

DUCKS AND GEESE

Order ANSERIFORMES

FOR practical purposes, the order to which ducks and geese belong, apart from a South American group, the screamers (*Palamedeidae*), with which we are not concerned, can be distinguished from all other birds by the laminated edges¹ to the bill. The flamingos, which are found in India but not in Malaya, belong to the order but are differentiated by their very long legs, their bill abruptly bent in the middle almost to a right angle, and by their rosy plumage.

The order is very poorly represented in Malaya; not more than nine species are known from within our limits, and of these five are rare and accidental visitors which need not be mentioned here. The others are, the white-winged wood-duck, a large and heavy bird, somewhat resembling a mandarin or Muscovy duck, abundant in the north of the Peninsula but extremely rare in the south; the cotton or goose teal (*Nettopus coromandelianus*), local and little known, and the whistling teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*)—the only abundant species—here described.

No geese or swans or any of the sea-ducks or mergansers have ever occurred, even as wanderers, in the Malay peninsular area.

Dendrocygna javanica

The Whistling Teal or Tree-Duck

Anas javanica, Horsfield, *Trans. Linn. Soc.*, xiii., 1821, p. 199 (Java).

Dendrocygna javanica, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1882, p. 197; Oates, *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1890, p. 284; Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iv., 1898, p. 430; Stuart Baker, *Game Birds, India, Burma and Ceylon*, i., 1921, p. 122, pl. 9; Herbert, *Journ. Siam. Soc., Nat. Hist. Suppl.*, vi., 1926, p. 355.

Malay Name.—Belibis: pet nam (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult.*—Middle of crown and back of head, blackish brown; forehead, sides of head, a stripe above the eye, neck all round and throat, brownish, becoming paler on the chin; mantle, upper back and scapulars, blackish, with rufescent tips to the feathers, giving a scaly appearance; lower back and upper tail coverts, black; the greatest upper tail coverts, chestnut; smaller and median wing coverts, maroon-chestnut; greater coverts, primaries

¹ Present also in certain petrels, *Prion* and allied genera.

and secondaries, black, becoming brownish on the inner secondaries. Inner aspect of wing, greyish black; axillaries and under wing coverts, glossy black; tail feathers, brownish black. Beneath, breast greyish brown, becoming rufescent and ultimately chestnut on the belly; flanks, greyish brown with whitish buff shaft stripes, broadening towards the tips; under tail coverts, whitish brown.

Immature.—The head not nearly so dark, the upper surface with the transverse rufous edgings to the feathers pale and more indeterminate. Lower surface more uniform, rufous brown without any rich chestnut on the belly. Very young birds lack the maroon-chestnut wing coverts.

Soft Parts.—Iris, brown; orbital ring, greenish yellow, sometimes clear pale chrome; bill, slate-grey; tarsi, pale slate-grey; toes and webs paler.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 16 in.; wing, 7·3 to 7·7 in.; tail, 2·5 in.; tarsus, 1·7 to 1·9 in.; bill from gape, 2 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the length of the Peninsula, Junk Zeylon, the Bandon Bight Islands, the Langkawi group; recorded from Penang and Singapore but doubtful on both, at any rate at the present day.

Extralimital Range.—Throughout the Indian Empire and the Indo-Chinese countries, east to the Liu Kiu Islands and Southern China, Sumatra, Borneo and Java, and probably the lesser Sunda Islands.

Nidification.—Probably breeds in small numbers in Perak, Pahang, and the islands off the Kedah coast, and more abundantly in the north of the Peninsula—the breeding season, according to Kelham and others, being in the latter half of the year. There are, however, no definite records of nests and eggs from the Malay Peninsula. Very young birds have been obtained at Kuala Kangsar in January and February. There are also nestlings in down from Tung Song, Peninsular Siam, dated 5th October, in Mr Herbert's collection now in the British Museum. Herbert gives the following account of the nesting habits in Central Siam, but does not mention the month:

“The nests are built on tufts of rushes, or coarse grass, or on low scrub bushes, but, so far as I know, the whistling teal around Bangkok never build their nests in trees as they do in many parts of India. The practice of nesting on the ground by this teal is, however, not uncommon in Burma and is fully dealt with by Mr Stuart Baker.

“The eggs are very spherical ovals, and but little compressed at the small end. The colour is creamy white when first laid, but very soon becomes stained. The surface is very smooth and often there is a fair amount of gloss which is due to a chalky deposit on the shell. This chalky surface becomes much scratched by the birds when turning the eggs during incubation. Eight is a very general number of eggs for a clutch and I have had as many as ten. One clutch averages 1·74 by 1·42 in., and another, 1·88 by 1·45 in., but I have not sufficient measurements to give a general average, which would, I feel sure, be rather smaller than that for Indian eggs.”

Habits.—The whistling teal is very widely distributed in the Malay Peninsula, very common in the north and in the east coast states but con-

tinuously scarcer as we proceed south, due to the lack of suitable country. In North and Central Perak and along the course of the Perak river it was, many years ago, exceedingly common and is still fairly numerous, and the same may be said of Pahang, but in Selangor it is now exceedingly scarce, and in Malacca and Negri Sembilan almost non-existent, though I doubt if at any time it was really common in any of these states. In the southern part of its range it is largely migratory, being much more abundant in the early months of the year.

As regards its habits, it frequents, for choice, stretches of water of comparatively limited extent, pools and lakelets by the edge of the ricefields, the ricefields themselves when flooded, and the backwaters of the larger rivers, where it is found in small flocks, though in Langkawi and at Bandon at the end of June I have seen very large numbers. The birds fly well and strongly, though, of course, at nothing like the pace of a mallard; they are also good divers but do not swim very fast. At night they roost on high trees surrounding the ricefields, and along the rivers, but probably feed, at least during part of the night, as their whistling note is then often heard in localities in which they are common.

The food is soft water-weeds and grass, and even, it is said, the young rice-plants, but also, as Baker states, and as I have noted myself in Trang, water-snails, often of considerable size.

The note is a soft low whistle, often uttered, both when feeding and on the wing, but I have never heard the chuckle or quack which is referred to by Baker.