

TITMICE

Family PARIDÆ

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THE titmice form a large family of small birds closely allied to the crows, which they resemble in their strongly scaled feet and legs. The wing is rounded, not very strongly developed and has ten primaries, the first of which is not very long. The tail, of moderate length, is square, rounded or slightly forked.

The bill is conical and short, and a patch of bristly or velvety feathers covers the nostril. The rictal bristles are but feebly developed.

In plumage the sexes are much alike and often have the head crested, although perhaps only in a small degree. Young birds differ little from adults, but are slightly paler.

The nests, often rather crudely made, are usually placed in holes in trees, but some species make beautiful domed nests. The eggs are either pure white or spotted.

Titmice are found in most parts of the world, but are absent in South America and the Pacific. Except when breeding, they are commonly found in flocks and are usually resident wherever they are found. A few species, however, are partly migratory, and some other, mountain, species are subject to altitudinal, seasonal movement.

The family is poorly represented in the Malay Peninsula by two species.

KEY TO THE MALAYAN TITMICE

- I { Head with a long yellow crest: abdo- } *Melanochlora sultanea flavocristata*,
men, yellow } p. 342
I { Head not crested: abdomen, grey
with a black median stripe } . *Parus major ambiguus*, p. 343

Melanochlora sultanea flavocristata

The Malay Sultan-Tit

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The feathers of the crown are lengthened to form a conspicuous crest. In the male the crown and abdomen are yellow; the remainder of the plumage

is glossy black with a slight green sheen. In females the green is much more pronounced on the upper parts, and the throat and breast are dusky green, not glossy black.

Total length, about 7·5 in. ; wing, 3·8 to 4 in.

In the Malay States small flocks of this conspicuous and handsome tit are common in submontane forest, especially in sunlit clearings and similar situations, but in the south of the Peninsula the species is also common in the lowlands wherever the old forest has been left standing.

Parus major ambiguus

The Malayan Great Tit

Turdus ambiguus Raffles, *Trans. Linn. Soc.*, xiii., 1821, p. 313 (Sumatra).

Parus major malayorum, Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1924, p. 333.

Malay Name.—Unascertained.

Description.—General plumage, grey, darker above and almost white on the under parts. Cheeks, white. Head and a stripe down the middle of the under parts, black.

Adult.—Sexes alike. Ear coverts, white ; remainder of head and neck all round, breast and a broad band down the centre of the under parts, including the under tail coverts, glossy blue-black ; under tail coverts, white at the sides. Mantle to rump, very pale blue-grey. Upper tail coverts, darker blue-grey. Tail, black, the outer edges of the feathers dark blue-grey, the outermost pair of feathers white, with the inner web, except at the tip, black-edged ; second outer pair of tail feathers with a white spot at the tip. Lesser and median wing coverts, blue-grey ; remainder of wing, deep black, the major coverts with broad blue-grey edges and broad white tips ; the inner secondaries with broad white edges, and the primary coverts, primaries and outer secondaries with narrow, blue-grey outer edges and the quills very narrowly white on the inner web. Edges of the wing, blue-black ; axillaries and under wing coverts, white. Remainder of under parts, french grey, palest near the black median line, greyest on the flanks. Thighs, black. Occasionally the sides of the breast are almost white and the flanks have a buffy tinge, and not infrequently there is a small white patch on the nape.

Immature.—Very like the adult, but paler and duller in colour.

Soft Parts.—Iris, brown ; bill, black ; feet, grey.

Dimensions.—Total length, 4·9 to 5·2 in. ; tail, 2·1 to 2·2 in. ; wing, 1·35 to 1·5 in. ; tarsus, 0·7 in. ; bill from gape, 0·5 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—The west coast of Trang and the island of Junk Zeylon off the west coast of Peninsular Siam. The coast of Patani. The coasts of Perak and Selangor.

Extralimital Range.—Sumatra. Very closely allied races occur in Java, with Bali ; and Borneo. All these Malaysian titmice can be regarded as subspecies of the very widely spread great titmouse (*Parus major*) of Europe. The present race seems to occur in Southern Tenasserim and perhaps also the

western parts of Burma and a lot of Northern India (" *cinereus* " of authors), but another form, *P. m. commixtus*, is also said to enter Tenasserim, and this, no doubt, also occurs in South-West Siam. I am not in a position to sort out these extralimital races, but at least can disagree with the repeated dictum that birds from the Malay States, Sumatra, Borneo and Java are alike.

Nidification.—Unknown from the Malay Peninsula.

Habits.—Although widely distributed in the Malay Peninsula this tit is very local, and has a most curious distribution, being, according to the present state of our knowledge, strictly confined to the narrow belt of casuarinas on the east coast of the Peninsula and the mangrove belt along the west coast. The actual localities, all enumerated above, at which specimens have been obtained are very few. Mr E. Seimund found it common, in company with *Zosterops*, in September and November among the mangroves at the entrance to the Klang Straits on the Selangor coast. In Sumatra it is also found in the lowlands, although here it is less conservative in its choice of country, being found, according to Dr E. Jacobson, in villages and towns, plantations, secondary and old forest. In Sumatra it is also found at very high elevations on the mountains, being common at even over 10,000 ft. on Mt Korinchi, where, according to Robinson and Kloss, it is numerous on the trunks of the tree *Vaccinium*. It seems possible that future investigation will reveal the species on the mountains of the Malay States.