

FAIRY BLUEBIRDS

Family IRENIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 274; Vol. II., p. 267.

FOR many years placed with the bulbuls (family *Pycnonotidæ*), these beautiful birds are now regarded as a distinct family, and in the scheme of classification placed near the orioles. Without going into technicalities, I must confess that the change of view strikes me as being another of those cases of mere change without progress to which I have objected in the case of the ruby-cheek (*Chalcoparia*).

The fairy bluebirds differ from the bulbuls in that the sexes are markedly different in plumage, and also, it is alleged, in that the very young birds are streaked. The latter is an important character it is true, but I have not seen Malayan specimens in this very early juvenile plumage and cannot comment on its nature. Long hair-like feathers growing from the nape point to an alliance with the bulbuls. The size is about that of a thrush; the bill is stout, curved over at the tip and slightly notched; there are fairly strong rictal bristles at the gape, and the nostrils are concealed by small feathers. The legs are short and the feet fairly strong. The wing is rounded, although fairly long, and the tail is square.

The family is a small one and includes only two genera. In one of these, confined to the Philippine Islands, the sexes are alike. In the other genus, *Irena*, which is found in most parts of the Oriental Region except the Philippines, the sexes differ widely in appearance, and in the male the feathers of the upper parts are curiously modified to present an enamelled appearance.

Irena puella cyanea

The Malayan Fairy Bluebird

Vol. I., p. 275; Vol. II., p. 267.

The male is bright, pale turquoise-blue on the upper parts and the under tail coverts. The feathers on these parts are glistening and smooth like an enamelled surface. The remaining under parts, wings and tail are velvety black.

The female is almost uniformly greenish blue, but the plumage is normal and lacks the high gloss of the blue feathers in the male.

Total length, about 10.25 in. ; wing, 5 in.

The fairy bluebird is common in old forest in the lowlands of the Peninsula, but at times, when certain trees are fruiting, it is tempted into areas of secondary growth. Its beautiful clear notes are still to be heard in the more wooded and secluded parts of Singapore Island.

In the northern half of Peninsular Siam the present form is replaced by the Indian subspecies *Irena p. puella*, which differs chiefly in that the under tail coverts are shorter, not coming within an inch of the tip of the tail. In the southern part of Peninsular Siam and in the Langkawi Islands, etc., the species is unstable, and intermediates between the two races occur.

The nest of the northern subspecies is reported from the mainland near Junk Zeylon and is described as carelessly made of dry twigs, placed in the fork of a sapling in thin jungle. The nest and eggs of the southern subspecies have not been recorded.