

ORIOLES

Family ORIOLIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 271; Vol. II., p. 265.

IN the orioles the plumage is usually bright and many of the species are black and yellow. In another, smaller section of the family, black and red are dominant. There is usually a slight colour difference between the sexes, and young birds are characterized by striped plumage.

Orioles are fruit-eating birds of arboreal habits. They are usually resident wherever they are found, but a few species are migratory.

The average size throughout the family is about that of a thrush. The bill is strong, hard, curved over and slightly notched at the extreme tip. The feet are rather weak. The long, pointed wing has ten primaries, of which the first is more than half the length of the second. The short tail, only slightly graduated, has twelve feathers.

The spotted eggs are placed in cup- or cradle-shaped nests high in trees.

The family is not a large one and is spread over the warmer parts of the Old World. In Madagascar, New Zealand and Oceania the family is unrepresented.

Four species are known from the Malay Peninsula, of which one, a black and red form, is confined to the mountains.

KEY TO THE MALAYAN LOWLAND ORIOLES

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|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| 1 | { | Throat and upper breast, black | 2 | } | <i>Oriolus chinensis</i> subsp. (adult), |
| | | Throat and upper breast, immaculate | | | p. 358 |
| | | and deep yellow | | | |
| | | Throat and breast, whitish, sometimes | | | |
| | | streaked | 3 | | |
| | | Remaining under parts, deep yellow. | | | <i>Oriolus xanthornus thaiocous</i> , |
| | | | | | (adult), p. 356 |
| 2 | { | Remaining under parts, heavily | | } | <i>Oriolus xanthornus xanthornus</i> |
| | | streaked with black | | | (adult male), p. 357 |
| | | Crown, black; throat, heavily | | | <i>Oriolus xanthornus thaiocous</i> (im- |
| | | streaked | | | mature), p. 356 |
| 3 | { | Crown, yellowish or olive - green; | | | |
| | | throat, scarcely, if at all, streaked. | 4 | | |

- 4 { Much larger: wing over 5.5 in. . *Oriolus chinensis* subsp. (immature), p. 358
 { Much smaller: wing about 4.3 in. . *Oriolus xanthonotus xanthonotus* (female and immature), p. 357

Oriolus xanthornus thaiocous

The Siamese Black-headed Oriole

Oriolus luteolus thaiocous Hartert, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, xxxviii., 1918, p. 63 (Koh Lak, South-West Siam).

Oriolus melanocephalus (part), Sharpe, *Cat. Birds, Brit. Mus.*, iii., 1877, p. 215; Oates, in Hume's *Nests and Eggs Ind. Birds*, i., 1889, p. 359; Oates, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds*, i., 1889, p. 506; O.-Grant, *Cat. Birds' Eggs, Brit. Mus.*, v., 1912, p. 431.

Oriolus xanthornus, Robinson and Kloss, *Journ. Nat. Hist. Soc. Siam*, v., 1924, p. 350.

Oriolus xanthornus xanthornus (part), Stuart Baker, *Faun. Brit. Ind., Birds* (2nd ed.), iii., 1926, p. 11; Stuart Baker, *Nid. Birds Ind. Emp.*, ii., 1933, p. 502.

Malay Name.—Burong kunyet.

Description.—Bright yellow, with head and neck, all round, black. Wings and tail mostly black.

Adult male.—Head, neck and fore breast, black, sharply defined against the bright yellow of the body plumage. Winglet, black; primary coverts, black, broadly tipped with yellow; other upper wing coverts, yellow, the major series with black shafts and a few of the inner feathers partly black on the inner web. Wing quills, black, a hidden pale yellow area at the base on the inner web. Primaries, except the outer two or three, very narrowly beaded with pale yellow on the outer web; inner primaries narrowly tipped with yellow, these yellow tips becoming much larger on the secondaries, progressively inwards, and confined to the outer webs; innermost small secondaries often with the outer web mostly yellow. Centre pair of tail feathers with a narrow yellow tip, but the terminal half otherwise black, the black decreasing progressively through the tail quills outwards, and the outermost feathers entirely yellow or with a little black on the outer web. Shafts of tail quills, black. Under wing coverts, yellow. The amount of yellow on the wing and tail quills is subject to considerable individual variation.

Adult female.—Usually less deeply yellow than the male and the upper parts often tinged with olive.

Immature.—Body plumage paler yellow, the mantle and back, yellowish olive. Throat, white, closely streaked with black; breast streaked with dusky. Top of the head, black, the feathers edged with olive; forehead, mostly yellow. Black of wings and tail washed with olive, the dark areas larger than in adults. Major wing coverts, black, broadly edged with yellow; smaller wing coverts, dull yellow with dusky centres.

Soft Parts.—Iris, red; bill, deep pink, pinkish brown or horny pink;

feet, grey or plumbeous green. *Young birds* differ in having the bill greyish black. They are said to have the iris brown at first, but it certainly turns to red before the adult plumage is assumed.

Dimensions.—Total length, 8.6 to 9.3 in.; wing, 5.1 to 5.6 in.; tail, 3 to 3.25 in.; tarsus, 0.9 to 1 in.; bill from gape, 1.2 to 1.3 in.

Range in the Malay Peninsula.—Peninsular Siam, including Junk Zeylon and Pulau Lontar; Pulau Langkawi.

Extralimital Range.—The present subspecies, regarded as inhabiting, for certain, Siam and Cambodia, is not recognized by some ornithologists, but although it is ill-defined, it does seem, on an average, to have more black in the tail than true *xanthornus*, which is widely spread in Peninsular India (excluding the north-west) and on the lower levels of the Himalayas from about Kumaon eastwards. The species then extends to Assam, Burma and Annam, but the subspecific identity of birds in the two last-named countries is uncertain. The species also occurs in North-East Sumatra, where it is, no doubt, a migrant. A closely allied form is found in Ceylon and southernmost India, and another in a very limited area in Borneo.

Nidification.—There is no record from the Malay Peninsula. In other parts of the range the deep cup-like nest of fibres and pieces of bark, etc., is suspended like a cradle between two twigs, high in a tree. The eggs, which measure about 1.1 by 0.8 in., are pinkish, spotted with brown or black. The usual clutch is three.

Habits.—This oriole seems to occur rather less commonly in Peninsular Siam than in South-West Siam just north of our area. It has been obtained on the west coast of the Peninsula opposite the islands of Junk Zeylon and Telibon. A few specimens from Langkawi Island in the Straits of Malacca mark the southern limit of the species in the Malay Peninsula, and although it has been obtained at Koh Lak, in South-West Siam, in April, it seems likely that the species is only a winter visitor to its extreme southern boundary. In the neighbourhood of Tavoy, in Tenasserim, Davison records it as common about gardens, secondary scrub and thin tree jungle. Referring to the species in Burma, Oates writes: "It affects alike the deepest forests and the most frequented gardens and compounds. Its exquisite call of five whistling notes is one of the most charming sounds heard in the jungle, and it seems to be uttered at all hours of the day, and almost all the year round."

Oriolus xanthonotus xanthonotus

The Malay Black-headed Oriole

Vol. I., p. 271; Vol. II., p. 266.

Males have the head, wings and tail black, the tail tipped with yellow, the back and under tail coverts bright yellow, and the under parts creamy white, heavily striped with black. Females and young birds are rather different and lack the black head. They have the upper parts olive-green, and the under parts whitish, heavily streaked with black.

Total length, about 8 in.; wing, 4.3 in.

This oriole is a common resident bird in the lowland forest, although ascending the hills rather higher than most lowland birds. Normally it is not a garden or open-country species. The nest and eggs have been recorded from near Simpang, Perak.

Oriolus chinensis indicus

The Indian Black-naped Oriole

Vol. I., p. 273.

The general plumage of the male is bright deep yellow, with a bold, black horseshoe mark encircling the head on top. The tail feathers are black with broad, yellow tips. Wings, mixed yellow and black.

Females are not quite so brightly coloured as males, and the upper parts have a slight green suffusion. In young birds the horseshoe band on the nape is only faintly indicated, the plumage of the upper parts is olive-green, and the under parts are white with bold, blackish streaks.

Total length, about 10.5 in. ; wing, 6 in.

From its breeding-grounds in Northern Asia this oriole moves to the south for the winter, during which season it is a common bird on the coastal flats and islands of the Malay Peninsula. It is certainly far commoner in the north than in the south, but Robinson's remark in Vol. I., describing the bird as uncommon in Singapore, is one of the few inaccuracies I have detected in his share of the present work. The species is, of course, a familiar garden bird in Singapore, and most European residents know its beautiful liquid notes, although, owing to the bird's habit of keeping to high trees, its appearance is much less well known.

The *species* also breeds in the Malay States and on Singapore Island. The breeding birds are, however, not the migratory form described above, but identical with the resident breeding oriole of Java and Sumatra. This bird, which can be known as the Malaysian black-naped oriole, *Oriolus chinensis maculatus*, differs from *O. c. indicus* in having less yellow on the inner secondaries. It will be described in more detail in our next volume.