

THE BIRDS OF
THE MALAY PENINSULA

VOLUME I: THE COMMONER BIRDS

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GAME BIRDS

Order GALLIFORMES

If we include in the game birds the bustard quails, genus *Turnix*, which by most authorities are regarded as belonging to a separate order, *Hemipodii*, on account of certain deep-seated anatomical peculiarities, which it is unnecessary to particularize here, the order is represented in Malaya by some seventeen or eighteen forms, of which three are not found elsewhere.

As it is intended to devote a special volume of this work to Game, Sporting and Shore Birds generally, I do not propose here to describe more than two species, which are mainly inhabitants of grass and waste lands, and which are the most likely to attract the attention of the ordinary observer.

In a book of this kind it would be superfluous to give elaborate diagnoses by which the different orders and groups of birds can be accurately defined. It will suffice to state that game birds can usually be recognized by their stout, compact body, with rounded wings fitting close to it. The legs are strong and the toes large, and, except in the bustard quails, there is always a hind toe. In many forms the legs of the males, and in a few cases of the females, are armed with one or more pairs of spurs, varying in size and degree of sharpness, according to species. The bill is stout and thick, and is usually short, with the culmen or ridge much arched. The nests, in Oriental species, are almost always on the ground, and are very simple. Eggs are numerous—rarely less than four—and the young are capable of looking after themselves immediately after hatching. When first hatched they are clad in down, often of diverse pattern.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

1	{	Hind toe absent	<i>Turnix</i> , p. 2.	2
		Hind toe present	<i>Excalfactoria</i> , p. 3.	3
2	{	Throat black	<i>Turnix j. atrigularis</i> (female)	
		Throat whitish	<i>Turnix j. atrigularis</i> (male)	
3	{	Plumage below mainly slaty blue	<i>Excalfactoria c. chinensis</i> (male)	
		Plumage below pale pinky buff, marked with black	<i>Excalfactoria c. chinensis</i> (female)	

*Turnix javanica atrigularis***The Malayan Bustard Quail**

Hemipodius atrigularis, Eyton, *P.Z.S.*, 1839, p. 107 (Malacca).

Turnix plumbipes, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1882, p. 5.

Turnix taigoor, Ogilvie Grant, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xxii., 1893, p. 530.

Turnix pugnax plumbipes, Stuart Baker, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Bombay*, xxii., 1915, p. 601.

Malay Name.—Puyoh: nok khum-maw (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult female.*—General colour above, rufous brown, the feathers of the head irregularly spotted with white. Scapulars, back, rump, upper tail coverts and tail, irregularly mottled with black, usually with a large, subterminal spot on each web, the scapulars with the margins of the feathers edged with whitish buff. Feathers of the forehead, black, with white tips. Lores, sides of the head and throat and neck, white, the feathers edged with black. Primaries, primary coverts and secondaries, brownish black, the primaries narrowly edged with buffy white, the outer secondaries irregularly barred on the outer web. Wing coverts, sandy brown on the inner webs, barred with black and yellowish buff on the outer webs. Throat and middle of the chest, black; sides of chest and breast, black, barred with buff or buff with guttate black spots. Rest of the under parts, rufous buff, paler on the middle of the abdomen, richer on the flanks and under tail coverts.

Adult male.—Differs from the female in having the top of the head less spotted with white. Throat, white, the centre of the breast, barred black and pale buff; general tone of the under parts much paler. Size smaller than the female.

Immature.—The immature females are at first like the males and lack the black throat. Some immature birds seem to have less black on the upper parts than the adults.

Soft Parts.—Bill and feet, plumbeous or plumbeous green, irides usually straw-colour or yellowish white.

Dimensions.—*Female*: total length, 5·6 in.; wing, 3·5 in.; tail, 1·3 in.; tarsus, 0·9 in.; bill from gape, 0·7 in. *Male*: total length, 5·2 in.; wing, 3·2 in.; tail, 1 in.; tarsus, 0·85 in.; bill from gape, 0·65 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the Malay Peninsula in suitable localities and in the islands of Salanga (Junk Zeylon), Penang, Singapore, Koh Samui and Koh Pennan.

Extralimital Range.—Very closely allied races range throughout India, Burma, Siam and French Indo-China, South China, Hainan and Formosa, Java, Ceylon, Billiton and Sumatra, but not to Borneo. There is much local variation, chiefly in the presence or absence of a rufous nuchal collar and in the rufous element in the mottling of the feathers of the back and mantle, and on these characters the species has been divided into several named races. Broadly speaking, the most richly coloured birds occur in the regions of highest rainfall, the brightest of all being from Java and Ceylon.

Nidification.—The eggs are almost invariably four in number, somewhat pointed at one end, and are pale greyish olive, thickly spotted with brownish olive and brown, the markings being often more densely congregated in a zone at one end. The shell is usually somewhat glossy. They measure about 0.92 by 0.78 in.

The nest is usually among lalang grass (*Imperatora koenigi*), often under the shelter of a Straits Rhododendron bush (*Melastoma*), and in the Malay Peninsula is little more than a slight depression in the grass, but is sometimes lined with bents and a few dead leaves. In Cachar, however, Stuart Baker describes the nest as “a thick pad of fine grass, from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter, fitting into some natural hollow, deepened, cleared and made circular by the birds themselves. In the centre the pad is from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep, and the sides curl up a little with the sides of the hollow.”

In Selangor the breeding season generally appears to be the months of June and July, but is very variable. In the north it is earlier.

Habits.—The bustard quail is common throughout the Peninsula wherever there is open country with much high grass, in situations similar to those affected by the button quail, though, as a rule, the present bird is not so much seen on rice stubbles. It is usually found singly or in pairs, and is hard to flush, unless with a dog. The food in the main is grass seed, though insects, and especially larval grasshoppers and locusts, are readily taken. The note is described as intermediate between a coo and a soft, booming purr. It is far more frequently uttered by the female than the male, is often heard at night, and, according to Stuart Baker, has not infrequently been mistaken for the purr of a tiger.

In this and allied Hemipodes there is a reversal in the usual rôle of the sexes, the female being the larger and more brightly coloured bird and courting the male, while the latter performs the duties of incubation. In the breeding season the females are very pugnacious, and the Malays take advantage of this fact by using a decoy in an ingeniously constructed cage (*gebak puyok*), which closes as soon as the wild bird enters to attack the inmate. The birds so captured are pitted against each other and large sums used often to be staked on a specially proficient bird.

Excalfactoria chinensis chinensis

The Blue-breasted Button Quail

Tetrao chinensis, Linn., *Syst. Nat.*, i., 1766, p. 277 (ex Edwards, *China*).

Excalfactoria chinensis, Oates, in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds*, 2nd ed., iii., 1890, p. 448; Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iv., 1898, p. 112; Oates, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, i., 1901, p. 47, pl. 4, fig. 2; Robinson, *Journ. Fed. Mal. States Mus.*, i., 1906, p. 128.

Excalfactoria chinensis chinensis, Herbert, *Journ. Siam. Soc., Nat. Hist. Suppl.*, vi., 1926, p. 336 (Nidification).

Malay Name.—Pikau: nok khum kai-na (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult male.*—Middle of the head, nape, back and rump, earthy

brown, broadly mottled and spotted with black and in freshly moulted birds washed with richer brown, most of the feathers with whitish buff shaft stripes, disappearing in older birds, when the back tends to become almost uniform. Forehead, sides of the head and neck, lesser and median wing coverts and some of the upper tail coverts, breast and flanks, bright slate-blue, brightest on the breast and flanks. Rest of the under surface, below the breast and some of the upper tail coverts, maroon-chestnut. A narrow white band from the nostril to the eye, with a broader black band beneath it; a broad white patch below the ear coverts; chin and throat black, the black carried up in a narrow line to the ear coverts, behind the white patch; a white gorget on the lower throat, extended in a narrow line to the ear coverts and margined on both sides narrowly with black. Primaries and secondaries dull brown, slightly vermiculated with brownish buff; tail feathers, completely hidden by the coverts, chestnut-maroon.

Adult female.—Upper surface like that of the male, but top of the head darker, forehead and stripe over the eye pinkish buff, not slate-grey. Breast, pinkish buff; lower breast, flanks and under tail coverts, buffy white, barred with bracket-shaped black bars, these bars becoming almost obsolete on the breast in old birds. Centre of the abdomen, uniform dirty-white. Wings and wing coverts as in the male, but lighter and with no trace of grey.

Younger males.—Are browner and less blackish above, the buff shaft stripes more pronounced; the chestnut edgings to the wing coverts generally seen in old birds are hardly developed, and the blue-grey of the under parts predominates over the chestnut, and on the flanks is flecked with sandy buff and black.

Fledgelings.—Have the upper parts broadly striped with yellowish buff, the throat pale sulphur-yellow, and the feathers of the chest and flanks blackish, with broad white shaft stripes.

Soft Parts.—Bill, black, the lower mandible, lead-grey; irides, crimson in the male, hazel in the females and young; feet and legs, pale chrome-yellow; claws, dark horn.

Dimensions.—*Male*: total length, about 5 in.; wing, 2·75 in.; tail, 0·9 in.; tarsus, 0·8 in.; bill from gape, 0·45 in. *Female*: size similar.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the Peninsula in suitable localities. Islands of Penang and Singapore, and probably Langkawi, Salanga and Koh Samui and Koh Pennan, though not definitely recorded from there.

Extralimital Range.—The greater part of India, throughout Indo-China to China, Formosa and Hainan. Slightly modified forms occur in the Sunda Islands, Celebes and the Moluccas, the Philippines, Australia and New Britain.

Nidification.—The breeding season is very variable, from March to July or August. The nest is very slight, consisting merely of a few wisps of withered grass, placed in a hollow among low bushes or in high lalang grass. The eggs are usually four or five, but occasionally six or seven, to the clutch, dull greenish olive, faintly speckled with black. They are rather pointed at one end and measure about 1 by 0·75 in.

Habits.—The blue-breasted quail is common in settled districts throughout the Malay Peninsula, but is not found in jungle or on the hills except where these have been deafforested. It is met with principally in stretches of abandoned

cultivation and mining-land that have been overgrown with coarse grass, or in paddy-fields that have just been reaped or are lying fallow. It is especially abundant in the *tand tenggala*, or ploughland, along the banks of the Jelei and Lower Tembeling rivers in Pahang. Usually it is found singly or in pairs, but towards the end of the year in coveys of six or seven that lie very close.

Its food is almost entirely grass seed. Blanford and others state that its note is a low, double whistle, but I have never heard this.