

# BEE-EATERS

## Family MEROPIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 110; Vol. II., p. 57.

THE family of bee-eaters, or *Meropidæ*, found in all the warmer portions of the Old World as residents and in the more temperate regions as summer migrants, is a compact group characterized by very uniform and specialized features.

The habit of body is slender and elongate, and the wings are rather narrow and much pointed, denoting considerable powers of flight. The tail is fairly long, and certain species have the central feathers extended beyond the rest. The bill is long, curved downwards and sharply pointed at the tip, fairly broad, and deep at the base, a structure correlated with the food, which is insects caught on the wing. Oriental species have the plumage mainly green, ornamented with bright colours and plumes.

The nests are chambers at the end of tunnels, sometimes of considerable length, excavated in sandy or earthy cliffs, and the eggs are white, very rounded in shape.

From the whole of the Malay Peninsula proper, four species are known, of which one is strictly a jungle or forest bird (*Robinson*, Vol. I., p. 110).

### KEY TO THE MALAYAN BEE-EATERS

I	{	Throat, bright vermilion . . . . .	<i>Nyctiornis amicta</i> , p. 101
		Throat, green to blue . . . . .	<i>Merops viridis viridis</i> , p. 101
		Chin, yellow; throat, chestnut, fading into green of breast	<i>Merops superciliosus javanicus</i> , p. 101
		Chin and upper throat, yellow; lower throat, chestnut, separated from the green breast by a broad black line	<i>Melittophagus e. erythrocephalus</i> , p. 100

### *Melittophagus erythrocephalus erythrocephalus*

#### The Bay-headed Bee-eater

Vol. I., p. 114.

A small species without the lengthened tail feathers. Top of the head and the mantle, pale chestnut-bay; rump, pale blue; remaining upper parts and the under parts from the breast downwards, green. Chin and upper throat, yellow; lower throat, chestnut bordered by a black line which is separated from the green of the breast by an ill-defined yellow line.

Total length, about 8 in. ; wing, 4 in.

Occurs only in the north of the Peninsula where it is common as far south as Langkawi and Penang. I know of no reliable record from south of Kuala Kangsar in Perak, in which state, however, the bird is not common. It breeds on Junk Zeylon.

*Merops viridis viridis*

**The Malaysian Chestnut-headed Bee-eater**

Vol. I., p. 111, pl. 7.

Head and mantle, deep chestnut ; ear coverts, black ; throat, blue ; under parts, wings and scapulars, green ; rump and upper tail coverts, pale blue ; tail, blue-green. Centre pair of tail feathers greatly lengthened. Young birds lack the long tail feathers and are green, turning to blue on the rump and tail. Ear coverts, black.

Total length, about 11 in. ; wing, 4.5 in.

This bee-eater is common almost everywhere in the lowlands of the Peninsula, but more especially on the coastal flats and in open country. It seems to avoid the old forest. It is often seen in large flocks, the birds catching their insect food on the wing. Normally it nests in colonies, the eggs being laid in burrows in steep sandy banks in the neighbourhood of water. Mr A. T. Edgar points out that, where no banks are available, the nesting burrows are made in flat sandy areas.

*Merops superciliosus javanicus*

**The Brown-breasted Bee-eater**

Vol. I., p. 112, pl. 7.

Centre tail feathers lengthened. Rump, blue ; tail, blue-green ; remainder of upper parts, green. Ear coverts, black bordered by a blue line. Chin, yellow ; throat, chestnut passing into green on the breast and abdomen ; under tail coverts, blue.

Total length, about 12 in. ; wing, 5.4 in.

Unlike the last-mentioned species, this bird seems not to be resident in the Malay Peninsula, and there is no local record of the nest and eggs. From October to April it is very common on the coasts, especially in the mangroves.

*Nyctiornis amicta*

**The Red-bearded Bee-eater**

Vol. II., p. 57.

Fore part of the crown, lilac ; chin, throat and centre of the breast, vermilion ; remainder of the plumage, green. Tail underneath, yellow tipped with black.

Total length, about 12.5 in. ; wing, about 5 in.

This bee-eater is common in heavy lowland forest. It is more numerous in the forests on or near the foothills in inland localities than on the coastal plains. The eggs have been found in tunnels in the banks of forest streams.