

ORIOLES

Family ORIOLIDÆ

It is difficult to give a simple definition of this family; its members are moderate-sized birds, none much larger than a thrush, with coarse and deep bills, much curved over at the tip and slightly notched; the gape is provided with bristles. The wing is long and pointed and has ten primaries, the first large, more than half the length of the second. The tail is short, slightly graduated, with twelve feathers. Feet not very strong; tarsi, smooth behind, with three scutes in front.

The sexes are usually slightly different and the young birds are always much streaked. The colours are, in most species, bright, usually black and yellow, but in one group black and red, while there is an Australian section of very dull neutral tints.

The nests are cup-shaped structures placed high in trees, and the eggs are spotted. The family, comprising some sixty forms, is spread over the tropical and warmer temperate zones of the Old World, but not in Madagascar, New Zealand or Oceania generally. Most species are strictly sedentary but a few are migratory.

Four or five are known from Malaya, of which two are here described.

KEY TO THE SPECIES HERE DESCRIBED

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| 1 | { | Smaller wing never more than 4.5 in. | 2 |
| | { | Larger wing always more than 5.75 in. | |
| 2 | { | Head and throat black | <i>Oriolus x. xanthonotus</i> (male), p. 271 |
| | { | Head, greyish green; throat, greyish white | <i>Oriolus x. xanthonotus</i> (female), p. 272 |
| 3 | { | Abdomen quite uniform yellow | <i>Oriolus chinensis indicus</i> (male), p. 273 |
| | { | Abdomen distinctly striped | <i>Oriolus chinensis indicus</i> (female and juvenile), p. 273 |

Oriolus xanthonotus xanthonotus

The Malay Black-headed Oriole

Oriolus xanthonotus, Horsf., *Trans. Linn. Soc.*, xiii., 1821, p. 152; Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 213; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 505.

Oriolus xanthonotus xanthonotus, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 13.

Malay Name.—Burong kunyet kechil.

Description.—*Adult male.*—Head all round, chin and throat, glossy black; mantle, lesser upper wing coverts, back, rump and upper tail coverts, clear yellow, with a greenish tinge on the scapulars; median wing coverts, dull yellow, with black edges; greater coverts, black. Primaries, black, all except the first two edged with white; secondaries, brownish black, edged with pale yellow. Inner aspect of wing, blackish, the quills broadly edged with pale yellow towards the base; axillaries, white, under wing coverts blackish, edged with white. Tail feathers black, all except the centre pair with a quadrate patch of pale yellow at the tip of the inner web, increasing towards the outer feathers. Beneath, creamy white, with a buffy tinge, with longitudinal streaks of brownish black, broader on the flanks. Vent and under tail coverts, bright yellow; thighs, lemon-yellow, the feathers with black bases.

Adult female.—Above, olive-green, darker and greyer on the crown, which is obscurely streaked, brighter on the rump; tail the same, with an ill-defined subterminal black bar, and a pale yellow spot on the inner webs of the feathers. Wing coverts, olive-green; the median series with black bases; the greater series, black, with olive-green edges and whitish tips. Primaries as in the male; secondaries, brownish, with green edges, the innermost almost entirely olive-green; lores, mottled greyish and white; ear coverts and sides of neck, dull olive-grey. Beneath, throat greyish with ill-defined streaks; rest of under surface white, with clear black streaks; under tail coverts, bright yellow.

Immature.—Like the female, but with the wing coverts broadly edged and tipped with pale rufous buff; the head with the streaks more defined; under tail coverts, paler yellow.

Soft Parts.—Iris, carmine, often chocolate or Indian-red in the female; bill, maroon-brown; feet, greenish slate. *Immature*: “iris, brown; bill, pinkish flesh; feet, purplish grey” (Jacobson).

Dimensions.—Total length, about 8 in.; wing, 4·2 to 4·4 in.; tail, 3 to 3·2 in.; tarsus, 0·8 in.; bill from gape, 1 to 1·1 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—The whole length of the Peninsula, Singapore and Penang islands. Not recorded from the other islands, but probably occurring on the larger ones, except the Tioman group.

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

Nidification.—Kellow found this oriole nesting near Simpang, Larut, Perak, at the end of February. The nest and eggs are, according to Baker, like those of other orioles, the former a deep cup built of grass and twigs in the fork of a tree, and lined with soft fibre. The eggs are warm pink, the markings being of chestnut-brown, underlaid with others of lavender. Measurements about 1 by 0·78 in.

Habits.—A bird of heavy jungle, rarely coming into orchards or open country, but occasionally found on the banks of the larger rivers, especially when fig-trees, common in such situations, are in fruit. It extends a long way

up the hills, sometimes as high as 4000 ft., and is always met with singly or in pairs. Its call is very musical, an oft-repeated whistle of three or four notes.

Unlike the larger yellow orioles in the Malay Peninsula this species is strictly sedentary, and does not make even limited migrations.

Oriolus chinensis indicus

The Indian Black-naped Oriole

Oriolus indicus, Jerd., *Ill. Ind. Orn.*, 1847, pl. 15 (Malabar).

Oriolus diffusus, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 197.

Oriolus chinensis indicus, Meinertzhagen, *Ibis*, 1923, p. 63; Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 7.

Malay Name.—Burong kunyet.

Description.—*Adult male.*—A black band encircling the crown from the lores over the eye, broad on the nape. Crown, mantle, back, upper tail coverts, lesser upper wing coverts and the whole under surface, bright yellow, inclined to orange on mantle and breast, more greenish on the longest tail coverts, the latter occasionally with small black shaft stripes at the tips. Median wing coverts, black on their inner webs; primary coverts, black with yellow tips. Primaries, black, all except the outermost narrowly beaded with white on the outer web; the secondaries with the greater part of the outer webs greenish yellow, with a margin of brighter yellow, the innermost entirely yellow on the outer web, the tips of the inner webs also yellow. Inner aspect of the wing, with the quills bordered with pale yellowish, white towards the base of the inner webs; axillaries and under wing coverts, yellow. Tail, glossy black, the central pair of feathers entirely so; the remainder with successively broader tips of bright yellow, rather over an inch on the outermost.

Adult female.—As the male, but the mantle and wing coverts have a strong cast of greenish; the primaries are brownish black, and the tail feathers are strongly suffused with greenish olive. All but the oldest birds are lightly streaked with dusky on the breast, and the crown also is greenish yellow. There is never so strong an orange tint on the under surface as in old males.

Immature.—The lores, dusky, the black horseshoe band on the nape only indicated; the upper surface olive-green, lightly striped with black, the tail coverts brighter yellow. Primaries more broadly edged with whitish and the primary coverts brown. Tail, mostly greenish olive. Throat, greyish white, lightly streaked with dusky. Under surface, whitish, with broad black streaks; the flanks and under tail coverts more yellow. The throat is the first to change into light yellow, and the adult male plumage is gradually acquired by a spring moult. A young male, dated 23rd March, has the outer tail feathers of the adult and a few orange-yellow feathers on breast and mantle; the black nape band is just appearing.

Soft Parts.—Iris, crimson or purplish brown (Darling); bill, pinkish horn, much darker in the young birds; feet, pale grey or greenish slate.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 10·5 in.; wing, 5·9 to 6·1 in.; tail, 3·9 to 4·2 in.; tarsus, 1 to 1·1 in.; bill from gape, 1·3 to 1·4 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Throughout the length of the Peninsula and on the larger islands, but rarer to the south and in Singapore.

Extralimital Range.—A continental bird, breeding in Northern Asia and wintering in South China, Hainan and Formosa, and in most of the countries south of the Himalayas but not in Western India.

Nidification.—Does not breed in Malaya.

Habits.—Common on the coasts and islands of the north of the Peninsula, but becoming rarer towards the south, and in Singapore quite an uncommon bird. It is more abundant, too, on the western than on the eastern side of the Peninsula. It is typically an orchard and open-country bird, and is never found in jungle country or on the hills. The food is entirely fruit and berries, and in habits it exactly resembles the European golden oriole, having precisely the same whistling note.

Note.—In the north of the Peninsula, south to the Langkawi Islands, another golden oriole, *O. xanthornus*—formerly called *O. melanocephalus*—is occasionally met with as a winter visitor. It can at once be distinguished from the present bird by its rather deep yellow plumage, and by the fact that the whole head and throat are glossy black. Younger birds have the throat and breast coarsely striped with black. It will be described in detail in a later volume.