

LEAF BIRDS

Family ÆGITHINIDÆ

FOR reasons of practical convenience I have gone a step farther than most ornithologists, and have elevated to family rank this group of birds, which may be said to have their headquarters in Malaya.

As noted elsewhere, they are, in many respects, intermediate between the true bulbuls (*Pycnonotidæ*) and certain of the babblers (*Timaliidæ*). From the former they are distinguished by their longer tarsi, and by the fact that the sexes are always more or less different; from the latter by their more arboreal habits and by the more pointed wing and longer tail. Bill more or less straight, slightly curved, usually with a notch on the upper mandible; wing, longer than the tail, rather pointed; tail, usually square or slightly rounded; tarsi and toes strong. Plumage bright, that of the sexes different; young birds like the female. Nests cup-shaped, rather like those of flycatchers, neater and more compact than those of the bulbuls, built high in trees; eggs spotted. The family consists of three genera, with about twenty-five species confined to the Oriental region. Eight species, with representatives of all the genera, occur in Malaya, of which two are dealt with in this volume.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

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|---|---|--|---|
| 1 | { | With white or yellowish white on the wing coverts; smaller, wing under 3 in. | 2 |
| | { | With no white or yellowish white on the wings; larger, wing over 3 in. | 3 |
| 2 | { | Wing coverts, black or partly black; beneath, clear yellow | <i>Ægithina t. tiphia</i> (male adult) |
| | { | Wing coverts with no black; beneath, greenish yellow | <i>Ægithina t. tiphia</i> (female and immature), p. 214 |
| | { | Chin and throat black | <i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis icterocephala</i> (male), p. 215 |
| 3 | { | Chin and throat yellowish green | <i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis icterocephala</i> (female and immature), p. 216 |

*Ægithina tiphia tiphia***The Common Iora**

PLATE 17

Motacilla tiphia, Linn., *Syst. Nat.* (10th ed.), 1758, p. 186 (Bengal).*Ægithina tiphia*, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 230.*Ægithina tiphia tiphia*, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), i., 1922, p. 340.**Malay Name.**—Kělichap kunyet.

Description.—*Adult male.*—Head, mantle and back, yellowish olive-green, much blotched with glossy black, the bases of the feathers yellowish white, whiter on the rump. Upper tail coverts black. Lesser upper wing coverts also black, the median and greater series with broad white tips and edges forming a double bar on the wing. Primaries and secondaries, glossy black, all except the two outer primaries, with narrow white beading to the outer webs; the secondaries with broader pale yellow edgings on the outer webs, pure white on the inner webs. Wing lining, lead-grey, the feathers with white edges on the inner webs; axillaries and under wing coverts, whitish, pale yellow on the edge of the wing. Tail feathers, glossy black, faintly tipped with yellowish white. Lores, yellowish green, feathers round and above the eye, bright yellow; under surface, rich chrome-yellow; middle of the belly and under tail coverts, paler yellow, with white bases; flanks, greenish olive; thighs, mingled black and yellow.

Note.—The average fully adult bird has been here described; in rare cases, however, the whole head, mantle and upper back is glossy black, leaving only the rump olive; the olive-green of the flanks is also much restricted.

Adult female.—Whole upper surface, yellowish green, less olive than the male; wing coverts, blackish brown at the base, the white tips tinged with yellow. Primaries and secondaries, brownish black with pale yellow edgings. Middle pair of tail feathers as the rest of the upper surface, the others often with pale yellow edgings. Feathers round the eye, bright yellow. Under surface yellower than the upper surface, brighter on the middle of the belly, duller on the under tail coverts; thighs, greenish olive.

Immature.—Paler canary-yellow above and below, the feathers of the upper surface with obscure pale tips, edges to the tail feathers broader.

Note.—The changes in plumage of this species are very complicated and no two specimens are exactly alike. Throughout, the very young birds are paler and more yellow above than the adults; the young male passes through a stage resembling the adult female, and later acquires the glossy black wing coverts with pure white tips and the black tail. Later, a variable amount of black appears on the back and head, and the under surface becomes bright chrome-yellow. At first the flanks are broadly olivaceous green, but in very old birds this becomes restricted. No Malayan bird, however, has the upper surface entirely black or the under surface uniform chrome-yellow.

Soft Parts.—Iris, white or yellowish white; bill, slate, the culmen, black; feet, slaty, sometimes tinged with green.

Dimensions.—Total length, 5·4 to 6 in. ; wing, 2·4 to 2·5 in. ; tail, 1·9 to 2·4 in. ; tarsus, 0·7 to 0·8 in. ; bill from gape, 0·7 to 0·8 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Everywhere except on quite small islands.

Extralimital Range.—From Persia eastwards to Annam, through the Indo-Chinese countries. Replaced in Central India, Southern India and Ceylon, Borneo, Sumatra and Java and the Philippines by closely related subspecies.

Nidification.—Though this is so common a bird in the Malay Peninsula we are very deficient in breeding records. In Pegu it nests from May onwards, and the season is probably very similar in Malaya. Baker (*loc. cit.*) describes the nest as a very neat cup of fine soft grasses lined with the same, and well matted outside with cobwebs and spiders' egg-bags. It measures $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter, by about 20 in. in depth, the walls being very thin, and is placed in the fork of a bush or small tree at from two to twenty feet above the ground. The eggs are from two to four in number and of two types, one with a pale, creamy or greyish white ground-colour with a few irregular longitudinal marks of grey and underlying ones of neutral tint. The second type has the ground-colour a beautiful pink, and the markings are reddish. Average dimensions, 0·7 by 0·55 in.

Habits.—One of the commonest garden, scrub and orchard birds, not found in old jungle, and not ascending the hills to an elevation exceeding 1500 or 2000 ft. It is found singly or in pairs on low trees ; sometimes, but rarely, on coconut-palms, and is mainly insectivorous, though it certainly occasionally eats fruits and berries, especially those of the mistletoe. As Baker notes, the males are much in the habit of drooping the wings and expanding the long flank feathers, very much like a spider-hunter, except that they do not do so in the air, but always on a perch. The systematic position of the species is uncertain, but it is probably correctly placed with the green leaf birds near the timaliads on one side and the ordinary bulbuls, typified by the common bulbuls, on the other (*Pycnonotus*). On the other hand, its habits and actions remind one of certain of the hill tits, such as *Mesia*, and of the ruby-throat *Chalcoparia*, though the bill is very different from both these birds.

Note.—The male figured is from Sungkai, South Perak, February 1902 ; the female from near Patani town, April 1901, and the immature from Malacca, July 1877.

Chloropsis cochinchinensis icterocephala

The Malay Green Leaf Bird

Chloropsis icterocephala, Lesson, *Rev. Zool.*, 1840, p. 164 (Palembang, Sumatra) ; Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, vi., 1881, p. 30.

Chloropsis cochinchinensis icterocephala, Kloss, *Journ. Malay Branch Roy. Asiat. Soc.*, iv., 1926, p. 162.

Malay Name.—Burong daun.

Description.—*Adult male.*—Top and sides of the head, ear coverts, and an area round the black throat, bright sulphur-yellow, at times with a slight verditer tinge ; hind nape and sides of the neck, bronzy yellow ; mantle, back and upper tail coverts, bright green ; lesser upper wing coverts, bright, shining

cobalt-blue; median and greater coverts, deep peacock-blue with broad green edges; primary coverts, blue; primaries, blackish, edged with blue externally; secondaries, black on their inner webs, blue on the outer webs, edged with green; inner aspect of the wing, lead-colour, the quills with paler inner edges; axillaries, greenish. Under wing coverts, smoky, edged with green, edge of wing mingled blue and green; tail feathers, blue with dark shafts, the centre pair greenish, or very broadly edged with green; lores, as area beneath the eye; chin and throat, narrowing to a point, black; a short moustachial stripe, deep ultramarine blue; rest of under surface, pale green, bluish on the upper breast, yellowish on the middle of the belly; thighs, bluish green.

Adult female.—Bright yellowish green above and below, with no black on the throat; head, strongly washed with bronzy yellow, but no pale yellow on forehead and sides of the head. Bright wing stripe, shorter and paler blue, edges to the primaries, broader and more greenish blue, the primaries themselves more brownish. Tail, more greenish, especially the two centre pairs of feathers. Beneath, with the throat washed with verditer-blue, the deep ultramarine-blue moustachial stripe of the male replaced by a very short stripe of verditer-blue.

Immature.—Like the adult female, the young male acquiring the adult plumage by a gradual moult; the moustachial stripe and the black patch beneath the eye are the last to be acquired.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark brown; bill, black; feet, plumbeous green.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 6·7 in.; wing, 3·1 to 3·3 in.; tail, 2·5 to 2·7 in.; tarsus, 0·65 to 0·75 in.; bill from gape, 0·75 to 0·8 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From Patani south to Johore; Penang and Singapore Island.

Extralimital Range.—Sumatra. Closely allied subspecies are found in Borneo and in Burma, Indo-China and the north of the Malay Peninsula, *Ch. cochinchinensis cochinchinensis* (*chlorocephala auct.*). There is a zone in the neighbourhood of Perlis and Kedah where it is difficult to say to which subspecies specimens should be assigned.

Nidification.—There appear to be no records as to the breeding of this bird, though eggs, described as like those of Indian species, but smaller, are in the Nehr Korn collection, from Malacca. Allied forms make cup-like nests of moss and tendrils, lined with fine grass, etc., on the outer branches of tall, forest trees. Eggs are cream or creamy white, with reddish-brown or reddish-black marking. They measure, according to Nehr Korn, 0·8 by 0·47 in.

Habits.—A low-country forest bird, not ranging much above 3000 ft., if as high. It keeps to the lighter and more open parts, and is occasionally, but not often, found in gardens and in village lands if these are near old jungle. It is usually found in small parties on the tops or on the upper branches of big trees. I have never seen it in bushes or near the ground, except when it has come to bushy fig-trees in fruit, when its greed seems to eliminate its normal shyness, as with many other species of birds. Its food is certainly mainly seeds and fruit, though allied species are said to be in part insectivorous. An occasional note is a very musical whistle, but when the birds are feeding in company it is a continuous chuckling chatter.