

DRONGOS OR KING-CROWS

Family DICRURIDÆ

THE drongos, or king-crows, are a very natural family, allied to the shrikes on one side, and possibly more distantly to the birds of paradise (*Paradisidæ*) on the other. Nostrils hidden by small bristle-like feathers. The bill is stout; the culmen somewhat arched, and the upper mandible slightly notched near the tip. The tarsi are short, smooth behind, and the feet fairly strong.

Wing, long and pointed, of ten primaries, tail of ten feathers only, usually as long or much longer than the wing, always more or less forked, often with the outer tail feathers very much elongated with racquet-like expansions at the tips.

Head, very often with an elaborate crest, or with bunches of elongate hairs. Plumage, always black or grey, often spangled with glistening tips. Sexes alike; young, like the adults, but those of the black species spotted or barred with white.

The nests are shallow pads of tendrils and creepers, etc., so loosely constructed that the eggs are not infrequently visible from beneath, placed in trees, often at a great height and at the ends of the branches. Eggs are usually three or four in number, whitish or pinkish, handsomely spotted, scrolled and streaked.

The family contains about a hundred forms, ranging from tropical Africa, through Southern Asia to New Guinea, and North Australia but not Oceania. Seven distinct species, not including racial forms, occur in Malaya, of which I have described two of the commonest here.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

- Not crested; outer tail feathers not greatly lengthened, with no part of the shafts bare *Dicrurus annectens annectens*, p. 268
- Strongly crested; outer tail feathers greatly lengthened; the middle portion of the shaft bare, ending in a twisted racquet } *Dissemurus paradiseus malayensis*, p. 269

*Dicrurus annectens annectens***The Crow-billed Drongo**

Buchanga annectens, Hodgs., *Ind. Rev.*, i., 1837, p. 326 (Nepal).

Dicrurus annectens, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 231; Ogilvie Grant, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1912, p. 435, pl. 20, figs. 1 to 3; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 312; Baker, *op. cit.* (2nd ed.), *Birds*, ii., 1924, p. 353.

Dicrurus annectens annectens, Stuart Baker, *Nov. Zool.*, xxvi., 1919, p. 41.

Malay Names.—Chechawi, chenchawi, or chawi chawi.

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. Forehead, without hairs, not crested; tail slightly forked, outer tail feathers slightly curled upward at tip. Whole plumage black, all the visible parts with a bluish or greenish gloss; sides of the face not glossed.

Immature.—General colour, duller; under surface and under tail coverts with white tips to the feathers, broader on the tail coverts; under wing coverts and axillaries with large drop-shaped white tips, which are only completely lost in very old birds. Very young birds are still duller sooty black, with broader white bars on the under surface.

Soft Parts.—Iris, carmine in adults, reddish brown or dark in young birds; bill and feet, black.

Dimensions.—Total length, 9 to 10 in.; wing, 5·5 to 5·8 in.; tail, 5·3 to 5·7 in.; tarsus, 0·85 to 0·9 in.; bill from gape, 1·2 to 1·35 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout its whole length. Islands of Junk Zeylon, Langkawi, Penang and Singapore. Rarer on the east side of the Peninsula, and not recorded from the Tioman group.

Extralimital Range.—From the Himalayas, throughout Burma; parts of Siam, east to the borders of Cambodia; rare in Annam and Sumatra; accidental in Java; rare in Borneo.

Nidification.—Though resident in the Malay Peninsula for several months in the year it is doubtful whether this drongo breeds in the country. In the foothills of the Himalayas, Baker states that it nests from April to June, building the usual saucer-shaped nest in a horizontal fork of one of the outer branches of a tree, often at a great height. The eggs number three or four, and are very handsome. The ground-colour varies from a creamy white to a warm salmon, and the primary markings consist of longitudinal streaks and blotches of reddish and chestnut-brown, with similar secondary markings of neutral tint and grey. The average dimensions are given as 1·04 by 0·78 in.

Habits.—The crow-billed drongo is a very common bird along the coasts, and on islands in the vicinity of the Malay Peninsula, but is much rarer in the interior, and is not found at any altitude on the hills. Of the very large numbers of birds from the Malay Peninsula that have passed through my hands not one has been dated between the 20th April and the 22nd September, so that it is evident that it spends the summer elsewhere.

The birds are generally seen singly or in small numbers, and are less

crepuscular in their habits than some of the hill species, nor is their flight so active and graceful. The note is the usual flute-like whistle, though they also, when disturbed or in company with others of the species, utter a disagreeable, chattering noise. Diet is insectivorous—ants, butterflies, termites, etc., caught on the wing—though it is a puzzle as to how birds that take up their residence on minute islands like Pulau Jarak find sufficient food.

Dissemurus paradiseus malayensis

The Northern Malayan Large Racquet-tailed Drongo

Edolius malayensis, Blyth, *Journ. Asiat. Soc. Bengal*, xxviii., 1859, p. 272 (Penang and Andamans).

Dissemurus paradiseus, Linn. (part), Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 258; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 325.

Dissemurus paradiseus paradiseus (part), Stuart Baker, *Nov. Zool.*, xxv., 1918, p. 300; id., *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), ii., 1924, p. 377.

Dissemurus paradiseus malayensis, Kloss, *Ibis*, 1918, pp. 229, 518; id., *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, iii., 1919, p. 453.

Dissemurus paradiseus hypoballus, Oberholser, *Journ. Wash. Acad. Sci.*, 16, 1926, p. 518 (Peninsular Siam).

Malay Names.—Burong anting anting; burong sawai; burong hamba kĕra: nok seng sao hang buang (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. Head with a long crest on forehead, the feathers recurved; outer tail feathers greatly elongated; the median portion of the shaft bare, and with a terminal racquet with the edges bent over. The upper surface, black; visible portion of wings and the outer webs of the tail, glossed, and spangled with metallic bluish, greenish in certain lights; feathers of the rump with greyish bases.

Immature.—The crest much less developed; under wing and tail coverts tipped with white, metallic lustre less pronounced; the under surface, brownish, barred with white.

Soft Parts.—Iris, carmine, reddish brown in younger birds; bill and feet, black.

Dimensions.—Wing, 5.5 to 6.2 in.; tail, the extreme length of outer feathers, 14 to 17 in.; tarsus, 0.9 to 1.2 in.; bill from gape, 1.3 to 1.5 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From the northern border down to Central Perak, Junk Zeylon, the Langkawi group, the Bandon Islands and Penang.

Extralimital Range.—Northwards to Tavoy. The present species is an admirable instance of geographical variation and very many forms have been recognized, based mainly on size, the character of the crest, and the shape of the tail racquets. When sufficiently large series are examined many of these local races are perhaps admissible, but there are necessarily considerable numbers of individual specimens which it is difficult to assign to any particular race, while there are also zones, intermediate between the territories of established races, of which the inhabitants are also intermediate in character.

Nidification.—Nests and eggs of this Malayan form are not on record, but those of the Siamese bird, *D. p. paradiseus*, are well described by Herbert (*Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, vi., 1923, pp. 96-98, pl. 9), and the Malayan bird is almost certain not to differ in any material particular, though it is doubtful if it breeds in gardens and open country as near Bangkok.

Mr Herbert found the breeding season to be from April to June in Central Siam: from April to June, normally, in Malaya. The nests were always in the outer branches of mango-trees, about twenty feet from the ground, and were "cup-shaped, but very shallow and built of tiny creepers, roots and stems of grass, often so thinly put together that one can see from below whether there is anything in it. The materials are bound round the sides of a horizontal fork at the end of a branch so that the nest hangs in the fork like a cradle." The eggs are described as without gloss, and at times with a mat surface, rather long ovals and pointed towards the small end, and in colour much as other drongos' eggs: "the ground-colour from white or a dingy cream to a warm pink, with markings in either red, claret or reddish brown, and a few in pale purple." The full clutch is three and the average size is given as 1.13 by 0.79 in.

Habits.—This drongo is a resident bird throughout the Peninsula, replaced in the southern third and in Singapore Island¹ by the extremely closely allied *D. p. platyurus*, a rather smaller bird. The race from the Tioman Archipelago differs in certain particulars, and will probably ultimately receive yet another name. It is common everywhere, frequenting orchard-land—especially where there are groves of bamboos, secondary jungle, clearings in old forest, etc.—but does not ascend the hills to a greater altitude than about 3000 ft., above which its place is taken by the smaller racquet-tailed drongo (*Bhringa remifer peracensis*). It is seen to greatest advantage in the early morning and late afternoon, when it is very active, towering upwards into the air, and then rushing downwards, the racquets on the outer tail feathers appearing like two enormous bees in attendance on each quarter. The note is an exceedingly pleasing and mellow whistle, and is very varied, but the bird is also a clever mimic, and in the islands where it is common will imitate the notes of the shama and mynah bird so cleverly that the counterfeit note can hardly be detected.

Note.—The method of growth and the formation of the racquet on the outer tail feathers is not yet fully understood. Normally, the shaft between the racquet and the ordinary portion of the tail feathers is quite bare, but in some specimens the barbs remain for a breadth of a quarter of an inch or more, and the racquet is formed by a gradual and not an abrupt expansion. Possibly, as in the case of the neotropical motmots, the feather is actually trimmed by the birds themselves.

The subject is suggested as an interesting one for careful observation in the field, and the collection of illustrative specimens both in this and in the allied genus *Bhringa*.

¹ Oberholser (*Journ. Wash. Acad. Sci.*, 16, 1926, p. 519) considers the Singapore bird is peculiar to that island, and names it *Dissemurus paradiseus messatus*. I think the name is unnecessary.