

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS

Family MOTACILLIDÆ

THIS family can be recognized by its lengthened hind toe with more or less elongated hind claw ; the tarsi are nearly smooth, only slightly scutellated in front on their lower extremity. The bill is fairly long and slender, only slightly notched at the tip, with distinct bristles at the gape. Wing, with nine primaries, the first and second nearly equal. Tail of twelve feathers, sometimes longer than the wing, always more than two-thirds the length.

Sexes, nearly alike, but in the wagtails with a very distinct winter and summer plumage, and a distinct juvenile one. Colours, various, never with bright blue, red or vivid green. Often with bright yellow on the summer plumage.

Nests on the ground, usually ; often in holes or among stones, sometimes in roofs, etc., very rarely in trees. The nests are usually open, rarely domed ; the eggs are spotted, and in the tropical species three to five is the usual clutch. Most of the wagtails are migratory birds breeding in the far north, or at very high elevations, and wintering in the tropics. Some of the pipits also are migratory, but many are strictly sedentary birds.

The family is widely distributed throughout the Old World, but does not occur in the Australasian region.

Nine species find a place in the Malayan list, but only three are other than rare and accidental, and only one a permanent resident. These three are here described. Owing to the great variation due to age and to seasonal changes the discrimination of the wagtails is by no means easy, but the common species can be recognized by the following key.

KEY TO THE SPECIES OF WAGTAILS AND PIPITS HERE DESCRIBED

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|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | { | Upper surface, streaked and mottled | <i>Anthus richardi malayensis</i> , p. 294 |
| | | Upper surface, plain | 2 |
| 2 | { | With a black gorget ; throat, white | <i>Dendronanthus indicus</i> , p. 293 |
| | | With no black gorget | 3 |
| 3 | { | Throat, black ; belly, yellow | <i>Motacilla cinerea caspica</i> (summer),
p. 292 |
| | | Throat and belly, white or yellow | <i>Motacilla cinerea caspica</i> (winter and
young), p. 292 |

*Motacilla cinerea caspica***The Eastern Grey Wagtail**

Parus caspicus, S. G. Gmelin, *Reise Russ.*, iii., p. 104, pl. 20, fig. 2, 1774 (Caspian Sea).

Motacilla melanope, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 293.

Motacilla cinerea caspica, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 265.

Malay Name.—Mentua pelandok.

Description.—*Adult male in summer plumage.*—Above, clear grey, sometimes slightly washed with olive-green on mantle; rump, upper tail coverts, greenish yellow; lesser wing coverts, grey; median, greater and primaries and secondaries, blackish brown; the coverts with paler edges, the secondaries with white edges to the outer webs, and a white patch at the base showing on the outer aspect of the wing; axillaries and under wing coverts, greyish white. Outermost tail feathers completely white, the next two pairs white with black inner webs; the centre three pairs completely black. A distinct white superciliary, and a fine white stripe from the gape, bordering the throat; lores, black; ear coverts, greyish, often streaked with white. Chin and throat, black, the feathers with pale edges; rest of the under surface, pale primrose-yellow, paler on the middle of the abdomen and becoming deeper, almost orange on the under tail coverts.

Adult female.—Almost identical with the male, but the throat is never quite so black, and the white stripe bordering the throat is not so broad and clear. The superciliary stripe is generally not so distinct.

Adult in winter plumage.—Whole upper surface and sides of the head, dull brownish grey, with hardly any trace of bluish, a white but not very conspicuous supercilium extending from the lores to beyond the ear coverts; rump and upper tail coverts, greenish yellow, with brighter yellow edges. Throat, pure white; rest of under surface, pure yellow, brightest on the under tail coverts; somewhat brownish on the sides of the chest.

Immature.—As in the winter plumage, but the throat buffy, not pure white, often with dark edges to the feathers; median wing coverts with pale buffy edges; the middle tail feathers not so black and the general tone of the upper surface is distinctly browner.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark; upper mandible, black or brownish black; lower, pinkish flesh or whitish; tip, black or brownish black; feet, pale pinkish brown, yellowish at the back, toes pinkish grey (Jacobson).

Dimensions.—Total length, about 8 to 8·2 in.; wing, 3·2 to 3·4 in.; tail, 3·7 to 3·9 in.; tarsus, 0·8 in.; bill from gape, 0·7 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Everywhere during the winter months, including even the smaller islands.

Extralimital Range.—Breeds throughout Northern Asia from the Urals to Kamchatka and in the Himalayas. Winters throughout Southern Asia and the Malay Archipelago, eastward to Celebes, the Moluccas, western New Guinea; also in Southern China, Hainan and Formosa.

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

Habits.—This wagtail is found in most parts of the Peninsula from as early as 3rd August up to 26th March, only acquiring the black-throated plumage in February and March. It arrives, probably, by journeying down the coasts of the Malay Peninsula from the north, as it has not as yet been met with at any distance from land, though very plentiful on the off-shore islets. It is one of the commonest of the winter residents, and may be seen at times in nearly every garden, especially near water. It is also common along the road and more open streams up to an altitude of 4000 ft. or more, and shares the rocky mountain torrents with the fork-tails, provided always that there are sunny reaches and occasional sandy banks. Generally it is solitary or in pairs, but at times, usually near the migration, it and the forest wagtail congregate in immense flocks which may number many thousands. The flight is direct, but dipping, and never very long sustained. Its food is insects and worms, and I have even seen one attempt, but in vain, to catch the larger dragon-flies. Action, gait and general demeanour are precisely those of the English members of the family.

Note.—Two other wagtails occasionally visit the Malay Peninsula, but are very much rarer. One, *Motacilla flava tawana*, is very much deeper yellow beneath and greenish above, with a broad yellow eyebrow; the second more closely resembles *M. c. caspica*, but has a much shorter tail, equal to or not exceeding the wing; the mantle is, as a rule, more tinged with green, but the rump and tail coverts are grey. This is *Motacilla flava simillima*, a breeding bird in Kamchatka and Eastern Siberia, wintering in the Indo-Malayan countries as far west as the Andaman Islands. Both these forms will be described in detail in a later volume.

Dendronanthus indicus

The Forest Wagtail

Motacilla indica, Gmelin, *Syst. Nat. i.*, 1789, p. 962 (India).

Limonidromus indicus, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 300.

Dendronanthus indicus, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 276.

Malay Name.—Unascertained.

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes similar. Head, neck, back, scapulars, lesser upper wing coverts and centre pair of tail feathers, brownish olive, rather darker on the tail; upper tail coverts, sooty black; median and greater wing coverts, black, with broad, creamy white tips; primary coverts, black. Primaries, brownish black, all but the first with a narrow edging of creamy white on the outer webs, and a broader patch of the same colour towards the base; secondaries, blackish, brown towards the tip, also with a patch of yellowish white, shading into grey, on the outer web. Inner aspect of wing, greyish, the primaries edged with white, and with white bases; axillaries, yellowish, with dusky tips; under wing coverts, mixed white and dusky. A yellowish

white superciliary stripe from the lores; sides of the face, olive-brown; the ear coverts, paler. Beneath chin and throat, pure white; sides of the breast, brown, a regular black crescentic band on the breast, and another interrupted one beneath it, often joined to the first by a few black feathers in the centre line. Rest of the under surface, white, infuscated with light brown on the flanks and tinged with yellowish in many cases. Thighs, dusky; outermost tail feathers, white, black towards the base of the inner web, the next pair similar with a greater amount of white; the next three pairs almost uniform black, and the centre pair the colour of the back, shorter than the rest.

Many birds are yellower beneath than others; these are freshly moulted; birds in worn plumage are much whiter.

Immature.—Black gorget on throat narrower; the upper tail coverts less black.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark; upper mandible, horny; lower, pinkish white; feet, fleshy.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 7 in.; wing, 3·1 to 3·4 in.; tail, 2·8 to 3 in.; tarsus, 0·8 to 0·9 in.; bill from gape, 0·7 to 0·8 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Distributed throughout its length; Junk Zeylon, Penang and Singapore islands. Occasionally on the smaller islets.

Extralimital Range.—Breeding in Siberia and North China, occasionally in Northern Burma and Siam. In winter, in the Indo-Chinese countries and in Sumatra, Borneo and Java.

Nidification.—Does not breed in the Malay Peninsula.

Habits.—A winter visitor in the Malay Peninsula, arriving about the end of September, and leaving about the middle of March—rather later in the more northern parts. The bird keeps strictly to dense jungle, except on its first arrival, when it appears to spend a few days in the mangroves. At other times it frequents damp situations and the sides of the smaller streams, running just like the common wagtails, and taking flight only when closely approached. The food is worms, slugs and small shells, and Baker states that insects are often taken in the air. The forest wagtail is usually found singly or in pairs, but, like others of its family, sometimes congregates in very large flocks. On one occasion, at the end of December, after heavy wind and rain, I remember seeing very many thousands in the early morning on the summit of the Larut Hills in North Perak. By midday they had completely disappeared.

Anthus richardi malayensis

The Malay Pipit

Anthus malayensis, Eyton, *P.Z.S.*, 1839, p. 104 (Malacca).

Anthus rufulus, Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, ii., 1890, p. 308 (part).

Anthus richardi malayensis, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 292; Herbert, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam.*, vi., 1923, p. 215.

Malay Names.—Apit apit; laki padi: chak tanah (*Kedah*): lanchar lanchar or sri lanchar; nok a charp fon hang yao (*Siamese*).

Description.—*Adult*.—Sexes similar. Above, fulvous brown, the feathers

of the head and mantle with dark centres and pale edges, those of the back and rump almost uniform; wing coverts, blackish, very broadly margined with buff and white. Primaries, dark brown, narrowly edged with whitish on the outer web, not extending to the tips; secondaries, rather darker brown, more broadly edged with pale buffy. Inner aspect of wing, dusky, with pale margins to the inner webs of the feathers; axillaries and under wing coverts, smoky, the latter margined with yellowish buff; margin of wing, pale buff. Centre pair of tail feathers, brownish black, margined with buffy, the next three pairs almost uniform blackish, the penultimate pair with a wedge of white running down to the tip, outer web and shaft nearly entirely black; the outermost pair white, nearly to the extreme base, the shafts white or pale brown. A buff superciliary stripe from the nostril; lores, dusky; feathers round the eye, buffy white. A dark stripe bordering the throat; ear coverts and a patch above them, dark brown, with a rufous tinge. Beneath, throat, white; breast, fawn or pale tawny, with dark stripes on the shafts of the feathers broadening to the tips; rest of the under surface, tawny, pale creamy buff on the middle of the belly, darker and more infuscated on the flanks; thighs, pale buff.

The above description is from a freshly moulted bird. In worn plumage, the colour above is darker and greyer, especially on the wings, due to abrasion of the pale edges of the feathers. The lower surface, except for the dark stripes on the breast, is dirty-white, the fawn or tawny tint having completely faded.

Immature.—Lighter and more mottled above, due to the broader and buffier pale edges to the feathers; below, the dark stripes on the breast are broader but less defined.

Soft Parts.—Iris, dark; upper mandible, brown; lower mandible, yellow fleshy with brown tip; feet, fleshy.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 6·4 in.; wing, 3·1 to 3·4 in.; tail, 2·6 to 2·7 in.; tarsus, 1·05 to 1·15 in.; bill from gape, 0·75 to 0·85 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Over its whole length, and on all the island groups except where these are covered with dense jungle.

Extralimital Range.—North to Central Tenasserim and Central Siam; Sumatra, Java, and possibly Borneo, and one or two of the Philippine Islands, but the status of the birds from the latter islands is rather uncertain, as is that of those from the lesser islands of the Sunda chain.

Nidification.—The breeding season in the Peninsula is from the end of March to the middle of August, and the nests are usually at the edges of ricefields, or on the banks separating ricefields. One found by me at Biserat, in the Patani States, on 18th July, was situated among long grass, and consisted of a flat circular pad some five inches in diameter, composed of dead grass and loose mat leaves, lined with a few horse's hairs—which must have been hard to come by, as at that time there were only three ponies in the country. The eggs were four in number, rather pointed, the ground-colour dirty-white, thickly covered with very fine dark sienna-brown mottlings, evenly distributed, and also with large purplish-black blotches, more thickly congregated at the larger end. Baker gives the average dimensions of a large number of eggs as 0·86 by 0·61 in. Herbert's figures are somewhat less.

Habits.—In the ricefields and in open country everywhere, coming into gardens, and running about on lawns, this cheerful little bird is one of the commonest species in the country. It prefers fallow ricefields and buffalo grazing-grounds, and the embankments used to regulate the flow of water over the crops, and does not care for ground that is always swampy or marshy, or too deeply flooded. Its food, etc., is that of the ordinary wagtails, and its gait and flight are very similar but less direct, while it often soars to a greater height. It is also less strictly terrestrial, and often perches on low bushes, but never at any height. The species is strictly resident, and does not seem to make even local movements as do so many Malayan birds. It is found singly or in pairs, never in large flocks as is the case at times with the migratory birds.