

CROWS, JAYS AND MAGPIES

Family CORVIDÆ

THIS family, like most others of the *Passeriformes*, varies a good deal in external characters.

The bill in most species is powerful and thick, the upper mandible slightly notched; the nostrils are covered with stiff bristles directed forwards, the feathers of the forehead also, often bristly or velvety. The tarsi are smooth behind, with two entire longitudinal plates; both the tarsi and feet usually strong.

The wing has ten primaries, the first well developed, and is generally somewhat pointed; the tail is of twelve feathers, square or much graduated, greatly lengthened in certain genera.

Plumage, very variable, some species brightly coloured, many entirely black; the sexes are alike, and the plumage of the young like that of the adult.

Nests are usually large structures of sticks and twigs placed high in trees, but some species nest in holes in trees and rock and one genus burrows in the ground. The eggs are usually four or five in number, in nearly all species greenish in ground-colour with reddish brown spots or markings.

Practically all the species are non-migratory birds.

The family is a large one spread over the whole of the world; it has six Malayan representatives, of which three are true crows—one a hunting crow, a handsome bird of general yellowish-blue plumage confined to the higher mountains (*Cissa robinsoni*); a white-winged jay, and a racquet-tailed magpie—a long-tailed bird with the plumage uniform blackish with a greenish gloss—which hardly enters the British portion of the Peninsula. One of the crows and the white-winged jay find a place in this volume.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

- Larger; plumage uniform black . . . *Corvus coronoides macrorhynchus*, p. 264
Smaller; plumage black, with a
white bar on the wing; head,
somewhat crested *Platysmurus leucopterus*, p. 265

*Corvus coronoides macrorhynchus***The Southern Large-billed Crow**

Corvus macrorhynchus, Wagl., *Syst. Av.*, 1827, *Corvus*, sp. 3 (Java); Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 38.

Corvus coronoides macrorhynchus, Kloss, *Journ. Fed. Malay States Mus.*, x., 1921, pp. 223-227; Meinertzhagen, *Nov. Zool.*, xxxiii., 1926, p. 85.

Malay Name.—Gagak, dendang.

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. Culmen, arched upwards; bill, thick; feathers of the throat, bifurcated at tip. Whole bird, black; upper surface, including wing coverts, with a strong purplish gloss; feathers of the mantle with greenish gloss; bases of the feathers of hind neck, whitish, or very pale grey. Lower surface with the gloss more greenish.

Immature.—The bifurcations of the feathers of the throat not nearly so marked; whole bird duller, purplish and greenish reflections much reduced; the bases of the neck feathers, darker.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark, or dark brown; bill and feet, black.

Dimensions.—Total length, 18.5 to 21 in.; wing, 12.2 to 14.5 in.; tail, 7.2 to 8.5 in.; tarsus, 2.5 to 2.6 in.; bill from gape, 2.5 to 2.7 in. Females run rather smaller than males.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From the north border to Selangor, but rare south of that. Not common south of Trengganu on the eastern side. On all the islands but doubtful in Singapore.

Extralimital Range.—Java, Sumatra, and the lesser Sunda Islands to Timor. Not in Borneo. Very closely allied subspecies occur throughout Asia.

Nidification.—The nests are large untidy structures of sticks and twigs, built usually at some height in trees among the mangroves or in secondary jungle, and the nesting season is in the earlier part of the year, later on the eastern side of the Peninsula than on the west. The eggs much like those of a rook or raven, and usually rather pointed ovals, but they vary much in shape. They are smooth in texture but have little gloss. The ground-colour is dull sea-green, sometimes rather bluish, and the markings are small and fairly evenly distributed over the egg, of a dull reddish brown, appearing sometimes as if clouded over with greyish. Eggs from Pegu are sometimes heavily blotched with black. Baker gives the average dimensions of eggs of the extremely closely allied *C. c. andamanensis* as 1.68 by 1.24 in.

On the coast of Selangor and Perak, Malays have told me that crows not infrequently make their nests in the substructure of the immense nests of the sea-eagle (*Cuncuma leucogaster*), which does not interfere with them. I have never actually seen such associations myself, but have no reason to doubt my information. In Kelantan the crows are much parasitized by the big, black cuckoo (*Eudynamis scolopacea malayana*).

Habits.—Though, in India, birds of this species are universally known as the jungle-crow, in contradistinction to the house-crow (*Corvus insolens*), our bird is emphatically not a jungle species, but lives in open country and around

towns and villages, though it never comes near houses, as does *C. insolens*. All along the coast, especially near the fishing villages, it is exceedingly common, living on fish refuse, and stealing the fish exposed to dry on the stages. Inland it is decidedly rarer, though a few are to be found in the neighbourhood of the slaughter-houses in the larger towns.

On the eastern side of the Peninsula, in the Patani States, it is fairly abundant inland. Everywhere, except in the fishing villages, it is a shy and suspicious bird, and not particularly easy to get near. Most of the smaller islands of the Straits of Malacca, and also off the east coast, are inhabited by a pair or more of these birds, which in many cases fly off to the mainland for the day, returning at evening. On the coast they roost in company, on high trees in the mangrove zone. The note is very much that of the English rook, but louder and more raucous and resonant. In some parts of the Peninsula crows are valuable medicine. The ashes of their feathers mixed with coconut oil and applied to the hair are an infallible remedy for baldness or premature greyness.

Note.—Some thirty years ago the Ceylon house-crow (*Corvus splendens protegatus*) was introduced into Klang in the hope that it might combat the plague of caterpillars of the clear-wing hawk-moth (*Cephanodes hylas*) at that time devastating the coffee plantations. It readily established itself in the town, which is some seven miles from the port, and has so greatly increased in numbers as to have become a nuisance, of late years. In the port, however, it has not been able to compete with its larger relative, nor has it spread to other parts of the state. Curiously enough the form has somewhat changed its type and is now darker than the Ceylon form from which it is descended, and is approximating to the race that is geographically nearest—viz. *C. splendens insolens*, from Burma.

The jungles are inhabited by another species, the Malaysian slender-billed crow (*Corvus enca compilator*), distinguished by slightly smaller size, longer, straighter and more slender bill, the absence of hackles on the throat, and the greyer under surface. This species is a more southern form and is not known in the Siamese portion of the Peninsula. It extends to Sumatra and Borneo, and in a modified form to Java, Celebes, and the smaller islands to the eastward.

Platysmurus leucopterus

The White-winged Jay

Glaucopis leucopterus, Temm., *Pl. Col.*, 1824, 265 (Sumatra).

Platysmurus leucopterus, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 90; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 37; *id.* in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), i., 1889, p. 26; Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), i., 1922, p. 58.

Malay Names.—Burong kambing; gëmbala gajah; chelong.

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. With bristles directed forwards over the nostrils, and upwards over the forehead, forming a sharp ridge. A short, full crest on the head, the feathers rounded at the tips. General colour black

and slightly glossy, terminal halves of the greater upper wing coverts and the outer webs of the outer secondaries white, forming a long, narrow bar on the wing. Most of the body feathers with shining black shafts.

Immature.—Like the adults but a sootier black; upstanding bristly feathers of the forehead not so long or stiff, and the rounded crest feathers not present.

Soft Parts.—Iris, crimson; bill and feet, black.

Dimensions.—Total length, 15.5 to 16.5 in.; wing, 7.6 to 7.8 in.; tail, 7.5 to 8.5 in.; tarsus, 1.5 to 1.8 in.; bill from gape, 1.5 to 1.6 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout its length. Not on any of the islands.

Extralimital Range.—Tenasserim as far north as Tavoy; South-West Siam; Sumatra.

Nidification.—Davison found a nest on 8th April at Dusun Tua, Ulu Langat, Selangor. It was about six feet from the ground, in moderately thick jungle, with a good deal of undergrowth, "on the frond of a *Calamus* (climbing palm) the end of which rested on the fork of a small sapling. The nest was a great coarse structure, like a crow's, but even more coarsely and irregularly built, and with the egg cavity shallower. It was composed externally of small branches and twigs, and loosely lined with coarse fibres and strips of bark. It contained two young birds about a couple of days old."

Baker describes the eggs as very magpie-like, measuring about 1.3 by 0.93 in.

Habits.—Strictly an old jungle bird, rarely coming into even secondary forest. The birds are met with—but not at any height on the hills—in pairs or small parties, always in trees (often rather high up) and never on the ground. The food is insects, principally caterpillars and beetles. The note is harsh, very frequently uttered, rather resembling the bleat of a goat (*kambing*), whence the bird derives one of its Malay names, but more creaking. The Malays say that the bird is often found in the vicinity of elephants, and it is therefore also called the *gembala gajah* (elephant bird).