3. "A list of Birds collected on Pulau Rumpia, Sembilan Islands", *H. C. Robinson and C. Boden Kloss*, Journ. F. M. S. Mus., X, 1922, pp. 255-259.

4. "List of Birds collected on Pulau Jarak, Straits of Malacca", *H. C. R. and C. B. K.*, tom. cit. pp. 259-260.

5. "Birds from the One Fathom Bank Lighthouse, Straits of Malacca", *H. C. R. and C. B. K.*, tom. cit., pp. 253-255.

6. "A visit to the Aroa Islands with a List of the Birds found there" *H. C. R.*, op. cit., 2, 1906, pp. 8-16.

The second group includes species which although appearing in numbers on the islands in the Straits of Malacca are otherwise, in the Malay Peninsula, only found on the mountains where, during the winter months, they are common: their stay in the lowlands is so brief that they are very rarely collected there. To this group belong *Hemichelidon s. sibirica*, *Hemichelidon ferruginea*, *Poliomyias mugimaki*, *Geocichla sibirica*, *Turdus o. obscurus* and *Larvivora cyanea*.

Some of the migratory land-birds, particularly as might be expected those of the second group, are rare or unrecorded in the extreme south of the Malay Peninsula, i.e. Johore and Singapore Island with its smaller islets. It seems reasonable to suppose that the absence of high mountains in this area has an intimate bearing on the point, but H. C. Robinson further suggests that "evidence such as it is, points to the possibility that the Malacca Strait migration channel for birds coming from the north stops short at some point not far north of Malacca, and that migrants arriving in the Peninsula south of that point, and in Singapore, reach their destination by another route. But what that route is, exactly, no one knows"<sup>1</sup>.

The same author writes of *Hemichelidon ferruginea*.—"It would appear to be one of the birds that visit us by way of Tenasserim and the Straits of Malacca, gradually working its way south, but not, apparently, reaching Johore and Singapore"<sup>2</sup>.

It was solely to get information concerning the migratory stream that some collectors from the Raffles Museum were sent to Pulau Pisang to collect birds from 4th—18th December, 1930.

Pulau Pisang is a small island in the Straits of Malacca about seven miles from the west coast of Johore: on the island there is a lighthouse.

The collection obtained consists almost entirely of common species but Mr. de Fontaine fortunately got a number of migrants which, from the very specialised local point of view mentioned above, are of much interest.

The following birds can be dismissed without further mention: they are common, resident forms.—

*Chalcophaps i. indica*, *Demiegretta sacra*, *Hirundapus g. gigantea*, *Micropus affinis subfurcatus*, *Hirundo javanica abbotti*, *Muscitrea cinerea butaloides*, *Kittacincla tricolor malloperena*, *Pycnonotus p. plumosus*, *Aplonis panayensis strigatus*, *Anthreptes m. malaccensis*, *Leptocoma jugularis pectoralis* and *Dicaeum cruentatum ignitum*.

1. "Birds of the Malay Peninsula", 1, 1927, p. xliii.

2. tom. cit., p. 191.

Special note however may be made of *Dicaeum minullum olivaceum* and *Caloenas n. nicobarica*: the flower-pecker seems to be uncommon in most parts of the Malay Peninsula and the reported presence of the Nicobar pigeon on Pulau Pisang has hitherto been unconfirmed.

The following species obtained on the island also appear to be resident in the southern half of the Malay Peninsula (although only *Alcedo atthis bengalensis* has actually been found breeding) but there is, in addition, either an autumnal influx or an extensive local movement during the same season about which nothing seems to be known.—

*Treron c. curvirostra*, *Myristicivora b. bicolor*, *Ptilinopus jambu*, *Rallina fasciata*, *Alcedo atthis bengalensis*, *Halcyon pileata* and *Ceyx e. erithacus*.

The remaining forms collected are not yet known to have a resident population in the Malay States or Singapore.—

*Accipiter virgatus gularis*, *Eurystomus orientalis calonyx*, *Merops superciliosus javanicus*, *Hirundopus gigantea indica*, *Eudynamis s. scolopacea*, *Clamator coromandus*, *Pitta brachyura cyanoptera*, *Hirundo rustica gutturalis*, *Hemichelidon s. sibirica*, *Poliomyias mugimaki*, *Terpsiphone paradisi incei*, *Turdus o. obscurus*, *Locustella lanceolatus*, *Phylloscopus b. borealis*.

Some of the migratory forms mentioned above merit more detailed notice.—

*Rallina fasciata*.—There are two marked movements of this rail in the Malay Peninsula during the year. It appears in numbers on the small islands of the Malacca Straits and in the west coast state of Kedah from October to December. In May large numbers again appear on the shores of the east coast state of Kelantan: a specimen was also taken at the One Fathom Bank Lighthouse on 30th April and according to Mr. A. W. Hamilton (in litt.) this "vernal" movement is also well-known to the Kedah Malays "about June." The species occurs, rarely, in Singapore Island. One specimen was obtained on Pulau Pisang.

*Accipiter virgatus gularis*.—"Extraordinarily abundant along the coasts and on the small islands of the Straits of Malacca from September to December and again in March and April"<sup>1</sup>. Robinson considered that this hawk was rare south of Malacca and in Singapore Island but I have before me ten specimens from the latter locality all collected, casually, during October—December in the course of a few years. The Pulau Pisang collection contains one specimen.

1. Robinson, tom. cit., p. 73.

*Halcyon pileata*.—This bird is known to breed as far south as Bangkok in Siam but there is no evidence of its doing so in the Malay Peninsula. Robinson says that it would appear to perform migrations of limited extent but these may be more extensive than he thought. I have a note of one boarding a ship in position Lat. 8° 10' N.; Long. 108° 50' E. on 8th Oct. (A. M. Hughes) the nearest land, except for Pulau Condore, being the coast of Annam about 160 miles distance. It is also significant that this kingfisher has no subspecies over its very wide range. Only one example was obtained on Pulau Pisang.

*Merops superciliosus javanicus*.—Our ignorance concerning the migrations of this bee-eater seems to be complete. This is the first time that the species has been taken on the Straits of Malacca migration line but it is commonly found in the mangrove forests of the west coast of the Malay Peninsula and the specimens from Pulau Pisang may be stragglers from the mainland in search of food. Four examples were collected.

*Eudynamis s. scolopacea*.—The koel again cannot be considered as belonging to the group of species not commonly extending south of Malacca. Robinson refers to it as very rare in the southern portion of the Malay Peninsula and in Singapore but it is really not uncommon in the latter locality. A good series was obtained on Pulau Pisang.

*Hemichelidon s. sibirica*.—Four specimens were obtained. This flycatcher has hitherto not been recorded south of Malacca but two specimens in the Raffles Museum were collected by C. Boden Kloss in March 1905 at Pelepak in the lowlands of south Johore.

*Poliomyias mugimaki*.—Another species whose southern limit in the Malay Peninsula has always been supposed to be about the latitude of Malacca. One specimen was obtained.

*Turdus o. obscurus*.—This thrush must be extremely rare in the south of the Malay Peninsula. It has been recorded from Singapore but I have never seen a specimen from the island. Ten specimens were obtained on Pulau Pisang but Mr. de Fontaine states that many more could have been collected.

*Locustella lanceolatus*.—Robinson considered that this warbler was only doubtfully known from Singapore and writes "I am at a loss to understand why this warbler has never occurred in collections made in Malacca by Davison and others; possibly the latitude of Kuala Lumpur is the most southerly in the Peninsula"<sup>1</sup>. Only one example was secured on Pulau Pisang.

<sup>1</sup> tom. cit., p. 249.

To sum up, the main interest in the small collection from Pulau Pisang is that it can be interpreted to suggest that the stream of migratory birds passing down the Straits of Malacca in the last three months of the year reaches a point much further south than was thought, extending in fact almost to the southern extremity of the Malay Peninsula and well south of the latitude of the Malayan mountains.

This latter fact combined with the absence or great rarity of most migratory land birds in Johore and Singapore raises the question of the destination of some of the Pisang migrants. They certainly do not spend the winter on the island, and unless they, finding that they have overshot their mark, retrace their flight to a higher latitude in the Peninsula, the Sumatran mountains must be their destination. The above is one interpretation but there is another, for the fact that there is a line of "autumnal" migration south or south-west across the South China Sea through the Anamba Islands must not be lost sight of: this line is also used by *Rallina fasciata*, *Halcyon pileata*, *Hemichelidon s. sibirica* and *Phylloscopus borealis* among other species. It is known that in May migratory birds appear in large numbers on the coast of Kelantan but I have, as yet, no information concerning an autumn or winter influx at that point although it probably happens. That at least part of the Anamba stream (part of it may go on to Borneo) arrives on the south-east coast of the Malay Peninsula is almost certain. A consideration of the local status of the several migratory forms of *Lanius cristatus* supports this view. The breeding grounds of *L. c. superciliosus* and *L. c. lucionensis* lie to the east and south-east of those of *L. c. cristatus*. The first two mentioned forms are much commoner in Singapore Island (and presumably in the extreme south of the Peninsula) than they are further north where *L. c. cristatus* is the common subspecies<sup>1</sup>. It is most significant that *Lanius c. cristatus* which occurs on the islands in the Straits of Malacca, and is one of "the commonest of birds in the neighbourhood of Kuala Lumpur" should be very rare in Singapore and only doubtfully known from Sumatra. The theory that Sumatra (or at least the southern half of the island) receives its winter quota of *L. c. lucionensis* and *L. c. superciliosus* from the Anamba stream, part of which at least, crosses the southern extremity of the Malay Peninsula to reach the south-east coast of Sumatra, is very attractive. The point I wish to make is that Pulau Pisang lies on this line.

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, tom. cit., p. 257, gives the range of *L. c. cristatus* in the Malay Peninsula as south to Malacca and states that he has not seen it from Johore or Singapore although it is one of the commonest of birds in the neighbourhood of Kuala Lumpur! There is one specimen in the Raffles Museum from Singapore.