

DRONGOS OR KING-CROWS

Family DICRURIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 267; Vol. II., p. 261.

THE drongos have been called "crow-like flycatchers" and the name is a good one, for they resemble the crows in that most of the species are glossy black, with a robust and arched bill, at the base of which the nostrils are concealed by small bristle-like feathers, whereas in their habit of catching insects on the wing after a spring from a perch of vantage, they recall the flycatchers. They have also, perhaps slightly fancifully, been regarded as occupying a position somewhat intermediate between the shrikes and the birds of paradise (*Paradiseidæ*). The general tone of the plumage of a few of the species is pale grey, not black. The sexes are alike in plumage, but young birds are usually spotted or barred with white.

The tail of ten feathers is often strongly forked, and the outer feathers are sometimes lengthened into ornamental plumes ending in racquet-shaped expansions. The wing is long and pointed and has ten primaries. The head may be crested or adorned with bunches of hair-like feathers. The legs are short, but the feet are fairly strong.

The nests are shallow and not very well-made cups of tendrils and creepers, etc., placed in trees, and the whitish eggs are handsomely marked with reddish brown.

Some drongos are excellent songsters.

The family is a large one, and well distributed from tropical Africa to India, China, and through the Malaysia islands to New Guinea and North Australia.

Seven distinct species find a place in the Malayan list, of which all, except the Malayan lesser racquet-tailed drongo (*Bhringa remifer peracensis*), which is restricted to the mountains, can be seen in the lowlands of the Peninsula.

KEY TO THE MALAYAN LOWLAND DRONGOS

I	{	Plumage, pale grey, with a white patch on the sides of the head	} <i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i> subsp., p. 353
		Plumage, dark blue-grey (upper parts, steely slate); no white patch on the head	
		General colour glossy black	2

2	}	Outer tail feathers enormously lengthened and ending in "racquets"	} <i>Dissemurus paradiseus</i> subspp., p. 354
		Outer tail feathers normal; tail forked	
3	}	Smaller: wing less than 5 in.	} <i>Chaptia aenea malayensis</i> , p. 353
		Larger: wing more than 5 in.	
4	}	Bill smaller; back usually glossed with blue	} <i>Dicrurus macrocercus cathoecus</i> , p. 353
		Bill larger; back usually glossed with bottle-green	

*Dicrurus annectens annectens***The Crow-billed Drongo**

Vol. I., p. 268; Vol. II., p. 261.

The whole of the plumage is black with blue-green gloss but without spangles. The tail is slightly forked, but the outer feathers are not conspicuously lengthened. Young birds have white spots on the under parts and under the wings.

Total length, about 9.5 in.; wing, 5.6 in.

This drongo is a migrant from the north, and is not known to breed in the Peninsula. During the winter months it is very common on the coasts and on the small islands in the Straits of Malacca, but it is much rarer in the inland districts.

*Dicrurus longicaudatus intermedius***The Grey Drongo**

Dicrurus intermedius Blyth, *Journ. Asiat. Soc. Bengal*, xv., 1846, p. 298 (Penang).

Buchanga cineracea (part), Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 250.

Dicrurus nigrescens, Oates, in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds* (2nd ed.), i., 1889, p. 208; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 315.

Buchanga nigrescens, O.-Grant, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1912, p. 443.

Dicrurus longicaudatus intermedius and *D. l. nigrescens*, Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1924, p. 344.

Dicrurus leucophaeus disturbans and *D. l. nigrescens*, Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), ii., 1924, p. 361; Stuart Baker, *Nid. Birds Ind. Emp.*, ii., 1933, p. 324.

Malay Name.—Chěchawi (*Edgar*).

Description.—*Adult.*—Sexes alike. Head without crest or long hair-like feathers, but rictal bristles prominent. Tail, long and forked, the outer feathers very slightly recurved. Entire upper plumage, steely blue-black;

below, blue-grey to greyish black, darker on the throat and breast, paler, almost dark ashy grey on the abdomen and under tail coverts.

Immature.—I have seen no very young birds from the Peninsula, but certain specimens in which the under tail coverts are narrowly tipped with white are, no doubt, sub-adult. Younger birds will probably prove to have the under wing coverts also white-tipped.

Soft Parts.—Iris, red; bill and feet, black.

Dimensions.—Total length, about 9 in.; wing, 4.9 to 5.3 in.; tail, 4.8 to 4.9 in.; tarsus, 0.8 in.; bill from gape, 0.9 to 1.1 in. The small series examined from the Malay Peninsula indicates no difference in the size of the sexes, but a larger number would, perhaps, show that females average rather smaller than males.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Junk Zeylon and an islet off the adjacent island of Pulau Panjang. Kedah. Sitiawan, Lower Perak. Penang Island.

Extralimital Range.—Burma and Siam, but I am not in a position to fix the limits more exactly.

Nidification.—Mr A. T. Edgar found this drongo breeding at Sitiawan in Lower Perak in 1932. On 13th April he found a nest, forty feet from the ground, on a small horizontal outer branch of a rubber-tree. Mr Edgar records that “the nest is a shallow saucer, placed in a fork, with part of the rim overlapping the arms of the fork on both sides, so that the nest hangs like a cradle. It is only about four inches in external diameter, and an inch deep, a very small nest, considering the size of the bird. This nest was made of *akar sepuleh*, a creeping plant, with small, flat leaves, found growing on rubber-trees, usually at a fork. Some of the leaves were left on the stems used to make the nest, but most of them had been picked off. The floor of the egg-chamber was loosely woven (in some nests the eggs can be seen from below); the rims which rested on the supporting branch were strong and well made. The outside of the nest was compacted and adorned with cobwebs, green moss and lichen. There were three eggs, partly incubated, measuring 0.9 by 0.72 in. Smooth, not glossy, rounded ovals, the ground-colour is a beautiful pale pink, marked sparsely all over with small brown spots, and with larger blotches of brown and purplish brown, underlined with pale purplish grey.” Four other nests were noted in May and June. All these were found twenty to thirty feet from the ground, in outer branches of “perepat” (*Sonneratia*) trees.

Habits.—So few examples of this drongo have been obtained in the Malayan area that I have thought it best to record the detailed localities rather than to piece these together to make a connected range. It will be seen that they form a broken line down the western side of the Peninsula. Birds recorded by Mr Stuart Baker under the name of *Dicrurus leucophaeus disturbans* as breeding at Simpang in Perak in April, May and June no doubt belong to the present form. From Lower Perak Mr Edgar has no record of the bird except during the breeding season, when he notes that, like other drongos, this species will draw attention to its nest by the habit of swooping at the heads of passers-by.

*Dicrurus macrocercus cathoecus***The Chinese Black Drongo**

This is a glossy black species with a deeply forked tail and so like *Dicrurus annectens* that the two birds are easy to confuse. The best distinguishing character is the size of the bill which is much smaller in the present species, measuring from the gape only 0.95 to 1.1 in. against 1.2 to 1.35 in. in *D. annectens*. Wing, about 5.6 in.

Occurs only in Peninsular Siam as a winter visitor from the north. It is common in many parts of China where it breeds abundantly, and it is also reported as breeding in Tenasserim. The species is unknown from the Malay States, or any part of the Peninsula under British influence.

Dicrurus leucophaeus subspp.**The Ashy Drongo**

Two races of this drongo seem to visit the Malay Peninsula in the winter months. Both are pale grey birds, slightly darker on the upper parts and almost white on the centre of the abdomen and on the under tail coverts. The lores and ear coverts are wholly or partly white. Wing, about 5.5 in.

The relatively paler, almost pearl-grey birds, with the white patch on the head large, distinct and including all the ear coverts, are referred to a northern race (*D. leucophaeus cerussatus*) breeding in Manchuria, Foochow, etc. The rather darker birds with the white head patch less well marked and not embracing the hinder ear coverts, belong to a more southern race breeding in Yunnan and South-East China, etc. Both forms are commoner in the north of the Peninsula than in the south and I know of no reliable record of either form from the extreme south.

*Chaptia aenea malayensis***The Southern Bronzed Drongo**

Vol. II., p. 262.

A small species with a deeply forked tail and the plumage deep black, very highly glossed with blue and green and conspicuously spangled. Belly, very dark grey. The axillaries and under wing coverts with a few white spots. This is the smallest of the Malayan drongos.

Total length, about 8.25 in. ; wing, 4.7 in.

It is widely distributed and fairly common in the lowland forests and in the foothills up to an altitude of well over 4000 ft. Sometimes, but not commonly, it can be seen in secondary forest and on the edge of cultivated areas.

In Selangor Mr G. C. Madoc has seen eggs in June. The nest was about forty feet from the ground and built far out in a fork of a slender branch of a big rubber-tree growing on the edge of jungle. It was composed of bark and strips of decomposed wood and lined with dead strips of a small vine. The

nest was secured to the branch with strips of vine and cemented with cobwebs. The two eggs were dull pink, blotched with a rather darker colour forming a ring at the blunt end. Measurements, 0.96 by 0.67 in.

Dissemurus paradiseus subspp.

The Malayan Large Racquet-tailed Drongo

Vol. I., p. 269; Vol. II., p. 263.

In this large species the general plumage is black, glossed with blue and green, and the upper surface is conspicuously spangled. The forehead is conspicuously crested. The outer tail feathers are enormously lengthened, the shafts bare on the projecting part of the feather, except at the end where the feather opens up in a racquet or blob shape. These outer feathers may reach a length of 17 in. The wing measures about 5.75 in.

Three subspecies or geographical races are found within the limits covered by this book. A northern race, *D. p. malayensis*, occupies the country from our northern boundary down to about the latitude of Penang and Central Perak. South of this, and in Singapore Island, the species is slightly smaller and the forehead is more accurately described as merely tufted rather than crested. This southern race is *D. p. platurus*. A third race, *D. p. microlophus*, distinguished by its very slightly larger average size and almost untufted forehead, was originally made known from the Anamba Islands in the South China Sea, and most birds from the islands of the Tioman Archipelago seem nearer to it than to *D. p. platurus*.

This species is a common and conspicuous resident bird almost everywhere in the lowlands of the Peninsula. It inhabits a variety of country, being found in old forests, secondary growth and cultivated areas. In Singapore it freely enters gardens on the outskirts of the city wherever there are tall trees.

According to Mr A. T. Edgar the nest is placed in trees, from fifteen feet upwards, in rubber and light jungle. Mr V. W. Ryves notes clutches of three eggs in April and May. Mr Edgar notes young birds in the nest in April, May and July.