

CROWS, JAYS AND MAGPIES

Family CORVIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 263; Vol. II., p. 259.

IN this family the bill is thick and strong, and stiff bristle-like feathers directed forwards conceal the nostrils. Often the feathers of the forehead are modified and are velvety or bristly. The legs and feet are strong. The wing has ten primaries, of which the first is well developed. The tail varies in shape but is usually square, although in many species it is much graduated or has the feathers lengthened in an ornamental manner. There are twelve tail quills.

Some members of the family are very brightly coloured, but the true crows are black, glossed with blue or green. Adults and young birds of both sexes are much alike in plumage.

The nest is usually a large untidy mass of sticks at the top of a tree, but some species choose holes in trees as nesting sites. In the great majority of the species the four or five eggs have a greenish background and are heavily marked with brown.

The crows form a large family of birds found in most parts of the world. Six species find a place in the Malayan list. With the exception of the Malay hunting crow or blue magpie (*Cissa robinsoni*), which is purely a mountain bird, all can be observed in the lowlands of the Peninsula.

KEY TO THE MALAYAN LOWLAND CROWS

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| 1 | { | Middle tail feathers greatly lengthened and broadened at tip | <i>Crypsirina temia</i> , p. 348 |
| | | Tail normal | 2 |
| 2 | { | A broad white bar across the wing | <i>Platysmurus leucopterus</i> , p. 347 |
| | | Wings, blackish with no white bar | 3 |
| 3 | { | Nape, grey and contrasting with the black crown | <i>Corvus splendens protegatus</i> , p. 347 |
| | | Head and nape, concolorous or almost so | 4 |
| 4 | { | Bill straighter and slenderer; no hackles (bifurcated feathers) on the throat; under surface greyer | <i>Corvus enca compilator</i> , p. 346 |
| | | Bill more curved and robust; hackles on the throat; under surface blacker | <i>Corvus coronoides macrorhynchus</i> , p. 347 |

*Corvus enca compiler***The Slender-billed Crow**

Corvus compiler Richmond, *Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus.*, xxvi., 1903, p. 518; new name for *Corvus tenuirostris* Horsfield and Moore (not Brehm, 1855), *Cat. Birds, Mus. East Ind. Coy.*, ii., 1858, p. 558 (Bombay, error = Malacca, Blyth, 1863).

Corone enca (pt.), Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 43.

Malay Names.—Gagak; dëndang.

Description.—Plumage, entirely blackish. Bill, thick, the culmen gently curved. Nostrils hidden by forwardly-directed, bristle-like feathers. Very like the southern large-billed crow (*Corvus coronoides macrorhynchus*) described in Vol. I., p. 264, but slightly smaller, the bill longer, more slender and with the culmen straighter and less arched, no bifurcated feathers (hackles) on the throat, and the under surface with a grey "bloom."

Adult.—Sexes alike. Plumage, black; the upper parts with a strong violet or purple gloss; the under parts less deeply black and with a decided grey tinge, especially on the abdomen. In certain lights the feathers of the mantle seem to be paler-edged, producing an incipient squamate appearance, especially noticeable in worn plumage. Bases of body feathers mostly white.

Immature.—Like the adult, but slightly duller in plumage.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark brown; bill and feet, black.

Dimensions.—*Male*: total length, 17.3 to 19.4 in.; wing, 12.6 to 13.2 in.; tail, 6.2 to 6.6 in.; bill from gape, 2.5 to 2.7 in.; tarsus, 2 to 2.25 in. *Female*: slightly smaller, total length, 18.7 in.; wing, 12.2 to 12.5 in.; tail, 6.4 to 6.8 in.; bill from gape, 2.5 to 2.6 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—The lowlands from Perak south to Johore.

Extralimital Range.—Sumatra and the islands of the Rhio Archipelago; the West Sumatran islands of Simalur and Nias. Borneo. The typical form of the species is found in Java, Bali and the Mentawi Islands, and closely allied forms inhabit Celebes, the Philippines and Ceram.

Nidification.—There is no local record. In Sumatra, Dr E. Jacobson has noted that the nests are found singly in village gardens and plantations, often on thorny trees (*Erythrina*).

Habits.—In most parts of the Peninsula this crow is not a common bird, and, broadly speaking, it replaces the more numerous large-billed crow (*Corvus coronoides macrorhynchus*) in the less open country and in the inland districts. It is a bird of the forest rather than the coasts, but it does, nevertheless, visit the mangrove belt where this is backed by other forest, and I have shot it on a mangrove-lined seashore near Singapore. The most northerly specimens I have seen are from Taiping, in Perak; other Malayan specimens are from inland districts in Pahang and Jelebu, and it is not uncommon in the extreme south of Johore. Specimens have been recorded from Patani and from a small island off the coast of Kedah, but I mistrust the identifications and suspect that these northern birds are *C. coronoides macrorhynchus*. The specimens have not been examined.

*Corvus coronoides macrorhynchus***The Southern Large-billed Crow**

Vol. I., p. 264.

In adult and immature birds of both sexes the plumage is entirely black, or nearly so, with purplish and green gloss. The feathers on the throat are bifurcated at the tip.

Total length, from 18.5 to 20 in. ; wing, 12 to 14.5 in.

In the Malay Peninsula this crow is common in many localities, but it is inclined to be local in distribution. It is a bird of the open country and not of the forests, and the usual habitat is the coast in the neighbourhood of fishing villages. The large untidy nests of sticks are usually placed high in trees in the mangrove or in secondary forest.

*Corvus splendens protegatus***The Ceylon House-Crow**

Vol. I., p. 265.

In this crow the top of the head and the throat are glossy black, fairly sharply defined against the greyish neck, mantle and breast. Wings and tail, black with blue and green reflections.

Total length, about 18 in.

The species was imported from Ceylon into the Klang district of Selangor about forty years ago, in order to deal with a plague of caterpillars of a clear-wing hawk-moth (*Cephanodes*), at that time a pest in the coffee plantations. The crows are now abundant in the town of Klang and its environs, but, curiously enough, have not spread very far. A few birds are usually to be seen in Port Swettenham, and I have also seen odd birds in Kuala Lumpur. It breeds in Klang.

*Platysmurus leucopterus***The White-winged Jay**

Vol. I., p. 265.

The whole plumage is black, except for a white bar across each wing. The head has a short crest. Iris, crimson.

Total length, about 16 in. ; wing, 7.7 in.

Although common in the lowlands in many parts of the Malay States, this jay is not known to many Europeans in Malaya, for it rarely leaves the shelter of old forest, where it is usually seen in the taller trees. The crow-like nest has been recorded from Selangor, "about six feet from the ground, in moderately thick jungle with a good deal of undergrowth, on the frond of a *Calamus* (climbing palm), the end of which rested on the fork of a small sapling."

In Perak Mr V. W. Ryves found a clutch of three eggs at the end of February.

In Selangor Mr G. C. Madoc has seen eggs in March and December, in swampy secondary forest, composed largely of "bertam" palms. Mr Madoc describes the nest as "a somewhat flat structure composed outwardly of small dry twigs about one foot long. The egg-chamber was very thickly lined with soft rotten wood and finished off with soft rootlets and some fresh white flowers and buds. The whole nest was about a foot across. One nest was placed on the sloping stem of a palm about three feet from the ground; another nest, also on a palm stem, was eight feet from the ground." Mr Madoc describes his eggs as white, thickly speckled with light brown, especially at the larger end. The three eggs of a clutch measure 1.22, 1.16 and 1.08 by 0.95, 0.94 and 0.92 in. Two eggs of another clutch are rather larger, 1.33 and 1.32 by 1 in.

*Crypsirina temia*¹

The Racquet-tailed Magpie

Corvus temia Daudin, *Traité Elem. Orn.*, 1800, p. 244 (Africa, error = Java).

Crypsirhina varians, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 83; Oates, in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), i., 1889, p. 25; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 35; O.-Grant, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1912, p. 487; Herbert, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, vi., 1923, p. 90; Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1924, p. 338; Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), i., 1922, p. 56.

Crypsirhina temia, Stuart Baker, *Nid. Birds Ind. Emp.*, i., 1932, p. 43.

Malay Name.—Unascertained.

Description.—Almost uniformly bronze-green. The tail long, fan-shaped, and with the centre pair of feathers projecting beyond the others and broadened at the tip. Feathers of the forehead, short and velvety, covering the nostrils.

Adult.—Sexes alike. Forehead and lores, deep black. All the remaining exposed plumage, except the under side of the tail, which is black, dark bronze-green, blackest on the tail, greenest on the back and wings, most bronzy on the under side and slightly blue-green on the crown. Wing lining and hidden parts of quills, dull black.

Immature.—Very young birds are dull black, the wings and tail washed with oily green.

Soft Parts.—Iris, china-blue; bill and feet, black. On the field labels of some immature birds, Kloss has marked the iris as "dark" or "pale blue," and the gape as "whitish."

Dimensions.—Total length, 12.8 to 13 in.; wing, 4.4 to 4.7 in.; tail, 7.2 to 7.8 in.; tarsus, 1.1 to 1.2 in.; bill from gape, 1.1 to 1.2 in.; culmen, 0.75 to 0.85 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Found only in Peninsular Siam, where it occurs from the Pakchan estuary south to Patani on the east coast. On the west coast its southern limit has not been defined. Recorded from Tung Song.

¹ *C. varians* in Vol. II., p. 259 (in the text).

Extralimital Range.—Northwards through Tenasserim and Lower Burma to north of Thayetmyo and Toungoo. Thence east to Tonkin and south throughout Siam and French Indo-China to Cochin-China. Sumatra, Java and Bali.

Nidification.—According to Mr E. G. Herbert, who has studied the species in Siam, a favourite haunt of this bird in the breeding season is scrub jungle on the outskirts of a village, and the nest is usually placed in a thorny bush about six feet from the ground. The nest is a neat, shallow cup of twigs. A characteristic feature is a lining made from the twisted tendrils of small creepers. In Siam nests have been found from April to August. The three or four crow-like eggs are described as moderately broad ovals, but often much pointed towards one end. They measure about 1 by 0·7 in., and are yellowish or greyish white, speckled, spotted and blotched with yellowish brown and ashy.

Habits.—In Patani, Robinson found this small magpie not uncommon in May and June, searching for cockchafers and large green rutelid beetles in the cashew trees. In Tenasserim, according to Oates, it is met with singly and in pairs, and is numerous in secondary jungle, bamboo brakes and gardens, where it searches for large insects in trees, never descending to the ground.