

IBISES AND SPOONBILLS

Family PLEGADIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 47.

THE ibises and spoonbills are included by most authorities in the order *Ardeiformes*, and form a group equivalent in rank to the herons, bitterns and the storks, and to two other sections found only in Africa, the whale-headed storks (*Balaniceps*) and the hammer-headed storks (*Scopidae*).

It is difficult to give a popular definition of the family, all the members of which are moderate-sized marsh birds, with legs relatively rather shorter than in the storks and herons, and covered with hexagonal scutes behind. There are no powder-down patches.

The local forms have the bill curved downwards with the upper mandible *grooved almost to the tip*. In the painted storks (*Ibis*), which in some respects are akin to the ibises, this groove is quite short, not more than one-third the length of the mandible.

The spoonbills are also included in the family, but in these, as their name implies, the upper mandible, though slightly bent downwards, is broadened and flattened towards the tip; none of them is found in Malaya.

The plumage in the family is very varied; some species are pure white, others black or glossy black, while one South American genus is scarlet. They are spread over the warmer parts of the whole world, excluding Oceania.

The family comprises about forty species, of which three are Malayan. The commonest is the white ibis, *Threskiornis melanocephalus*.

KEY TO THE MALAYAN SPECIES OF IBISES

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 { Plumage mostly white | <i>Threskiornis melanocephalus melanocephalus</i> , p. 211 |
| 1 { Plumage dark | 2 |
| 2 { Neck feathered to the nape, smaller | <i>Pseudibis papillosa davisoni</i> , p. 213 |
| 2 { Neck naked to the nape, larger | <i>Thaumatibis gigantea</i> , p. 214 |

Threskiornis melanocephalus melanocephalus

The White Ibis

Vol. I., p. 47.

Tantalus melanocephalus, Latham, *Ind. Orn.*, ii., 1790, p. 179 (India).

Ibis melanocephalus, Oates in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1890, p. 226; Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xxvi., 1898, p. 7;



Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iv., 1898, p. 361; Oates, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, ii., 1902, p. 99.

Threskiornis melanocephalus melanocephalus, Herbert, *Journ. Siam. Soc., Nat. Hist. Suppl.*, vi., 1926, p. 349; Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), vi., 1929, p. 314.

Malay Name.—Sekēndi (Messrs Madoc and Edgar): nok chon (*Siamese*).

Description.—Bill long, curved downwards. Upper mandible with a groove parallel to the edge, extending to the tip. Nostrils in a slit at the base of this groove. Tarsus with hexagonal scales. Tail short, of twelve feathers. Head and neck bare.

Adult in breeding plumage.—The whole plumage pure white, except the inner secondaries and tertials, which are pearly grey, the barbules elongated and loose in texture. Feathers round the base of the neck elongated and pointed; a patch of long narrow plumes on the breast.

Adult in non-breeding plumage.—White with no elongated plumes or modified secondaries, these feathers being pale grey.

Immature.—Head and neck lightly feathered; top and sides of the head, dark iron-grey, merging into the white of the neck. Primaries with black shafts, the outer ones with the outer webs and tips blackish. Inner secondaries normal, dark grey. Rest of the plumage white.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark; bill, black; legs and toes, black; skin of head and neck, dark bluish black; skin of wings and sometimes of the sides of the body, deep red; in young birds dusky or black.

Dimensions.—Total length, 24 to 28 in.; wing, 13 to 14.5 in.; tail, 5 in.; tarsus, 4 in.; bill from gape, 6 to 6.5 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—South, along the coasts in suitable localities as far as Selangor on the western side, and to Patani on the east.

Extralimital Range.—Throughout India, Ceylon and the Indo-Chinese countries to China and Southern Japan. Also in Java and Borneo. Chasen has seen it on the east coast of Sumatra.

Nidification.—Is not known to breed in the Malay Peninsula, though it probably does so in the north. According to Mr Stuart Baker, in Ceylon this ibis breeds in March, but in the rest of India most eggs are laid in August and September. The nest is made of sticks and placed in trees, often in numbers. Sometimes a number of nests are joined to form one platform. The eggs are from two to four in number, bluish or greenish white, generally without markings, but sometimes delicately spotted with yellowish brown. The shape is very variable but generally distinctly pointed at one end. Texture of the shell rather rough and chalky, entirely without gloss. Eggs from Java measure about 2.5 by 1.7 in. Mr Herbert has eggs from Central Siam obtained in July from one of several nests at the top of a tree forty-five feet high.

Habits.—Though there are few formal records of this ibis in the Malay Peninsula, and still fewer specimens, the bird is not really uncommon in the country, especially in the winter months, and Robinson has frequently seen it along the Selangor coast from the Bernam river to Port Swettenham, on

the mud-flats, bordering the mangrove swamps, but always under such conditions as to be unapproachable. The birds were usually singly or in pairs, never in flocks, and often in company with the painted stork.

At Bandon, near the mouth of the river, Robinson and Seimund met with a flock of some twenty or thirty individuals, and obtained one bird in commencing breeding plumage.

It has never been recorded from inland districts in the Malay Peninsula. The food is worms, shellfish and crabs.

All the birds met with have been very wild and took to the wing at the least alarm. The birds seem to take some time to get up steam, and flight is at first heavy and laborious, but once started is powerful, direct and long-continued.

Pseudibis papillosa davisoni

Davison's Black Ibis

Geronticus davisoni, Hume, *Stray Feathers*, iii., 1875, p. 300 (Pakchan Estuary, Tenasserim).

Graptocephalus davisoni, Oates in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1890, p. 228; Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xxvi., 1898, p. 14.

Inocotis davisoni, Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iv., 1898, p. 364; Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1921, p. 73.

Pseudibis davisoni, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), vi., 1929, p. 317.

Malay Name.—Unrecorded.

Description.—Sexes alike. Head naked. Neck all round and under parts, clay-brown, darkest on the throat and overlaid with glossy blue-green on the under tail coverts. Scapulars and tertials, brown, washed with metallic green. Wings mostly dark metallic blue, brightest on the secondaries and greater coverts, the marginal coverts less vivid and narrowly fringed with brown, the primaries rather blacker and washed with metallic green, and a conspicuous white shoulder patch formed by some of the inner lesser and marginal coverts. Tail, dark metallic blue. Wing lining and axillaries, black washed with metallic blue-green.

Immature.—The crown and throat feathered; the wings and tail not glossy blue but brown, the feathers of the upper parts edged with bright brown.

Soft Parts.—Iris, orange; bill, horn; feet, deep red; crown, dark indigo; occiput and ring round neck, livid whitish blue (South-West Siam).

Dimensions.—Total length, 31.5 in.; tail, 7.5 in.; wing, 15.5 to 16.75 in.; tarsus, 3 to 3.75 in.; bill from gape, 5.75 to 7.25 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Known only from the extreme north, where it occurs from the limit of our area at the Pakchan Estuary, through Peninsular Siam and certainly as far south as Pulau Lontar, off the west coast, at about 7° 30' N. Recorded from Junk Zeylon.

Extralimital Range.—From Upper Burma, south through Tenasserim, Siam (apparently scarce in the north), to the north of the Malay Peninsula.



Occurs in South-West Yunnan and in French Indo-China except in the northern parts.

Nidification.—Not known to nest in our area. Oates found a nest on 13th February in Pegu. He describes it as placed on the branch of a tree, about 15 ft. from the ground on the bank of a creek. It was a small shapeless mass of sticks, and contained two eggs near to hatching. One egg measured 2.55 by 1.8 in. ; it was smooth, without gloss and of a pale blue much stained by the bird's feet. Collectors in Upper Burma have taken the eggs in March.

Habits.—This species is evidently common in Trang, and several specimens have been received from the Lay Song Hong, a large lake or swamp in the interior of the state. A male collected on Pulau Lontar, off the west coast of Siam, was one of a pair frequenting an open grassy plain interspersed with bushes near the sea. The birds were not particularly shy, and with a little care were easily approached. In the Siamese province of Bandon one male was obtained out of a flock roosting on a very lofty tree on a bank of the Bandon river. The species is described by Blanford as follows: "It haunts open plains or marshy flats or the banks of rivers, and perches on high trees, and it has a harsh weird cry."

Note.—This ibis appears to us but little more than a strongly marked race of the Indian *P. papillosa*; it has, however, been elevated to generic rank, partly on the shape of its cranium, and partly on account of the alleged absence of rufous papillæ on the occiput and, therefore, different colour. As a matter of fact, our series shows that these papillæ are definitely present, at any rate at certain seasons, although perhaps less marked than in *P. papillosa*, and we do not think that the bird can profitably be kept generically distinct. As regards bare parts, our birds are consistently coloured and show no trace of red on the head.

Thaumatibis gigantea

The Giant Ibis

PLATE 22

Ibis gigantea, Oust., *Bull. Soc. Philom.* (7), i., 1877, p. 25 (Cochin-China).

Thaumatibis gigantea, Robinson and Kloss, *Ibis*, 1911, p. 17, pl. i.; *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1921, p. 73.

Malay Name.—Unrecorded.

Description.—Bill long and curved. Head and upper part of neck naked; crown papillose. Remainder of neck covered with short, dull greyish-green feathers, broadly edged with whitish, producing a scaly appearance. Under parts, dark brownish grey, green in certain lights and distinctly green on sides of the body and under tail coverts. Mantle, back, scapulars, tail and wing quills, except inner secondaries, blackish green, less green on primaries. Remainder of wing, dull silvery; wing coverts with darker edges (Trang, Peninsular Siam).

Immature.—According to Messrs Delacour and Jabouille, young birds have

those parts of the head and neck naked in the adult, covered with short, black feathers.

Soft Parts.—Bare parts of head and neck, bluish black, with black transverse bars on the back of the head and neck; bill, dull lake; feet and legs, bright crimson lake; claws, horny.

Dimensions.—Total length, 42·6 in. (male), 40·8 in. (female), according to Sir W. J. F. Williamson's native collector. Wing, 21·5 in.; tail, 10·5 in.; bill along culmen, 9·3 in.; tarsus, 4·4 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Obtained only on two occasions, both in the north of the Peninsula, once by Robinson and Kloss at Krongmon, in the interior of Trang, and once by Dr W. L. Abbott on Pulau Terutau.

Extralimital Range.—Just outside our area Robinson saw a specimen of this rare ibis from the train in a marshy patch of ground, slightly south of Koh Lak, in South-West Siam. It has also been obtained in West-Central Siam and in French Indo-China. Messrs Delacour and Jabouille have recorded it from Cochin-China, Cambodia and Laos. Sir W. J. F. Williamson has also recorded it from the coast of Cambodia.

Nidification.—Unknown.

Habits.—Our knowledge of the habits of this rare bird rests entirely on the published observations of Messrs Delacour and Jabouille. According to these authors it is found in the marshes and tree-scattered plains of Cambodia and Cochin-China, and also in the damp open grassy places in the forests. It is fairly common, but very suspicious and difficult to approach. Generally met with in pairs or family parties, but flocks of forty birds have been observed.

The bird figured is the male (one-fifth natural size) from Krongmon, Trang, Peninsular Siam, mentioned above.

