

# BARBETS

Order SCANSORES

Family CAPITONIDÆ

THE barbets (*Capitonidæ*) are a small family of fruit-eating birds occurring in the tropics of Africa, Asia and South America, and well represented in Malaya. They are strictly sedentary, confined as a rule to old jungle, though a few are orchard and garden birds. The wing is rounded and the powers of flight feeble. Tail short, always shorter than the wing, composed of ten feathers. Bill, thick and robust, broadened at the base, straight or gently curved downwards, generally provided with bristles in the neighbourhood of the nostrils, which may equal or exceed the bill in length. Feet, coarse and strong, two toes directed forwards and two backwards, the soles somewhat broadened.

Plumage usually gaudy in the Asiatic species, the dominant colour green, with bright tints about the head and sometimes with ornamental plumes (*Psilopogon*). One genus, *Calorhamphus*, very dull in plumage. Sexes in the Malayan forms approximately the same in colour. The nests are in holes in trees, and as usual in such situations the eggs are white, variable in texture and shape, usually rather round and glossy.

The note in certain of the species is an anvil-like clank, from which the birds derive their vernacular Malay name of "Coppersmith." Many of the deeper jungle forms are, however, very silent birds.

In Malaya only about three out of the thirteen species on the list are found away from deep jungle.

## KEY TO THE SPECIES OF BARBETS HERE DESCRIBED

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|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | { | Larger ; dull-coloured birds, with no bright colours on the head and neck | } <i>Thereiceryx lineatus intermedius</i> ,<br>p. 148 |
|   |   | Smaller ; with bright colours on head and neck . . . . .                  |   |
| 2 | { | Throat blue ; abdomen uniform green                                       | } <i>Mezobucco duvauceli duvauceli</i> ,<br>p. 146    |
|   |   | Throat lemon ; abdomen striped  |   |

*Xantholæma hæmacephala indica*

## The Coppersmith Barbet

PLATE II (*lower figure*)*Bucco indicus*, Lath., *Ind. Orn.*, i., 1790, p. 205 (India).*Xantholæma hæmatocephala*, Shelley, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xix., 1891, p. 98; Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iii., 1895, p. 98.*Xantholæma hæmacephala indica*, Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam.*, v., 1923, p. 158; Herbert, *op. cit.*, vi., 1924, p. 299 (nesting habits); Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iv., 1927, p. 127.**Malay Name.**—Tukang besi (blacksmith) : nok chang thong (*Siamese*).**Description.**—*Adult male.*—Lores, black; top of the head to the hinder level of the eyes, crimson; behind this a narrow black band carried round to the gape and broadening on the jaw; ear coverts, blackish, greyish green posteriorly; a narrow stripe above the eye, a broad patch beneath it, and the chin and throat, clear lemon-yellow; sides of the neck and nape, greyish green; rest of upper surface, including tail, olivaceous green; primaries, black; outer webs externally edged with pale green, inner webs internally bordered with pale yellow, primary coverts as the primaries. Beneath, a broad crimson patch on the breast, edged below with golden yellow, rest of under surface pale lemon-yellow, with broad longitudinal streaks of olivaceous green, most marked on the flanks; tail washed beneath with bluish; under wing coverts, yellowish white, narrowly flecked with greenish olivaceous. Nasal bristles, black, extending almost to tip of bill, but not beyond it.*Adult female.*—No material differences, but perhaps a little duller, with the crimson breast patch smaller.*Immature.*—Much duller; crimson breast patch only commencing to appear, crimson forehead replaced by dull olive-yellow.**Soft Parts.**—Iris, hazel; orbital ring, crimson-lake; bill, black, pale at base; feet, crimson or coral.**Dimensions.**—Total length, 6 to 6.5 in.; wing, 3.1 to 3.3 in.; tail, 1.5 in.; tarsus, 0.8 in.; bill from gape, 0.85 to 0.95 in.**Range in the Malay Peninsula.**—Extending as far south as Kuala Kangsar on the western side of the Peninsula, and Trengganu on the eastern. Not recorded from Penang, and though Kelham (*Ibis*, 1881, p. 390) states that he met with the species near Bukit Timah, Singapore, I think there must be some mistake, as no other observer has come across it on the island (nor, as noted above, does it occur in the southern half of the Peninsula).**Extralimital Range.**—Practically throughout Southern Asia, from Persia to Annam. Slightly modified forms occur in the Philippine Islands and in Sumatra. Not known in the rest of the Malay Archipelago.**Nidification.**—Kelham (*loc. cit.*) states: "It breeds in Perak, in holes which it excavates in trees, but personally I did not find a nest. The eggs are white." Oates, writing of eggs from Pegu, says that they are white and usually of a lengthened cylindrical shape and exhibit a small amount of gloss (often

devoid of all gloss). When fresh and unblown, like so many eggs of this type they have a delicate pink blush. In length they vary from 0·87 to 1·07 in., and in breadth from 0·62 to 0·72 in., but the average of a very large series is 0·99 by 0·69 in.

In Bangkok, according to Herbert (*loc. cit.*), the breeding season is from February to April. Two eggs, or occasionally three, are laid; their average dimensions are given as 0·98 by 0·73 in., and they are noted as very asymmetrical.

**Habits.**—In Taiping and the neighbourhood this bird is common in gardens and orchards, but never in heavy jungle. The note is a “*took, took,*” rather like that of the Malay nightjar, but much clearer and more melodious, often uttered from the shelter of a tree, in the heat of the day, when most other birds are silent. It keeps closely to cover and is rather difficult to see.

The bird figured is a male from Ko-khau, Trang, Peninsular Siam, 6th January 1910.

*Mezobucco duvauceli duvauceli*

**The Little Malay Barbet**

PLATE II (*upper figure*)

*Bucco duvauceli*, Less., *Traité*, p. 164, 1831 (Sumatra).

*Mesobucco duvauceli*, Shelley, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xix., 1895, p. 85.

*Cyanops duvauceli robinsoni*, Stuart Baker, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, xxxix., 1918, p. 20 (Klang).

**Malay Name.**—Tukang besi.

**Description.**—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. A patch of verditer-blue on the lores; top of head, black; patch behind mandible, black, followed by a large red spot; a large red spot beneath the eye and a narrow stripe from behind the eye, above the ear coverts, also red, the bases of the feathers paler; ear coverts blackish, mixed with verditer-blue; a patch behind the black crown, dull verditer; rest of upper surface, grass-green; tail washed with blue; primaries black, all except the outermost narrowly bordered with green on the outer web externally, and with dirty-white on the inner webs internally. Beneath chin and throat, bright verditer-blue, succeeded by a large black spot which is narrowly bordered with verditer-blue beneath. Rest of the under surface, yellowish green; inferior aspect of tail, bright bluish; under wing coverts and axillaries, dull yellowish grey, edge of wing, blue. Nasal bristles extending beyond the tip of the bill.

*Immature.*—Dull green all over, washed with blue on the lower surface.

*Note.*—There is considerable variation in the plumage of this species; all but extremely old birds have the feathers of the fore part of the crown tipped with verditer-blue; most birds have the feathers of the sides of the breast faintly tipped with scarlet; the colour of the ear coverts is variable, some birds having them pure black, and others much mixed with blue. Lastly, the character of the black spot on the breast varies; in most specimens from more southerly districts it is large and clear black; in a few it is obscured by

verditer-blue and in one I have seen it entirely absent, thus approaching the northern race.

**Soft Parts.**—Iris, dark brown or chestnut; bill, black; base of lower mandible, bluish; feet, sage-green or plumbeous.

**Dimensions.**—Total length, 5·5 to 6·5 in.; wing, 2·9 to 3·2 in.; tail, 1·9 in.; tarsus, 0·7 in.; bill from gape, 1·1 in.

**Range in the Malay Peninsula.**—From Perlis, southward to the southern extremity. Singapore Island, where it now seems very rare. Not recorded from Penang Island.

**Extralimital Range.**—Sumatra only. The Bornean form is extremely closely allied, while that inhabiting the Indo-Chinese countries, Aracan to Annam, is rather more distinct (*M. d. cyanotis*). The bird from Tenasserim, south to Perlis, is intermediate (*cf.* below).

**Nidification.**—The nesting habits of this form have not been recorded, but they will not differ in any way from that of the extremely closely allied *M. c. stuarti* from Tenasserim, which was found breeding by Messrs Bingham and J. Darling, junior, in the Thoungyeen Valley and near Tavoy, on 28th February and 15th April, in rotten stumps and branches, twenty feet from the ground. The eggs, two or three in number, were laid on the bare wood, with no attempt at a nest. Those obtained by Mr Darling were much elongated ovals, with the shell excessively fine and thin, glossless and pure white. They averaged 0·89 by 0·66 in.

**Habits.**—Not so much of an orchard and garden bird as *Xantholæma*, but by no means confined to old jungle, as are the other barbets. A. L. Butler gives an amusing account of its habits, which may here be repeated:

“This is one of the most annoying birds I know to try and shoot. It ensconces itself among the foliage at the very top of a very high tree, often in the low country a durian, and there keeps up, for hours together, an incessant ‘*twit-twit, twit-twit,*’ very like the note of an English nuthatch. Owing to its turning its head from side to side while calling, these monotonous notes seem to come from a different direction every minute, and even when one has succeeded in locating the bird, more or less exactly, it is impossible to see it owing to its small size, leaf-green colour and its habit of keeping absolutely motionless (except for turning its head about) as long as it is calling. You may clap your hands, shout and throw stones into the tree as much as you like, but you won’t get it to move, much less take wing and give a flying shot. If two of you are shooting together, however, things are simplified considerably. You put the other gun on the far side of the tree and fire three or four shots at hazard into the top of it. Then at last the little barbet elects to move, and the other man gets a very high snap shot at a diminutive bird flying very jerkily away, which he may hit, but is much more likely not to” (*Journ. Straits Branch Roy. Asiat. Soc.*, No. 32, 1899, p. 25).

The specimen figured is a male collected by W. Davison at Klang, Selangor, Federated Malay States, on the 4th July 1879. It is the type of *Cyanops dwauceli robinsoni*, Stuart Baker, *loc. cit. supra*.

*Remarks.*—The bird above described (*M. d. duvauceli*) does not occur much north of Perlis; north of that state it is replaced by a slightly larger form, which differs also in having the ear coverts more bluish, the red on the sides of the head mixed with yellowish and the black spot on the middle of the breast much less conspicuous. This form, which extends north nearly to Rangoon and east to Bangkok, has been named, *M. d. stuarti* (Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam.*, iii., 1919, p. 100).

*Thereiceryx lineatus intermedius*

**The Lineated Dull Barbet**

*Thereiceryx lineatus intermedius*, Stuart Baker, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, xxxix., 1918, p. 9 (North Tenasserim); id. *Ibis*, 1919, p. 214; Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1923, p. 164.

*Cyanops lineata* (part), Shelley, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xix., 1891, p. 80.

*Thereiceryx lineatus*, Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iii., 1895, p. 88; Oates and Reid, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1903, p. 125.

**Malay Name.**—Tanau rhu.

**Description.**—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. With a broad naked space round the eyes. Crown and nape, pale earthy brown, with broad whitish shaft stripes; rest of under surface, bright green, the edges of the feathers shining green, the feathers of the hind neck with narrow white shaft stripes. Tail above, green, duller than the back. Primaries, blackish brown, with pale fulvous edges to the inner webs and the same to the outer webs, becoming greenish near the base; throat, chin, lores and cheeks, whitish brown, breast darker brown, the feathers with broad white centres; middle of abdomen, flanks and under tail coverts, greenish, with lighter centres. Lower aspect of tail, bluish; under wing coverts, ashy brown; axillaries paler.

*Immature.*—Appear to have the under surface more uniform, less striped; but the material available is inadequate.

**Soft Parts.**—Iris, hazel; bare orbital skin, orange-yellow; bill, orange-brown; feet, pale gamboge-yellow.

**Dimensions.**—Total length, 10 to 11 in.; wing, 4·8 to 5·1 in.; tail, 3·4 to 4·1 in.; tarsus, 1·1 to 1·3 in.; bill from gape, 1·50 to 1·65 in.

**Range in the Malay Peninsula.**—Along the coasts as far south as Kedah and Trengganu, but not common.

**Extralimital Range.**—The Indo-Chinese countries, but not ranging far north, where it is replaced by a larger bird, *T. lineatus hodgsoni*, and in Java and Bali by a smaller form, *T. lineatus lineatus*.

**Nidification.**—Not recorded from the Malay Peninsula. Bingham says of Tenasserim birds: "This bird was excessively common, but I only succeeded in finding two nests, one on 25th March and the other on 13th April. This latter contained four young ones, barely fledged. Out of the former, which was a mere hole, leading to a shallow hollow in the dried bough of a teak-tree which, having been cut down years ago, lay propped in a slanting position

against a neighbour, I took three fresh eggs which I found lying on the bare wood. The entrance hole was irregular and evidently not a recently cut one."

Oates states that the eggs are rather elongated ovals, the shells fine, smooth and rather fragile, but with scarcely any appreciable gloss. Three eggs average 1.18 by 0.83 in.

**Habits.**—In the Pakchan estuary and the three other localities in the Peninsula whence this bird has been obtained—Tanjong Patani by myself, Kedah by the members of the "Skeat Expedition," and Trengganu by Dr Abbott and Mr C. B. Kloss—this bird frequents open country, often among Casuarinas, and in Java, also, the allied form is not a heavy forest bird.

I have no special note of its call, but Blanford records it as a "monotonous disyllabic note," which is similar to that of the related jungle barbets.

**Remarks.**—I have included this species in the present volume as it is likely to be commonly met with at stations on the coasts of Trengganu, Kelantan, Kedah, and possibly at Kuantan. It is one of a curious association of birds that are known from Burma, Siam and the north of the Malay Peninsula; are not met with in the Southern Peninsula, Borneo or Sumatra, but reappear in Java.

### *Indicatoridæ*

#### **Honey Guides**

THE honey guides are closely related to the barbets, but differ considerably in their external appearance and habits.

The members of the family are all of small size, not exceeding a starling. Bill, stout, finch-like, the culmen curved, without nasal plumes or rictal bristles.

The wing is long and pointed, with nine primaries only. The tail, of twelve feathers, is somewhat graduated, the outer feathers shortest and narrow. Tarsus short, the toes strong.

Nesting habits are those of the barbets, and the eggs are similar. The food is largely bees and wasps, and the family derives its popular name from the habit the African species are said to have of pointing out the nests of bees in order that they may share in the spoil. Whether they actually do so in Asia is not known, but in Malaya we have come across the species only in places where, and at times when, bees were unusually numerous.

The family is a small one, numbering two genera and about fifteen species, all but two of which are African.

The only Malayan species, *Indicator malayanus*, is of dull colour, with bright yellow on the shoulders, and is a bird of very considerable rarity. It will be described in detail in a later volume.