

STARLINGS

Family STURNIDÆ

Vol. I., p. 282.

STRUCTURALLY the true starlings differ only in minor points from the tree-starlings. The former have no rictal bristles at the gape, and the tongue is rather less fleshy. In habits, birds of the two families are, typically, rather different, many of the starlings being migratory. The true starlings are also much less arboreal and more terrestrial in their mode of living, and the eggs are usually unspotted. The plumage of young birds is streaked. Starlings are found in most parts of the Old World, but although there are many Oriental forms, the family is poorly represented in the Malay Peninsula by five species. One of these was dealt with in Vol. I. As two of the others are migrants and the third is an open-country bird, none is dealt with in detail in the present volume.

KEY TO THE MALAYAN STARLINGS

(Including introduced species)

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|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | { | Crown, bright yellow | <i>Ampeliceps coronatus</i> , p. 365 |
| | | Crown, white or grey | 2 |
| | | Crown, black (brown in young birds) | 4 |
| 2 | { | Back, deep black (bronzy brown in young birds), glossed with violet | <i>Sturnia sturnina</i> , p. 364 |
| | | Back, pale grey to grey-black | 3 |
| 3 | { | Under parts, pure white | <i>Gracupica melanoptera</i> , p. 365 |
| | | Breast, dull pink | <i>Gracupica leucocephala</i> , p. 365 |
| | | Breast, pearl-grey | <i>Sturnia sinensis</i> , p. 364 |
| 4 | { | General appearance pinkish chocolate with a black head | <i>Acridotheres tristis tristis</i> , p. 365 |
| | | General appearance grey or grey-brown with a black crown | 5 |
| 5 | { | Greyer above; bill entirely yellow | <i>Æthiopsar grandis javanicus</i> , p. 366 |
| | | Browner above; bill, yellow with a bluish base | <i>Æthiopsar fuscus torquatus</i> , p. 364 |

*Æthiopsar fuscus torquatus***The Buffalo-Mynah**

Vol. I., p. 282, pl. 25 (*lower figure*).

Adults have the top of the head glossy black, the upper parts greyish brown, and the tail black, tipped with white on the outer feathers. The wings are brown, with a large white patch at the base of the black primaries. The under parts are grey, darkest on the throat and turning to creamy white on the centre of the abdomen and on the under tail coverts. The bill is bright yellow with a narrow bluish base. Young birds lack the glossy black crown, and are browner and less grey in general colour than adults. They are also more extensively white below.

Total length, about 9 in. ; wing, 4·6 in.

This mynah is common in the northern parts of the Peninsula, but in the extreme south it is unknown, and even in the northern Malay States the distribution is very local.

It is normally an open-country bird, usually seen associated with grazing buffalo and cattle. Since the publication of the first volume of this work Mr A. T. Edgar has published a detailed account of the bird in Lower Perak (*Bull. Raff. Mus.*, 8, 1933, p. 154). According to Mr Edgar, the nesting season is from February to May, and a favourite site for the nest of grass, fibre, twigs, etc., is in the crown of a coconut-palm, although nests were also located in holes in trees from eighteen to twenty feet from the ground. The three to five unspotted, beautiful greenish-blue eggs measure about 1·0 by 0·8 in.

According to the experience of Messrs V. W. Ryves and G. C. Madoc the breeding season in Selangor is from April to September (young). Mr Madoc has seen the nest in the tiled roof of a house.

*Sturnia sinensis***The Chinese Starling**

In the adult the back and breast are pale grey, the forehead, throat, rump, abdomen and wing coverts are white, and the wing and tail quills are black, the latter broadly tipped with white. Often the head and flanks are tinged with pinkish chestnut. Young birds are duller and less decisively marked.

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

A migrant from the north, occurring in large flocks in open country in the winter months.

*Sturnia sturnina***The Daurian Starling**

In adults the head and breast are pale pearl-grey, lightening to pure white on the abdomen. The upper parts are deep black glossed with green and violet, and usually with a whitish rump. There is a narrow white bar across

the wing coverts. On the nape there is an indistinct black patch. Young birds lack the glossy black in the plumage, and in general appearance are not unlike adults of the preceding species, from which, however, they can be at once separated by the absence of the broad white tips to the tail feathers, although the outermost feather on each side is edged with white.

Size roughly as in the last-named species.

A common winter visitor from the north, often occurring in mixed flocks with the Chinese starling, even in gardens in the centre of Singapore.

Ampeliceps coronatus

The Gold-crested Mynah

In appearance this mynah is striking and unmistakable. The whole plumage is glossy black except for the top of the head, the throat, and a big patch on the wing quills, which are bright yellow.

Total length, about 8.5 in. ; wing, about 5 in. or rather less.

Occurs only in Peninsular Siam, where it is common at least as far south as Trang.

Acridotheres tristis tristis

The Common Mynah

Adults have the head, upper breast, tail and primaries, black ; a patch at the base of the primaries, the under tail coverts and the tips of the tail feathers, white, and the remainder of the plumage, pinkish brown.

I doubt if this mynah is indigenous any farther south than Peninsular Siam, and regard records of birds from the Malay States as based on escaped cage-birds or their descendants. There are a few pairs on Penang and Singapore Islands.

INTRODUCED SPECIES

In addition to the indigenous starlings certain other forms have been introduced into the Malay Peninsula, but their range is at present very local and they are not well established. It would be a pity if they were allowed to multiply and oust the native species.

Hume's Mynah (*Gracupica leucocephala*) has been recorded as breeding in Perak, but I do not believe that the local stock is indigenous. It is a native of Tenasserim, Siam and the southern part of French Indo-China. The species is distinctive in appearance. The back, wings and tail are dark grey, almost black, the wings with a large white patch at the base of the primaries and the tail feathers with broad white tips. The head is white, the rump is pale rust-colour and the under parts are pale dull pink.

The Javan Mynah (*Gracupica melanoptera*) has been shot in Singapore from time to time, but seems not to have established itself. One specimen in the Raffles Museum was killed from a flock of similar birds. In appearance this species is much like *Gracupica leucocephala* described above, but the under

parts are white, the conspicuous patch of bare skin round the eye is yellow, not black, and the back is usually of a much paler grey. It is native to Java and Bali.

The Javan Jungle-Mynah (*Æthiopsar grandis javanicus*) is another introduced species of which a few pairs have established themselves on Singapore Island. In general appearance it is so like the buffalo-mynah (*A. fuscus torquatus*) that the two birds can easily be confused, but the present species is rather less brown and more grey in the general tone of the plumage and it has the bill entirely yellow and without the narrow bluish base.