

## HISTORY OF LOCAL ORNITHOLOGY

THE progress of our knowledge of the avifauna of the Malay Peninsula has been discontinuous, periods of activity alternating with great stagnation, and its history may therefore be divided into several periods.

During the first period, from about 1750 to 1830, specimens reached Europe in comparatively small numbers, and were mainly the result of the great voyages to the East subsidized, or initiated, by the French Government at the end of the eighteenth century, naturalists being frequently attached to these expeditions. In early days, however, the importance of exact labelling was not fully realized, and great confusion has arisen from the localities, often erroneous, ascribed to specimens. Nor was the material adequately preserved in those days, and very few specimens of an earlier date than 1810 exist in museums.

The second period may be said to commence with the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles. He devoted great attention to natural history, and inspired others with his own zeal. To him is due largely the credit for the results obtained by Horsfield, Jack, Farquahar, and other naturalists of the period. Most of his own collections, unfortunately, perished with the loss by fire of the Indiaman *Fame*, but some, including his drawings, still remain, and are preserved in the collections of the British Museum and the library of the India Office. Finlayson, a surgeon attached to Crawford's mission to Siam and Hué, also made large collections in the Straits of Malacca and on islands of the Gulf of Siam, and on the Cambodian coast, which to this day have been little visited by naturalists. His drawings are still preserved in the India Office library, but, with the exception of a few mammals, his collections, of which a list survives, have mostly perished, owing to defective preservation and the ravages of time.

On the retrocession of Java to the Dutch a great revival of zoological activity took place, and much zoological research was accomplished in Sumatra, South Borneo, and the islands east of Java to New Guinea, by Salomon Müller, Diard and Duvaucel, and Boie, and the results given to the world by Temminck, Bonaparte, Müller himself, and Schlegel. These collections still exist, for the most part of course in Leyden, but much passed by exchange, gift or sale to the collections of the British Museum, and to that of Lord Derby, now in Liverpool.

Simultaneously with the Dutch activity, collections made mostly in the

neighbourhood of Malacca were reaching England, and were being studied by Eyton and Strickland, amongst others. This period may be said to have ended about 1845.

In 1841 Edward Blyth was appointed Curator of the Museum of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, in Calcutta, and at once began to study the Malayan fauna. Until his death, in 1873, he produced a continuous flow of memoirs on Malayan mammals and birds, which were mainly printed in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, though two important papers, largely based on his study after retirement, of collections in Leyden, London and Liverpool, are to be found in the *Ibis* for 1865 and 1870.

Simultaneously with Blyth, a surgeon, Dr Cantor, in the employ of the East India Company, stationed at Penang and Malacca, made large collections of mammals, birds, fishes and reptiles, which were forwarded to the Company's museum at India House, and formed the basis of many papers by Dr Horsfield and Frederick Moore. Those collections, on the dispersal of the Indian museum in 1879, came to the British Museum, and still exist there, being more fortunate than Horsfield's Javan collections, which were largely destroyed by moths. Except for small collections by Dr Maingay, a surgeon stationed in Malacca, which were acquired by Lord Tweeddale, and passed with his collection to the British Museum, and a small collection made in Province Wellesley by Stoliczka, little zoological work was accomplished in Malaya for some years after Dr Cantor's service, and the third period may be said to end with him in 1854.

A. R. Wallace made small collections in Penang, Malacca and Singapore from 1859-1863, and Malacca was visited by R. G. Wardlaw Ramsay in the early seventies.

In 1881-1882 Lieutenant (now Brigadier-General) H. R. Kelham contributed an important paper to the *Ibis* dealing with the western side of the Malay Peninsula, from Perak to Singapore, while in 1877 Allan Octavian Hume turned his attention to the Malay Peninsula, and his collectors, W. Davison and J. Darling, jun., with a staff of native assistants, worked the western side of the Peninsula from the northern boundary to South Johore and Singapore. Conditions at the time prevented them reaching the ranges in the interior, nor did they collect on the eastern side, for similar reasons, but they accumulated an immense series of birds, probably not many less than 20,000 in number, all of which are now in the British Museum. As noted elsewhere, it says much for the thoroughness with which the available districts were worked that practically no resident species of any importance has been since discovered in the low country of the Malay Peninsula.

In 1886 and 1887 Mr L. Wray, then Curator of the Perak State Museum, investigated the mountain fauna of the ranges near Taiping and those of Batang Padang in the south of Perak. His collections, though not large, were very complete, and of considerable interest as showing the similarity of the fauna of the more elevated districts with that of Borneo, Sumatra and the Himalayas.

With these efforts the fourth period of Malayan ornithological activity came to a close.

In 1899, under the leadership of Mr W. W. Skeat, then an officer of the Malayan Civil Service, a "Cambridge" expedition studied the zoology and anthropology of the Siamese Malay States and of Gunong Inas in Northern Perak. Large collections were made in all groups, but no member of the party was specially an ornithologist, and the results were not of any outstanding interest. The collections obtained are in the Cambridge University Museum.

In 1901, I, in company with the late Dr Annandale, who had been a member of the earlier "Skeat Expedition," visited much the same country. Our activities were widely distributed, and though a collection of over six hundred skins, now in the British Museum, was obtained, it contained nothing of very great importance. For a variety of reasons we were unable to visit the mountains of Peninsular Siam, where much of interest awaited the collector.

In 1899 Dr W. L. Abbott made very large collections in Trang, and later on the coasts of Trengganu and in the Pulau Tioman Archipelago. These have never been reported on in detail. Mr A. L. Butler, afterwards Curator of the Selangor Museum, made an interesting collection in the Taiping Hills, supplementing that of Mr Wray. His specimens are in Lord Rothschild's Museum at Tring.

In 1903 I returned to the Malay Peninsula as Curator of the Selangor Museum, and in 1908 Mr C. B. Kloss joined the staff of the Federated Malay States Museum, succeeding me as director in 1926. Since 1903 considerable collections have been made by us, either alone or in conjunction, or with the assistance of Mr E. Seimund, to whom we owe much. Mr C. N. Chasen of the Singapore Museum has also been active in the investigation of the bird fauna of Singapore and the adjacent islands.

As far as the mere acquisition of collections is concerned there is now no great field for the ornithologist on the look-out for new species. Faunal lists for various districts are still required, notably for the extreme north-east of the Siamese area south to Bandon, and also from Trengganu and Kelantan. On the western side, in view of recent activities of American ornithologists, we require further material from the Tenasserim border south to Trang, and from Pulau Telibun off the mouth of the Trang river.

Finally, the island of Penang itself remains to be studied in detail, both in respect of the actual permanent residents, the seasonal visitors, and the altitudinal distribution of the birds. Very many species are credited to the island on very dubious authority, and what is now wanted are exact data.