

WARBLERS

Family SYLVIIDÆ

THE warblers are a large family of small birds allied to the flycatchers, but differing from them in having the plumage of the young much resembling that of the adult, but often brighter, not spotted or mottled.

The bill is very variable, as are the bristles at the gape and those on the forehead and overhanging the nostrils, affording a useful character for classification. The feet and tarsi are generally rather weak, the latter smooth behind, with two longitudinal plates.

The wing has ten primaries, of which the first is, in many genera and species, very minute, not extending beyond the primary coverts.

The tail is of either twelve or ten feathers, and is variable in structure and length. Some species have it much longer in winter than in summer.

The colours are usually dull and the sexes alike, or nearly so.

The nests are variable, in some forms cup-shaped, in others domed or ball-shaped, built in bushes, on banks, or among reeds; in one genus, *Orthotomus*, highly peculiar. Eggs may be either uniform blue-white, mauve, or spotted.

Many species are migratory and others resident—among these latter being the more abnormal genera. Some species have both resident and migratory subspecies.

The family numbers probably some six or seven hundred species at least, and is found throughout Asia, Africa, Europe and Australasia, but not in the New World. It is represented in Malaya by over twenty species, of which more than half are migratory forms, including several willow-warblers which are amongst the most difficult of birds to discriminate.

I have selected five species for description in this volume.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1 | { | Bill as long as head, broad at base,
much flattened | 2 |
| | | Bill shorter than head, not specially
flattened | 3 |
| 2 | { | Head rufous; mantle and wings
greenish | } <i>Orthotomus atrigularis atrigularis</i> ,
p. 246 |
| | | Head rufous; mantle and wings
greyish | |

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|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 3 | { | Striped above; tail much graduated; | . | <i>Locustella lanceolata</i> , p. 248 |
| | | rictal bristles feeble | | |
| 4 | { | Uniform above; tail less graduated | } | 4 |
| | | Rictal bristles strong and stiff, | | |
| | | larger | | |
| 4 | { | Rictal bristles very feeble, smaller | } | p. 250 |
| | | | | |

Orthotomus atrigularis atrigularis

The Malay Black-necked Tailor-Bird

PLATE 18 (*upper figures: left, female; right, male*)

Orthotomus atrigularis, Temm., *Pl. Col. Livr.*, 101, 1836, text (Malacca); Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, vii., 1883, p. 220; Oates, in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), i., 1890, p. 235; Oates and Reid, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, iv., 1905, p. 190, pl. 9, fig. 2; Herbert, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam.*, vi., 1923, p. 99.

Orthotomus atrigularis atrigularis, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), ii., 1924, p. 414.

Malay Names.—Kelichap puchat pisang; kachichi: nok a chip khor dam (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult male.*—Head, nape, lores and sides of face, chestnut-bay; upper surface, greenish, tinged with yellow, the upper tail coverts, brighter. Wing coverts as the back, primaries and secondaries, brownish, broadly edged with bright yellowish green; inner aspect of wing, brownish; the inner webs of the primaries edged with white; axillaries and under wing coverts, pale yellow, the greater coverts, white; edge of wing, bright yellow. Tail feathers, much graduated, dull brownish green above, edged with yellowish; beneath, shining yellowish green with pale yellowish tips. Ear coverts, ashy with black bases. Beneath, chin and upper throat, ashy, streaked with black; lower throat, black with whitish streaks. Flanks, greyish, tinged with green; middle of the abdomen, white; under tail coverts, pale yellow; thighs, tawny rufous.

Adult female.—Rather different from the male, the chestnut of the head paler, and not extending so far back on the nape. Beneath, with no black spot on the throat, the bases of the feathers very blackish. Flanks more tinged with green. Tail feathers with a distinct black spot near the tip; extreme tips whitish.

Immature.—With no chestnut at all on the head; general colour above, brownish green, below, with a pale sulphur wash on the breast.

Soft Parts.—Iris, brown, sometimes pale yellow; upper mandible, blackish, sometimes dark horn; lower, yellowish or pinkish horn; feet, yellowish or brownish flesh.

Dimensions.—Total length, 4'3 to 4'6 in.; wing, 1'7 to 1'8 in.; tail, 1'5 to 1'7 in.; tarsus, 0'75 to 0'85 in.; bill from gape, 0'7 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout its whole length, and on all, or nearly all, the islands.

Extralimital Range.—The extreme south of Tenasserim, South and Central Siam, Sumatra and Borneo. Replaced in more northern parts of the Oriental region by *O. a. nitidus*, which is a brighter green above.

Nidification.—Breeds in Bangkok in June and July, and probably about the same time in the Malay Peninsula, as Chasen has obtained many nestlings in April and May in Singapore. The nest consists of grass, stems, etc., lined with finer material and formed into a cup, which is placed between two large leaves which are sewn together by the birds. The nests are usually within a few feet of the ground, often in gardens and near houses, though in Bangkok Herbert states that the nest is placed in more secluded situations than those of the allied form, *O. s. maculicollis*. The eggs are from three to four in number and are extremely variable in ground-colour, from white to almost pure blue. Markings consist of various-sized blotches and specklings, varying in colour from red to purplish black, generally rather scattered but sometimes congregated in a zone at the larger end. Baker gives the average size as 0.62 by 0.46 in.

Habits.—Very widely spread throughout the country, ranging from sea-level to over 3000 ft. It keeps, as a rule, to scrub and secondary jungle, and to the more open parts of the old forest, especially at the edges of clearings. Its food is exclusively insectivorous, largely small ants, minute beetles and caterpillars, for which it energetically searches low bushes and trees. It is very active and restless in its movements, and while moving among bushes its tail is in incessant motion, being constantly flirited over its back. Its note is rather shrill and is constantly uttered, and may be rendered by the syllables "trik trik tri," though the short syllables are often repeated very many times before the final long one.

Note.—In the more northern parts of the Peninsula, and occasionally in the south, another tailor-bird (*Orthotomus sutoria maculicollis*) somewhat resembling this is not uncommon. In general appearance it is not unlike the female of the present species, but may be recognized by the elongated central tail feathers and the paler under surface.

The male bird figured is from Tenasserim and the female from Tembeling, Pahang.

Orthotomus ruficeps

The Red-headed Tailor-Bird

PLATE 18 (lower figures: left, adult; right, young)

Edcla ruficeps, Lesson, *Traité d'Orn.*, 1831, p. 309 (Sumatra, Robinson and Kloss, 1923).

Orthotomus ruficeps, Kelham, *Ibis*, 1881, p. 516; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind.*, *Birds*, i., 1889, p. 368; Stuart Baker, *op. cit.* (2nd ed.), *Birds*, ii., 1924, p. 415.

Malay Name.—Similar to the preceding species (?).

Description.—*Adult male.*—Head, lores and nape, bright chestnut-red; mantle, back and upper tail coverts, brownish grey; wing coverts, primaries and secondaries, dark brown, edged with pale grey; inner aspect of wing, ashy, with pinkish buff edges to the inner webs of primaries and secondaries; axillaries and wing coverts, buffy, tending to rufous on the outer series of the

latter. Tail, chestnut, blackish at the base, the blackish extending along the shafts of the feathers for some distance towards the tips; lower portion of the face and ear coverts, whitish. Beneath, whitish, washed with grey on the throat and breast; flanks, fulvous buff; under tail coverts, buffy white; thighs, pale chestnut.

Adult female.—Rather browner than the male, with a good deal more black on the centre parts of the tail coverts and rather more buffy beneath.

Immature.—The head, earthy brown, merely suffused with chestnut; the whole of the tail blackish brown.

Soft Parts.—Iris, brown, or pale hazel; upper mandible, horn; lower, pale fleshy; feet, brownish or purplish flesh.

Dimensions.—Total length, 4·7 to 5·2 in.; wing, 1·8 to 2 in.; tail, 1·7 to 1·9 in.; tarsus, 0·8 to 0·9 in.; bill, 0·75 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout its length and in Singapore.

Extralimital Range.—The extreme south of Tenasserim, Borneo, Sumatra and Palawan.

Nidification.—Kellow found this tailor-bird breeding near Taiping, Perak, from February to May, the nests and eggs being apparently precisely similar to those of the preceding species. The nests were placed low down and in scrub jungle. The average size of the eggs (*vide* Baker) was 0·62 by 0·45 in.

Habits.—A much more local bird than the foregoing, though wherever it does occur it is not uncommon. In the Siamese states and at Temengoh, in Northern Perak, I found it fairly numerous. It keeps much more to scrub jungle, and does not frequent gardens or orchard-land. Altogether a heavier built bird, it is much less sprightly and active than its congener, and its note, though similar, is much less frequently uttered.

Note.—The specimens figured are typical of the majority of the birds seen in the Malay Peninsula, but the plumage is variable, especially as regards the tail, which in very old birds has the terminal two-thirds almost uniform chestnut without any black. Some birds, too, have a much more buffy tinge below, but adult freshly moulted birds are almost pure white.

The male bird figured is from Trang, Peninsular Siam, and the female from Kuroo, near Malacca.

Locustella lanceolata

The Streaked Grasshopper-warbler

Sylvia lanceolata, Temm, *Man. d'Orn.* (2nd ed.), iv., 1840, p. 614 (Russia).

Locustella lanceolata, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 353; Stuart Baker (*op. cit.*), *Birds*, (2nd ed.), ii., 1924, p. 401.

Malay Name.—Burong tikus.

Description.—*Adult*.—Sexes alike. Above, greyish brown, heavily streaked on the head, mantle, scapulars and wing coverts with black; the lower back, upper tail coverts and fore part of the head, almost uniform. Primaries, brown, with pale outer edges; the secondaries much darker, with narrow, paler edges on both webs; inner aspect of wing, greyish, with pale inner margins to

the inner webs ; axillaries and under wing coverts, pale buffy white, the greater series of wing coverts near the edge of the wing with dark centres ; tail feathers, brown, very narrowly and obscurely edged and tipped with whitish. Lores, whitish, a very narrow and faint buffy supercilium ; sides of the face and ear coverts and sides of the neck, rufous brown ; the ear coverts streaked ; a dark patch at the angle of the gape, not always present. Beneath, throat, white, faintly tinged with buffy yellow ; breast, the same, but with a pale fulvous wash and narrow black streaks. Belly, uniform white, the bases of the feathers, broadly black ; the flanks, buffy, streaked with black ; under tail coverts, buffy, streaked with brownish black ; thighs, brownish, whitish, behind.

Immature.—The whole upper and under surface much more heavily streaked, including the back and upper tail coverts. Throat with fine hair-streaks, only the middle of the belly uniform, washed with yellow, the fulvous wash on the flanks and breast stronger.

Note.—Very old birds tend to get more uniform on the under surface and become whiter, but the streaks are always present.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark ; maxilla, blackish horn ; mandible, pale pinkish horn ; feet, fleshy.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 5·3 in. ; wing, 2·2 to 2·3 in. ; tail, 1·9 to 2·1 in. ; tarsus, 0·6 to 0·65 in. ; bill from gape, 0·55 to 0·62 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the western coasts of the Malay Peninsula and on many of the smaller islands of the Straits of Malacca. It has not, however, been obtained on Junk Zeylon or Penang, and only doubtfully on Singapore, though it is certain to occur on the two former of these islands.

Extralimital Range.—Over the whole of the northern parts of Europe and Asia, occurring as a straggler in Great Britain, and in winter throughout Eastern India, the Indo-Chinese countries and China to Sumatra and Java, though it has not as yet been recorded from Borneo.

Nidification.—Not a breeding bird in the Malay Peninsula.

Habits.—A migrant, arriving about October, and exceedingly common in the Straits of Malacca during the winter months, as very large numbers are found at the lighthouses and on Pulau Jarak, and the Sembilan Islands in October and November, though they disappear in the early months of the year, apparently leaving the more northern parts of the Peninsula at the end of March.

The bird frequents swampy country and likes thick cover among reeds and tall grass, and on the islands runs about amongst and underneath the bracken that covers some of them. Newly arrived birds are very tame and loath to fly, and on more than one occasion I have been able to obtain specimens with a stone. In the Peninsula, of course, they have no song, but occasionally utter a rolling chuckling note.

Note.—I am at a loss to understand why this warbler has never occurred in collections made in Malacca by Davison and others ; possibly the latitude of Kuala Lumpur is the most southerly in the Peninsula attained by the species, in which case its migration routes must be south via Burma and not across the China Sea. The fact that it is not known from Borneo or Singapore favours this supposition.

*Acrocephalus stentoreus orientalis***The Eastern Great Reed-warbler**

Salicaria turdina orientalis, Temm and Schleg., in Siebold's *Faun. Jap.*, *Aves*, 1847, p. 50, pl. 20B¹ (Japan).

Acrocephalus orientalis, Seebohm, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1881, p. 97; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 357.

Acrocephalus arundinaceus orientalis, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), ii., 1924, p. 391.

Acrocephalus stentoreus orientalis, Hartert, *Treubia*, vi., 1924, pp. 20-25; Stresemann, *Ornith. Monatsb.*, xxxii., 1924, p. 167.

Malay Name.—Murai sampah (but this is merely a general term for any small skulking bird frequenting brush or undergrowth).

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. First primary, minute; third, longest; second and fourth equal, longer than fifth. Above, pale earthy brown, the edges of the feathers slightly lighter; wing coverts and quills, darker brown, with pale edgings; inner aspect of quills, greyish brown, inner margins with pale edgings; axillaries, under wing coverts and edge of wing, buffy. Tail feathers rather browner than the primaries, with pale edgings to the inner webs and narrow whitish tips. Lores, greyish white; feathers round the eye and a short superciliary stripe, white; ear coverts, brownish. Beneath, whitish, slightly tinged with yellow, a dusky patch on each side of the breast; sides of the throat and middle of the breast with narrow dusky streaks. Flanks, fulvous buff; thighs, greyish brown.

Immature.—Paler above, and with a strong flush of pale sulphur-yellow over the lower surface, especially on the throat and the middle of the belly.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark; bill, yellow; culmen, dark, or maxilla dark; mandible, pinkish horn; feet, yellowish lead or dull greenish slate.

Dimensions.—Length, about 7.5 in.; wing, 3.4 in.; tail, about 3.2 in.; tarsus, 1.2 to 1.3 in.; bill from gape, 0.95 to 1 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout its length, but few records from the eastern side. Junk Zeylon and Singapore, and probably the other large islands.

Extralimital Range.—A breeding bird in East Siberia, North China, Korea and Japan, wintering in Southern China, the whole of Indo-China from Assam to Cambodia, Sumatra, Borneo, Java and the Philippines.

Nidification.—Does not breed in the Malay Peninsula.

Habits.—A close relative of the European great reed-warbler, the present bird has very similar habits. It appears to arrive from the south about October and to leave the north of the Peninsula about the end of February. It is found commonly amongst the thick and reedy vegetation growing on the edges of swamps and rivers, and in abandoned mining-land, and does not seem to frequent gardens, orchard-land, or any description of jungle. It is furtive and skulking in its habits, but much less so than the grasshopper-warblers, and is rather a

¹ Plate lettered "*turdoides*."

noisy bird during its stay with us, its note being harsh and disagreeable. It is not infrequently captured at the lighthouses on the coast during October and November, but not during the spring migration, when its line of travel seems to be inland.

Acanthopneuste borealis borealis

The Arctic Willow-warbler

Phyllopneuste borealis, Blas., *Naumannia*, 1858, p. 313 (Lake Ochotsk).

Phylloscopus borealis, Seebohm, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1881, p. 40.

Acanthopneuste borealis, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 412.

Acanthopneuste borealis borealis, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), ii., 1924, p. 472.

Malay Name.—Not recorded.

Description.—Without median stripe on the head, a double whitish bar on the wing coverts when in unabraded plumage; first primary small, not extending beyond the wing coverts. Second primary rather longer than sixth. Whole upper surface brownish olive, brighter on the rump, with a greenish tinge in fresh specimens. Primary and secondaries edged with the colour of the back, internally brownish. Outer wing coverts as the back; the median and greater series with narrow white tips, often with a yellowish tinge. Inner aspect of the wings with whitish edges to the inner webs of the quills, broader towards the base; axillaries very pale yellow. Under wing coverts, whitish, with large brown centres, the edge of the wing pale yellow; tail feathers, brownish olive, with greenish edges, and greener towards the base. A yellowish-white stripe, sometimes tinged with buff, from the nostrils above the eye to the back of the head, broadening posteriorly; below this a dark olive-green stripe running through the eye. Ear coverts, pale brown, bordered above and behind with a paler streak. Beneath, whitish yellow; the sides, fulvous; the middle of the abdomen and the under tail coverts whiter; the whole under surface with faint yellow streaks.

Note.—The specimen described is one from Chong, Trang, Peninsular Siam, shot on 16th December. Baker states that winter birds are more yellow beneath than summer, but it seems to me, from an examination of the large series of breeding birds in the British Museum, that the reverse is the case.

Immature.—Much browner above, especially on the head and tail. Beneath, rather whiter, the pale yellow streaks not so noticeable.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark; maxilla, dark horn; mandible, yellow; feet, brownish yellow to olive-brown.

Dimensions.—Total length, 4·8 to 5·2 in.; wing, 2·5 to 2·8 in.; tail, 1·8 to 2·3 in.; tarsus, 0·75 to 0·80 in.; bill from gape, 0·57 to 0·67 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the length of the Peninsula and on practically all the islands. I have not actually seen specimens from Singapore Island, but have obtained the species on Pulau Mapor at the eastern entrance of Singapore Straits as late as the first week in June.

Extralimital Range.—Breeds throughout the north of Europe and Asia.

In winter to practically all the countries east of the head of the Bay of Bengal, the Andamans, Siam, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo and Java, the Philippines, Moluccas and Lesser Sunda Islands.

Nidification.—Does not breed in the Malay Peninsula.

Habits.—This little willow-warbler is very common in the winter months throughout the Malay Peninsula, from August to the beginning of June, though very few arrive before the middle of October or remain after April. Most of our visitors seem to remain on or near the coast and do not penetrate into heavy jungle, though we have found them near the summit of Kedah Peak, at a height of 3500 ft., in December.

Among the mangroves and Casuarinas on the coast they are often met with, in small flocks or singly, and are very active and restless, flying with a short, jerky action, and returning to their perch like a flycatcher. They seem to feed largely on very small flies and midges, though they are often seen searching the boughs of trees like a tit. The note is a short double chirp, but is not often heard.

Note.—Of the considerable number of willow-warblers that visit the Malay Peninsula in winter I have selected this, the commonest, for description. All are very much alike and present considerable difficulties in identification, owing to abrasion of the feathers. Most of the species are commoner in the north than the south of the Peninsula, the only other species that is likely to be met with commonly in the British zone being the crowned willow-warbler, *A. occipitalis coronatus*. This species frequents more wooded country; it may be recognized by its bright yellow under tail coverts, greyer under surface, and by the longitudinal greyish streak on the crown, from the bill to the nape.