

WOODPECKERS

Order PICIFORMES

THE woodpeckers are one of the most dominant orders of birds in the Eastern Tropics, and are represented in Malaya by over thirty species, of which, however, only some six are dealt with here.

They are found all over the world except the circumpolar regions and in Australasia, where they are entirely unrepresented.

The order, apart from the wrynecks, which do not occur in Malaya, and the piculets, which have the tail extremely short, can at once be recognized by the character of the tail of twelve feathers which have the shafts stiffened throughout their lengths, the points usually narrowed and spiny, a structure which is designed to support the bird against the tree-trunks on which its life is mainly spent.

The bill is strong, elongate and chisel-shaped, and nearly always quite straight, with a marked culminal ridge. The tongue is extremely long and worm-like, provided with a pointed barbed tip and capable of great protrusion; the posterior prolongations (*cornua*) are curved backwards over the base of the skull. In many species the neck is much compressed and the character of the plumage thereon different from the rest of the body. The feet and toes are strong, with powerful claws; the toes are usually four in number, two directed forwards and two backwards, but some genera have three only.

Colours are often bright and the sexes are always slightly different, their differences being usually in the colour and arrangement of the feathers of the head and the region of the jaw.

Nests are in holes excavated by the birds in the branches and trunks of trees, or in the nests of ants, and the eggs, which are white and rather rounded, are laid on the bare wood without any lining.

The food is exclusively insectivorous, generally larvæ found in wood, from which they are excavated by the birds themselves, termites and ants. Insects are not caught on the wing.

Flight as a rule is straight, but not strong or long continued. The birds are usually seen in pairs. Their chief activity is shown by the agility with which they run round the tree-trunks.

The note of most species is a harsh discordant yell.

In Malaya, woodpeckers are found in all situations, from the mangroves by

the sea to the tops of the highest mountains, but species are scarce, even on the larger islands, and do not occur on the smaller ones.

They are strictly sedentary and no occurrence of any woodpeckers at sea, or at the lighthouses, is known within our area.

A key to the species likely to be met with in gardens, etc., is appended.

KEY TO THE SPECIES OF WOODPECKERS HERE DESCRIBED

1	{	With three toes only	<i>Dinopium javanense javanense</i> , p. 153
		With four toes	2
2	{	Small birds, wing less than 4 in.	3
		Much larger birds, wing more than 4.5 in.	4
3	{	Middle of crown grey	<i>Dryobates canicapillus suffusus</i> , p. 151
		Middle of crown brown	<i>Dryobates moluccensis moluccensis</i> , p. 152
4	{	Almost entirely rufous bay; smaller	} <i>Micropternus brachyurus squamigularis</i> , p. 155
		Much golden olive in pelage; larger	
5	{	Slightly smaller, wing rarely exceeding 6 in.	} <i>Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus chersonesus</i> , p. 156
		Slightly larger, wing rarely less than 6.2 in.	

Dryobates canicapillus suffusus

The Malayan Pygmy Woodpecker

PLATE 12 (*upper figure*, female; *lower*, male)

Iyngipicus canicapillus (part), Hargitt, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xviii., 1890, p. 322; Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iii., 1895, p. 46.

Iyngipicus canicapillus suffusus, Robinson and Kloss, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, xl., 1919, p. 14.

Malay Name.—Pělatok, or bėlatok bėlachan.

Description.—*Adult male.*—Upper surface, except head, sooty black, barred with white; median and greater wings, and the primaries on both webs, spotted with white, spots on the outer webs of the primaries very small. Central tail feathers almost uniform brownish black, a small spot of white on the inner webs near the tip, other pairs regularly barred brownish black and whitish. Top of the head, greyish; hind neck, black; a broad stripe from over the eyes, encircling the crown, also black. Fawn lores to nape, a broad white stripe through the eye, bordered above on the sides of the head with a narrow scarlet stripe; lores, fuscous; a large patch behind the eye and the ear coverts, brownish, bordered behind with black; a stripe from angle of jaw to below the ear coverts, whitish, bordered beneath with a mottled fuscous malar patch. Chin and throat, whitish; rest of under surfaces, fuscous, slightly tinged with yellow, with broad longitudinal stripes of blackish; under tail coverts, dirty-

white, with broad brownish stripes on the shafts ; under wing coverts, white, spotted with black ; axillaries whitish.

Adult female.—Like the male, but without the scarlet stripe on the sides of the head.

Immature.—Are like the females, but duller, the stripes on the under surface less clearly defined.

Note.—The character of the tail is very variable in this species, some birds having the middle feathers entirely unspotted and others with a series of three spots on each web.

Soft Parts.—Iris, brown or hazel ; bill, bluish horn-colour ; the base of the lower mandible, whitish ; feet, olive-green.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 5·5 in. ; wing, 3·2 to 3·4 in. ; tail, 1·7 in. ; tarsus, 0·6 in. ; bill from gape, 0·75 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Southwards from Perlis and Patani to Johore ; probably Penang Island, but not recorded therefrom ; Singapore Island, but scarce there, *I. moluccensis* being much the commoner bird.

Extralimital Range.—As here restricted, confined to the Malay Peninsula. The typical *I. c. canicapillus* is widely spread over the Indo-Chinese countries. A more distantly related form, *I. c. aurantiiventris*, is found in Borneo, and another, almost indistinguishable from the peninsular bird, in Sumatra.

Nidification.—Not recorded.

Habits.—This small woodpecker is generally met with in pairs, usually in fairly open secondary jungle or in gardens, never, so far as my experience goes, in heavy jungle or in hill country. It is commoner, as a rule, near the sea and, in my experience, is frequently found on rhu-trees (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), searching the boughs for ants and other small insects.

Remarks.—I have here described the southern race. North of Penang the typical bird, *D. canicapillus canicapillus*, is found, differing slightly in having the ground-colour beneath paler, without the fuscous wash developed in birds from Selangor and Perak. In the plate the crown of both sexes should be shown a little greyer. The specimens figured are somewhat intermediate in character, but are a fair representation of the average Malay Peninsular bird. The male is from Patani town, 6th October 1901, the female from Jambu, Jhering, Patani States, 5th June 1901.

Dryobates moluccensis moluccensis

The Lesser Pygmy Woodpecker

Picus moluccensis, Gmelin, *Syst. Nat.*, i., 1788, p. 439 (Moluccas) ; error, here restricted to Java.

Iyngipicus auritus, Hargitt, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xviii., 1890, p. 325 ; Oates and Reid, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1903, p. 155.

Malay Name.—Pelatok, or bēlatok bēlachan.

Description.—*Adult female*.—Like the preceding species but rather smaller ; general colour above, browner, with no trace of grey on the head ;

striping beneath less determinate, the brown centres to the feathers broader. Central tail feathers with white spots on either web.

Adult male.—Like the female, but with a narrow scarlet stripe on the sides of the head behind the eye.

Soft Parts.—Iris, chestnut; bill, black above, slate beneath; feet, plumbeous-green.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 5·25 in.; wing, 2·8 to 3·1 in.; tail, 1·6 to 1·7 in.; tarsus, 0·6 in.; bill from gape, 0·7 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From the latitude of Penang, south to Johore, Penang Island, Singapore and the adjacent islands.

Extralimital Range.—Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali, and in a modified form, *D. moluccensis grandis*, Lombok and Flores.

Nidification.—No details are on record. Eggs from Labuan, collected by Sir Hugh Low, are white and almost devoid of gloss, and measure 0·65 to 0·73 by 0·52 to 0·56 in.

Habits.—Similar to those of *D. canicapillus*, and often found on the same trees. In the Malay Peninsula it is never seen far from the sea, though in Sumatra Mr Jacobson met with it in the Padang highlands, and I found it at Tjibodas, West Java, at 4000 ft. Chasen (*Singapore Naturalist*, 1923, p. 101; 1924, p. 30) records it as common on the small islands near Singapore, and Mr Seimund and I secured a female on Pulau Sauh, an islet in the Rhio Straits, in July 1908.

Dinopium javanense javanense

The Golden-backed Three-toed Woodpecker

PLATE 13 (*left*, male; *centre*, female)

Picus javanensis, Ljungh, *Konig. Svensk. Vet-Ak. Handl.*, 1797, p. 134.

Tiga javanensis, Hargitt, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xviii., 1890, p. 412.

Tiga javanensis javanensis, Stuart Baker, *Ibis*, 1919, p. 207.

Dinopium javanense javanense, Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1923, p. 185.

Malay Name.—Bèlatok pinang: nok hua kwan deng (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult male*.—Head above and elongate nuchal crest, crimson, bases of the feathers, black. Mantle and upper back, golden, becoming crimson on the middle back and rump; upper tail coverts, black, the lateral shorter ones, brownish; wing coverts, golden, the outer upper ones and the primary coverts, blackish. Primaries, black with pale brownish tips, the outer one immaculate, the rest spotted with white on the inner web; secondaries, golden olive on their outer aspect, brownish, spotted with white, on the inner webs; tail, uniform black; lores, brownish; crown from behind the eye bordered with black, this stripe broadening on the nape. Beneath this a white stripe to the sides of the neck, and below this again a much broader black stripe which joins another narrower one from the base of the lower mandible; ear coverts partly white, partly greyish, a broad white stripe from the angle of the gape running beneath them. Chin and throat, buffy white, with a broad

median stripe of black spots; chest the same, the feathers very broadly margined with black; those of the rest of the under surface more narrowly tipped and margined with black; thighs and under tail coverts barred buffy white and blackish; axillaries and under wing coverts barred white and black, the outermost almost uniform black.

Adult female.—Like the male, but the forehead brownish, the rest of the head black, the feathers with elongate stripes of white.

Immature.—Resemble the adults of their respective sexes, the under surface more spotted, less striped. The median throat stripe is less defined and the under surface squamate. Young males have the head brownish at first. Bill of immature birds always with a pale tip.

Note.—The scarlet on the back varies much, and in some specimens the whole mantle up to the nape is flecked with this colour.

The majority of birds from the south of the Peninsula, Singapore and the islands in the vicinity have the white of the under surface deeply sullied with rufous; it is almost certain, however, that this peculiarity is due to stain, derived either from the trees on which the bird lives or from its insect food, as it is partially removable by solvents. It is curious, however, that it should hardly occur in northern birds.

Soft Parts.—Iris, chestnut; bill, bluish horn, black on culmen; feet, plumbeous sage-green.

Dimensions.—Total length, 10·5 to 11 in.; wing, 4·9 to 5·5 in.; tail, 4 to 4·2 in.; tarsus, 0·9 in.; bill from gape, 1·25 to 1·35 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—The Peninsula, south of latitude 10°, Penang, Singapore, and other islands, but not the Tioman group.

Extralimital Range.—West Java and Sumatra, though Stresemann considered the bird from the southern Malay Peninsula and Sumatra different from that from West Java, whence the species was originally described, and has named it *Dinopium javanense palmarum*. I cannot, however, agree with him.

Nidification.—Not recorded from this area; the nesting habits will not, however, differ in any material particular from those of the northern form (*D. javanense intermedium*), which the late Colonel Bingham describes as follows, from the Thoungyeen Valley, Tenasserim:

“I subjoin a note of a nest and eggs I found. It was the 22nd March 1879, and a frightfully hot day. I was returning to camp, and my road lay through some dry already burnt (*Dipterocarpus*) jungle. Passing close to a small stunted pyna-tree (*Lagerstrœmia flos reginæ*), a woodpecker flew out of a hole on the side nearest to me, nearly hitting my face as it flew, and perched, or rather struck, as they do, on a tree not far off. Keeping my eye on her I got one of the peons with me to widen the hole and see whether there were any eggs. In a few moments he announced three. I then shot the bird, which proved to be the above-mentioned woodpecker, a female. The three eggs were translucent whity pink and rather glossy, laid on the decayed wood in a natural hollow, a passage to which the bird had cut from the outside, at only four feet from the ground. It was a wonder that when the jungle was fired they had not been roasted.

"These three eggs measured 1'18, 1'19 and 1'11 in. in length, and were uniformly 0'8 in. in breadth."

Herbert gives a very similar account of Siamese eggs¹ also three to a clutch, of average dimensions, 1'05 by 0'78 in., obtained on 18th June.

Habits.—To Europeans this is probably the best known of the woodpeckers of Malaya. It is almost confined to the cultivation zone, and is rarely seen either in secondary or old jungle, nor is it common in the mangroves, though on occasion it has been found among them.

It is peculiarly associated with palms, the penang and, to a rather less extent, the coconut, on the trunks of which it is found in pairs feeding, on ants and other insects, and dodging round the trunks to avoid the observer. Flight is active but the bird seems to have little control over its force, and when driven to flight from one tree-trunk to another, lands on its objective with a flop. The note is a very disagreeable harsh yell, generally uttered on the wing.

Remarks.—I have described the southern bird. Towards the north of the Peninsula, but not in the British zone, it is replaced by a closely allied subspecies, *D. javanense intermedium* (Blyth), which differs only in its slightly larger average size, the wing ranging up to 5'8 in. This form ranges over practically the whole of the Indo-Chinese countries, eastwards to Cambodia, Annam and Southern Tonkin.

The male bird figured is from Klang, Selangor, 11th February 1880; the female from Ban Sai Kau, Patani States, 24th May 1901.

Micropternus brachyurus squamigularis

The Malay Rufous Woodpecker

PLATE 13 (*upper, male; right, female*)

Picus squamigularis, Sundevall, *Consp. Picin.*, 1866, p. 89 (Malacca).

Micropternus brachyurus (part), Hargitt, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xviii., 1890, p. 396.

Micropternus brachyurus squamigularis, Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam.*, v., 1923, p. 181.

Malay Name.—Bèlatok or pèlatok biji nangka (also applied to species of *Meiglyptis*): nok kua kuan (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult male.*—General colour, rufous bay, head more dusky, the feathers with paler edges; rest of the upper surface, including wings and tail, regularly barred with black; shafts of primaries, brown; ear coverts, pale brown; a patch of crimson beneath the eye; feathers of the chin and throat, blackish brown, with pale edges and pale shaft stripes. Breast, rufous chestnut, unbarred; remainder of under surface and under tail coverts, darker brown, with ill-defined blackish cross bars; under wing coverts and axillaries, brown, mottled with black.

Adult female.—Like the male, but lacking the crimson patch beneath the eye.

¹ Under the name *Tiga javanensis intermedia* (Blyth).

Immature.—Head more uniform with the rest of the upper surface ; beneath, with the chest duller, the light edges to the feathers of the chin and throat not so conspicuous.

Soft Parts.—Iris, reddish brown ; upper mandible, greenish black ; lower, yellowish white beneath ; feet, brownish black beneath.

Dimensions.—Total length, 9 to 9·5 in. ; wing, 4·5 to 4·8 in. ; tail, 2·8 in. ; tarsus, 0·9 to 1 in. ; bill from gape, 1·2 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout its length.

Extralimital Range.—Closely allied subspecies occur in Peninsular India, the Indo-Chinese countries, and Borneo, Sumatra and Java.

Nidification.—There are no local records of the nesting of this woodpecker, but like the Indian forms it will almost certainly be found to lay its eggs in holes excavated by the bird itself in the large papery nests made by tree-ants (*Cremastogaster*) or, in many cases, termites. Oates described the eggs of one of the subspecies of this bird as “elongated ovals, in some cases excessively elongate but always obtuse even at the small end. The shell is extremely thin and fragile and entirely devoid of gloss. In length they vary from 1·08 to 1·26 in., and in width from 0·72 to 0·8 in., but the average of five eggs is 1·16 by 0·7 in. nearly.”

This description applies to *M. b. burmanicus* (Hume) ; eggs of the Malayan form will probably be slightly smaller.

Herbert (*Journ. Siam. Soc., Nat. Hist. Suppl.*, vi., 1926, pp. 323-324) gives a detailed account of the nesting of the closely allied *M. b. williamsoni* in Central Siam. This form, too, nests in chambers excavated in ants' nests. The eggs are described as slightly elongated ovals, with a mat surface, and with a *very hard shell*, which is translucent. The clutch consists of three eggs and the average dimensions are given as 1·05 by 0·81 in.

Habits.—Essentially an inhabitant of gardens, orchards and dry secondary jungle. Not found in the coastal forests or in old jungle, and not ascending the hills to any height. The bird is generally met with in pairs and is very silent. In this country it is peculiarly associated with the jack-fruit trees (*Artocarpus*), where it feeds almost exclusively on ants. The plumage is often daubed with sticky material, to which the heads of the ants are often adherent, but whether this is derived from the ants themselves, or in part from the gum of the trees, I am unable to state with certainty.

The male bird figured is from Sungkai, South Perak, 7th February 1902, and the female from Gedong, near Bidor, South Perak, 9th January 1902.

Chrysocolaptes guttacrastatus chersonesus

The Golden-backed Four-toed Woodpecker

Chrysocolaptes strictus chersonesus, Klcss, *Ibis*, 1918, p. 113 ; Robinson, *Ibis*, 1919, p. 181.

Malay Name.—Pèlatok or bèlatok.

Description.—*Adult male*.—This species bears such an extraordinarily close

superficial resemblance to *Dinopium j. javanense*, from which, structurally, it is far removed, that it is unnecessary to describe it at length. The following points will serve to separate it. Toes, four in number, not three; size, larger; bill especially coarser; region of lower jaw, white, bordered above and below by a narrow black line.

Adult female.—Differs from the female of *D. j. javanense* in the above points and in having the white markings on the black crown more in the form of rounded white spots, not elongated shaft stripes. This is most markedly the case in the anterior portion of the crown.

Soft Parts.—"Iris, yellowish orange; bill, blackish brown; feet, dull umber-brown" (Kloss).

Dimensions.—Total length, 11.5 to 12 in.; wing, 5.7 to 6 in.; tail, 3.9 in.; tarsus, 1.1 in.; bill from gape, 1.9 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—This subspecies is known from South Johore and Singapore Island only.

Extralimital Range.—The Rhio group of islands south of Singapore Island and probably Sumatra and W. Java, though the forms inhabiting this island require further investigation. Other closely related forms inhabit the Himalayas, Southern India and the Indo-Chinese countries east to Cambodia and Cochin-China.

Nidification.—The nesting habits of this form are unknown; in the Nilgiris the closely allied subspecies, *C. g. delesserti*, breeds, according to Messrs W. Davison and Darling, in large holes, which it excavates for itself in the trunks of trees at all heights from six to sixty feet above the ground.

The eggs—which are never more than one in number—are described as rather broad ovals, pinky white with dead-white streaks when unblown, pure white when blown, and in both states very glossy, averaging 1.12 in. by 0.81 in.

Habits.—Less of a garden bird than *Dinopium* and not nearly so noisy. I doubt if it still exists in Singapore, but in 1904 Kloss obtained it at Woodlands, and it was not rare at Changi in 1908. In Eastern Johore and on the Rhio-Karimon Islands it was common in that year, frequenting secondary jungle near the sea.

Note.—The typical form of this bird, *C. g. guttacristatus*, is extremely common on both coasts and islands of the Northern Malay Peninsula, as far south as Biserat in Patani on the eastern side, and Perlis and the Langkawi group of islands on the west. Specimens said to come from Penang are in the British Museum, but the correctness of the locality is open to doubt. This race, which is widespread over the whole of Indo-China,¹ differs from the Singapore bird only in its larger size. It has been described from Salanga Island under the name *C. g. indomalayicus*, by a German ornithologist (Dr Hesse).

¹ Except in Tonkin, where a much larger bird occurs.