

COOTS, RAILS AND CRAKES

Order RALLIFORMES

Vol. I., p. 15.

FROM the nature of the terrain and the absence of swamp, the marsh-loving birds of this order are not likely to be found in any great number or variety in the mountains of the Malay Peninsula. Besides the species here described, which is probably a regular winter visitor or bird of passage, another bird of very wandering habits, Elwe's crane (*Limnobaenus bicolor*), will not improbably occur. It may be recognized by its grey head and dark grey under surface; the wings and back of a dark rufous chestnut. Wing, about 4.5 in.

At present it is known, so far as the Malay Peninsula is concerned, from a single specimen, obtained many years ago at Kota Tinggi, Johore, in the month of December. Elsewhere it ranges from the Eastern Himalayas and Manipur to Yunnan and Tonkin, generally, but not always, at high elevations.

Rallina superciliaris superciliaris

The Banded Crane

Rallus superciliaris, Eyton, *Ann. and Mag. Nat. Hist.*, xvi., 1845, p. 230 (Malacca).

Rallina superciliaris, Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, xxiii., 1894, p. 76; Blanford, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, iv., 1898, p. 76; Robinson, *Journ. Fed. Malay States Mus.*, ii., 1909, p. 150 (Cameron's Highlands); Robinson and Kloss, *op. cit.*, vi., 1913, p. 225 (Kedah Peak).

Rallina superciliaris superciliaris, Stuart Baker, *Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.*, xxxii., 1927, p. 9.

Malay Name.—Sintar merah.

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes probably alike. Head and neck, all round, rich chestnut-red, the throat white; rest of upper parts, including wings and tail, warm olive-brown, the inner coverts occasionally with small white bars narrowly bordered above and below with blackish. Inner aspect of quills, blackish, the inner webs with white bars; under wing coverts and axillaries barred with black and white. Breast, uniform chestnut; rest of the under

surface, including the under tail coverts, barred black and white. Thighs, fulvous grey, mingled with white.

Immature.—Whole upper surface, olive-brown, with no chestnut; sides of the face, dusky brown; breast, olive-brown, with only a slight chestnut tinge, the full colour appearing to be gradually acquired. It is not quite certain that this plumage is not also that of the adult female, but reliably sexed specimens in sufficient numbers are not available to determine the point.

Soft Parts.—"Iris, blood-red; base of upper mandible and greater portion of the lower, green; remainder of the bill, dark brown; legs, black" (*Oates*). *Immature*: iris, orange; bill, dark slate, sea-green at base of lower mandible; tarsus, Payne's grey.

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

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—From the northern border south to Malacca; on Junk Zeylon and the Langkawi Islands, and on Pulau Rumpia, one of the Sembilan Islands. The occurrence on Singapore Island is open to doubt.

Extralimital Range.—Along the base of the Himalayas to Eastern Assam, the Western Ghats and Kandala, and scattered localities in Continental India and Central Burma; Tenasserim (?); Ceylon, where it is common; Siam and Annam.

Nidification.—This rail has not been recorded as breeding in the Malay Peninsula, and very probably does not do so. Stuart Baker (*loc. cit.*) states that in the Western Ghats it breeds from June to December during the heavy rains, the nests being in heavy jungle, placed on the tops of tree stumps, etc.—at most, six feet from the ground. The clutches are of from four to seven, and the eggs are of a type very unusual in the family, being dirty-white, without markings, with a thick, chalky texture, like that of a heron. The shape is a very round, blunt oval, and the average dimensions are given as 1·33 in. by 1·02 in.

Habits.—Two specimens have been obtained from Lubok Tanom, on the Bertang river, Cameron's Highlands, in November and January, and a third from 3000 ft. on Kedah Peak at the end of November. As in other localities affected by this bird, very little is known of the habits in the Malay Peninsula. It has been obtained only during the winter months, and I, personally, am of opinion that the bird is migratory and not resident with us. The habits, so far as I am aware of them, are similar to those of other rails, but it is an even more skulking bird than *R. fasciata* and distinctly rarer. Speaking of the Indian bird, Bell states that it calls in morning and evening and during wet misty weather, and that its cry is like that of a common hen after laying an egg, with a difference. It has also an alarm note like "k-r-r-r-r-r," pronounced in a subdued voice. The food is insects of various kinds and small mollusca. From the fact that on two visits of short duration to Cameron's Highlands Sakais brought us trapped specimens, the bird is probably not uncommon during the winter months. In India and Ceylon it has the curious habit of flying into houses.