THE BIRDS OF THE MALAY PENINSULA
H.C. ROBINSON & F.N. CHASEN

VOL. III
SPORTING BIRDS; BIRDS OF THE SHORE AND ESTUARIES
THE BIRDS
OF THE
MALAY PENINSULA

A GENERAL ACCOUNT OF THE BIRDS
INHABITING THE REGION FROM THE
ISTHMUS OF KRA TO SINGAPORE WITH
THE ADJACENT ISLANDS

By

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VOLUME III: SPORTING BIRDS; BIRDS OF THE
SHORE AND ESTUARIES

WITH TWENTY-FIVE FULL-PAGE PLATES
IN COLOUR

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PREFACE

After Mr H. C. Robinson's death in 1929 no material actually intended for the present volume could, contrary to expectation, be found, but there have passed to me, among other papers by him, carefully prepared manuscripts dealing with some of the relevant groups of birds, but obviously intended for a more systematic and exhaustive work on the avifauna of the Malay Peninsula than the present series of volumes. The fullest use has been made of these manuscripts in this volume, in which I have made every effort to maintain the plan of the two already published, even to the extent of retaining certain items of classification and nomenclature against my personal inclination, for I have considered it unwise to make changes half-way through the work.

I am conscious that this fasciculus and the two as yet unpublished volumes, for which I shall be responsible, may not attain to the high standard of those produced by H. C. Robinson, for as one who is perhaps in a better position to judge than many, I have always considered my predecessor's two volumes as reaching a standard of accuracy and originality rare in modern ornithological publications.

While making no excuses for the shortcomings in my own work, I feel that I have been peculiarly unfortunate in that I have had first to deal with the sea-fowl and migratory shore-birds, and especially the larger herons and storks, for although these birds early attracted me, none of us has paid marked attention to them in the Malay Peninsula, where there have always been, superficially at least, more attractive paths to follow, such as the study of mountain faunas and interesting indigenous species.

Regrettable though it has been, I feel that no apology is needed for the long delay between the appearance of this and the last volume published. Robinson's death is, of course, the primary cause, and publication is only one of the many things retarded on account of the recent financial depression in the Federated Malay States.

My best thanks are due to Mr N. B. Kinnear of the British Museum of Natural History for help rendered during the preparation of this volume.

F. N. CHASEN.

SINGAPORE,

1st May 1935.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF PLATES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEOGRAPHY</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FAMILIES</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SPECIES</td>
<td>1–247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL INDEX</td>
<td>249–261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX TO NATIVE NAMES</td>
<td>263–264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF PLATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><em>Rhizothera longirostris longirostris</em> (Temm.)&lt;br&gt;The Long-billed Partridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><em>Tropicoperdix charloni charloni</em> (Eyton)&lt;br&gt;The Malayan Chestnut-breasted Tree-Partridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td><em>Rollulus roureol</em> (Scop.)&lt;br&gt;The Crested Green Wood-Quail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td><em>Melanoperdix nigra nigra</em> (Vig.)&lt;br&gt;The Malayan Black Wood-Partridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td><em>Treron curvirostra curvirostra</em> (Gmel.)&lt;br&gt;The Southern Lesser Thick-billed Green Pigeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td><em>Treron bicincta praetermissa</em> (Rob. and Kloss)&lt;br&gt;The Orange-breasted Green Pigeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td><em>Ducula aenea aenea</em> (Linn.)&lt;br&gt;The Green Imperial Pigeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td><em>Myristicivora bicolor bicolor</em> (Scop.)&lt;br&gt;The Pied Imperial Pigeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td><em>Poliolimnas cinereus cinereus</em> (Vieill.)&lt;br&gt;The Grey-bellied Crake (left)&lt;br&gt;<em>Limnobdirnus paykulli</em> (Ljungh)&lt;br&gt;The Chinese Banded Crake (right)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td><em>Oceanodroma leucorhoa monorhis</em> (Swinh.)&lt;br&gt;Swinhoe's Petrel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td><em>Stern a sumatrana sumatrana</em> Raffles&lt;br&gt;The Black-naped Tern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td><em>Charadrius mongolus atrifrons</em>, Wagl.&lt;br&gt;The Small Sand-Plover (upper)&lt;br&gt;<em>Charadrius leschenaulti leschenaulti</em>, Less.&lt;br&gt;The Large Sand-Plover (lower)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facing page xi
LIST OF PLATES

Plate 14. Charadrius peroni, Schleg. . . . Facing page 134
The Malay Plover

15. Tringa guttifer (Nord.) . . . "" "" 150
Armstrong's Sandpiper

16. Tail-feathers of—
   (1) Capella gallinago gallinago (Linn.)
       The Common or Fantail Snipe
   (2) Capella megala (Swinh.)
       The Chinese or Swinhoe's Snipe
   (3) Capella stenura (Bonap.)
       The Pintail Snipe

17. Rostratula benghalensis benghalensis (Linn.) . "" "" 173
The Painted Snipe

18. Demiegretta sacra sacra (Gmel.) . . "" "" 186
The Eastern Reef-Heron

19. Gorsachius melanolophus melanolophus (Raffles) . "" "" 190
The Malay Bittern or Malay Tiger-Bittern

20. Ixobrychus eurhythmus (Swinh.)
    Schrenck's Bittern (upper)
    Ixobrychus cinnamomeus (Gmel.)
    The Chestnut Bittern (lower)

21. Ibis leucocephalus (Penn.) . . . "" "" 204
The Painted Stork, Pelican-Ibis, or Asiatic
    Wood-Ibis

22. Thaumatibis gigantea (Oust.) . . . "" "" 215
The Giant Ibis

23. Nettapus coromandelianus coromandelianus (Gmel.) . "" "" 226
The Cotton Teal

24. Fregata andrewsi, Mathews . . . "" "" 232
The Christmas Island Frigate Bird

25. Anhinga rufa melanogaster, Penn. . . . "" "" 244
The Indian Darter or Snake Bird
GEOGRAPHY

The area with which this work is concerned is the Malay Peninsula in its widest sense, from the Isthmus of Kra and the Pakchan estuary on the north, to Cape Roumania, in Johore, on the south, the southernmost extremity of the Asiatic continent. The islands adjacent to the Peninsula are also included.

The area is a natural but not a political unit, the greater portion forming part of the British Empire, either as the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements, the Protectorate of the Federated Malay States, or the rather more loosely attached states, the suzerainty over which passed to Great Britain by the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, and by later treaties entered into with these states individually. These states are collectively known as the Unfederated Malay States.

The northern third of the Malay Peninsula forms part of the kingdom of Siam.

I. THE CROWN COLONY OF THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS

(A) SINGAPORE

Singapore is an island at the southern extremity of the Malay Peninsula, commanding the ocean route from Europe and India to China, and within a hundred miles of the Equator. It is roughly diamond-shaped, with a length east and west of about twenty-two miles, and a breadth north and south of fourteen, and an area of 217 square miles.

The coastal districts of Singapore are flat, much of them having once been swamp, and to the north and west there is a good deal of mangrove; to the east and in the south there are short stretches of sand. The interior is undulating land, and there are numerous low hills, rising to a maximum elevation of about 500 ft.

Although reasonably good snipe and pigeon shooting was to be had on the island, there is now little to attract the sportsman. A few acres of forest still exist on the higher ground in the interior, but the island has mostly been cleared of its original forest for the purpose of rubber-growing, other agricultural pursuits and military purposes. The shore-shooting seems always to have been poor, and wading birds are never really common, a condition probably due to the absence of extensive mud-flats. Occasional congregations of plovers and sandpipers may be observed on the exposed coral reefs south of the island.
(B) PENANG

Penang, situated on the west coast of the Peninsula, in lat. 5° 20' N., about three hundred and fifty miles from Singapore, is a mountainous island, in area rather over 100 square miles, or slightly smaller than the Isle of Wight. It is separated from the mainland by a shallow strait about four miles wide and much encumbered by mudbanks. On the south and west there are considerable areas of flat, alluvial land devoted to the cultivation of coconuts and rice, but the core of the island is steep and mountainous, composed of granite, and rising, in several peaks, to an altitude of over 2700 ft. Originally the island was covered with heavy forest, but much has been cleared and devoted to cultivation of various kinds. A fair amount of original jungle still remains on the crests of the hills and at the north-west corner of the island.

Although the museums of Europe contain much material from Penang, our knowledge of its fauna is by no means exact, and many birds attributed to the island have, in all probability, never really been found there. Our knowledge of the shore-birds visiting Penang is very scanty, and an interesting field of work is, therefore, still open to the ornithologist who is prepared to devote the leisure time of years to the subject.

The study of the sea-birds frequenting Pulau Perak, an isolated and barren rock some seventy miles from Penang on the direct course to Ceylon, may be commended to his notice.

(C) PROVINCE WELLESLEY

Province Wellesley is a strip of land from ten to fifteen miles deep, on the coast of the Peninsula facing Penang, with an area of 280 square miles. The country is mainly flat alluvial land, though there are hills on the eastern and southern border. Little original forest remains. In the period 1840-1870, however, not a few collections were made there, and many of the specimens attributed to Penang were really from this province.

(D) THE DINDINGS

Administratively part of the settlement of Penang, but separated from Province Wellesley by the whole of the coast-line of the state of Perak, the Dindings consist of two large islands, Pulau Pangkor and Pulau Pangkor Kechil, a group of islands off the estuary of the Perak river, known as the Pulau Sembilan or Nine Islands; an isolated island, Pulau Jarak, in the middle of the Straits of Malacca, and a strip of mainland running north from Pangkor, with a total area of about 180 square miles.

The birds have not been exhaustively studied, but are fairly well known. The avifauna of Pangkor is of special interest as including in its members the Argus pheasant, not known on any of the larger islands.

1 Since the above was written the Dindings have been ceded to Perak and are, therefore, no longer part of the Straits Settlements.
The Sembilan Islands—all quite small and rocky, though covered with jungle and scrub—are a halting-place for multitudes of birds during the migration season from October to December. The same may be said of Pulau Jarak, where also the Nicobar pigeon (*Caloenas nicobarica*), unknown on the mainland of Malaya, breeds.

Mr A. T. Edgar has recently obtained much valuable information about the shore-birds visiting the Dindings, which is a favourable locality for collecting.

**(E) MALACCA**

The territory of Malacca, the largest of the settlements comprising the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements, lies between the Protected State of Johore and the Federated Malay State of Negri Sembilan on the west coast of the Peninsula, with a coast-line of somewhat over forty miles. Malacca itself is some hundred and twenty miles by sea from Singapore. The site of an historic Malay sultanate—and then one of the great emporia of trade in the Far East—Malacca was conquered by D'Albuquerque in 1511, and remained under the Portuguese flag until 1650, when it passed to the Dutch, and finally became British in 1824. Malacca has given its name to the whole Peninsula, and even now has in many quarters, especially on the Continent, a far wider significance than in strict accuracy the size of the town or settlement justifies.

The settlement is of special interest to the ornithologist as being the country from which nearly all specimens of Malayan birds originally reached Europe, and as being, therefore, the *terra typica* of very many species.

There is still a certain amount of jungle in the settlement, which has an area of some 720 square miles, and a good many plains and low hills, covered, in part, with lalang grass and secondary scrub.

**II. THE FEDERATED MALAY STATES**

**(A) PERAK**

The Malay State of Perak, the senior of the Federated Malay States, lies entirely on the western side of the Peninsula.

Briefly it comprises, since the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909, the whole drainage basin of the Perak, and parts of the Krian river to the north, and the Bernam to the south, and has an area of about 8000 square miles.

The coast of the state is flat alluvial land fringed with mangrove forest, and fronted by islands of similar character intersected by fairly deep water channels, but to seaward there is a broad and very shallow bank of mud and sand. The birds of the mountains in the interior have been investigated in considerable detail, but, as in the case of all the Malay States, little is known about the visiting wader-birds.

**(B) SELANGOR**

Selangor is the state south of Perak, with an area of about 3100 square miles. It is watered by four principal rivers—the Bernam, forming the Perak boundary, the Selangor, the Klang and the Langat.