

NUTHATCHES

Family SITTIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 259; Vol. II., p. 255.

THE nuthatches form a small, but fairly well-defined family of birds, widely distributed in the forested parts of North America, Europe and Asia, and also represented almost everywhere else except in South America, tropical Africa, New Zealand and Oceania. They have somewhat the appearance of small woodpeckers and climb trees with equal facility, but the tail is short, rounded and composed of soft feathers quite unlike the long, stiffened, pointed quills of a woodpecker's tail.

In the nuthatches the bill is strong, fairly long and wedge-shaped; the wing is pointed and long, when closed reaching to the end of the tail; and the feet are very strong, with a robust hind toe and claw. There are some bristles at the gape, but they are short and inconspicuous. In plumage the sexes are not conspicuously different and the colour is not very brilliant, about reaching its maximum in the Malayan forms.

The eggs are laid in holes in trees, and the entrance hole is sometimes modified in size by plastering with clay. Eggs laid in holes are usually white, but the nuthatches provide an exception, for their eggs have markings.

The nuthatches seem to be most closely allied to the tits (*Paridæ*) and the tree-creepers (*Certhiidæ*): the latter family has no Malayan representative.

Two species occur in the Malay Peninsula. One is confined to the mountains, the other has two local forms and receives a brief notice below.

Dendrophila frontalis saturatior

The Malay Velvet-fronted Nuthatch

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In both sexes the forehead is black and the remaining upper parts are bright purplish blue; the under parts are bluish lilac. Males have a black stripe behind the eye. The bill is bright red.

Total length, about 5 in.; wing, 2·9 in.

In the Malay States this nuthatch shows a preference for submontane localities and is common on the lower slopes of the hills, but it also occurs at sea-level in forest of various kinds, including swamp jungle. In the northern part of Peninsular Siam it changes into a rather paler and duller form, which seems inseparable from the typical race inhabiting Ceylon and Java.