

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS

Family MOTACILLIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 291; Vol. II., p. 273.

THIS family is poorly represented in the Malay Peninsula, and the local list includes nine forms only. Of these, five wagtails are all highly migratory, and do not breed in the Peninsula. Of the four pipits only one form is resident. The common forms have been dealt with in detail in the first volume of this series, and as the others are migrants the family receives no detailed notice in the present fasciculus.

The wagtails and pipits are small birds, usually seen on the ground running with great rapidity in open places, especially on grass-land. They are characterized by the long hind toe on which the claw is often greatly lengthened. The slender bill is straight and has strong bristles at the gape. The tail is long. The sexes are much alike. The wagtails have distinct summer and winter plumages. The colour of the plumage is not striking, black, white and grey being dominant tones, but yellow is conspicuous in many wagtails, especially in summer plumage. Bright red, green and blue never appear.

The nests are usually placed on the ground. Most wagtails are migratory, breeding in high latitudes in the north and moving south to the tropics for the winter. Pipits too are often migratory, but a larger proportion of the known forms is resident wherever the birds occur.

The identification of wintering wagtails, in the great majority of cases not fully adult, is sometimes not easy, and the following key is offered only as a guide, although it covers all local specimens in the large series in the Raffles Museum. The well-known pied wagtails in which the plumage is mainly black and white are not known from the Peninsula, although as winter visitors they occur at Bangkok, and almost certainly visit South-West Siam. A few specimens have been recorded from Borneo, and stragglers may therefore be expected to occur in the Malay States.

KEY TO THE MALAYAN SPECIES OF WAGTAILS AND PIPITS

I	{ Upper surface streaked (PIPITS)	2
	{ Upper surface plain, not streaked (WAGTAILS)	5

2	{	Upper surface tinged with green; streaking weak	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i> subsp., p. 376
		Upper surface brown; streaking strong	3
3	{	Flanks heavily streaked	<i>Anthus cervinus</i> , p. 377
		Flanks uniform or scarcely streaked.	4
4	{	Smaller: wing rarely 3·4 in. and usually much less	<i>Anthus richardi malayensis</i> , p. 376
		Larger: wing more than 3·4 in.	<i>Anthus richardi sinensis</i> , p. 376
5	{	Hind claw shorter than hind toe	6
		Hind claw longer than hind toe	7
6	{	Abdomen, white; a double black band across the chest	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i> , p. 377
		Abdomen, yellow; no black band across the chest	<i>Motacilla cinerea caspica</i> , p. 377
7	{	Eye-stripe absent or scarcely noticeable	<i>Motacilla flava macronyx</i> , p. 378
		Eye-stripe long and broad	8
8	{	Eye-stripe, white	<i>Motacilla flava simillima</i> , p. 377
		Eye-stripe, yellow	<i>Motacilla flava taiwana</i> , p. 378

*Anthus richardi malayensis***The Malay Pipit**

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Sexes alike. Upper parts, pale brown, heavily streaked with darker brown. Under parts, buff or very pale tawny. Outer tail feathers, largely white.

Total length, about 6·4 in.; wing, 3·2 in., very rarely 3·4 in.

This pipit is common in open country throughout the Peninsula and is a conspicuous bird of the ricefields, grazing grounds and golf courses, on which it nests freely in tufts of grass from February to August. Local eggs measure about 0·78 by 0·6 in.

*Anthus richardi sinensis***The Chinese Pipit**

Like the preceding species, but larger. The wing 3·4 in. or longer. The Malayan status is that of a scarce winter visitor to Peninsular Siam. It has not been recorded from the Malay States.

Anthus hodgsoni (?) *berejowskii***Sarudny's Tree-Pipit**

Vol. II., p. 274.

Sexes alike. Upper parts, greenish brown with a few very indistinct streaks. Crown rather more noticeably streaked. Under parts, whitish,

tinged with buff on the throat and breast ; breast and flanks heavily streaked with blackish brown. Outer tail feathers largely white.

Total length, about 5 in. ; wing, 3.3 in.

As yet known only as a rare winter visitor to the lower hills, and not recorded from south of Maxwell's Hill in Perak.

Anthus cervinus

The Red-throated Pipit

A small species not unlike the very common Malay Pipit (*A. richardi malayensis*), but much more heavily streaked above and below, and with the flanks also heavily streaked. Throat and sides of the head, brick-red in males and spring females. Wing, about 3.25 in.

A winter visitor to the northern part of Peninsular Siam.

Dendronanthus indicus

The Forest-Wagtail

Vol. I., p. 293; Vol. II., p. 274.

Quite unmistakable in appearance. Upper parts, dark olive ; wings, blackish with white cross-bars. Under parts, white ; a narrow black band across the lower throat and a second, but broken, band across the breast.

Total length, about 7 in. ; wing, 3.2 in.

Breeding in North China and Siberia this forest-loving wagtail is very common in the Malay States in winter.

Motacilla cinerea caspica

The Eastern Grey Wagtail

Vol. I., p. 292; Vol. II., p. 273.

Back, grey or olive-grey ; rump, bright yellowish green ; under parts, pale yellow ; throat, white in winter, black in summer.

Total length, about 8 in. ; wing, 3.3 in. ; tail, 3.8 in.

Breeds in Northern Asia, but found commonly as a winter migrant in the Malay States, especially on the roads leading to the hill stations. Rarely seen in the black-throated summer plumage.

Motacilla flava simillima

The Eastern Blue-headed Wagtail

The adult in winter has the upper parts dull olive and the under parts yellow. The top of the head is tinged with brown and a broad eye-stripe is white. Tail, black with white outer feathers. In the spring plumage, rarely seen in Malaysia, the male has the crown greyish blue. Young birds are creamy white below, washed with brown on the breast.

Total length, about 6.6 in. ; wing, 3.1 in.

Not so common as the preceding species, but far from rare as a winter visitor, and found throughout the Peninsula in suitable localities, the great majority of the birds seen being immature.

Motacilla flava macronyx

The Eastern Grey-headed Wagtail

Very like the above subspecies in all plumages, but the eye-stripe obsolete or absent. In spring males have the top of the head darker and much less blue-grey than the blue-headed wagtail.

Although common as a winter visitor in Siam, this wagtail is much rarer farther south, and there are very few records from the Malay States.

Motacilla flava taivana

The Chinese Green-headed Wagtail

Very similar to the above two forms of *M. flava*, but the broad eye-stripe is yellow, not white, and the top of the head is green, even in spring males.

Another winter visitor from the north, but much rarer than *M. f. simillima*. Very few specimens have been obtained.