

POSTILLA

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NOTES ON INDIAN BIRDS III BIRDS FROM ASSAM

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I have recently been checking over specimens of birds from Assam, some kindly presented to me by Mr. Salim Ali, and others recorded by me on a recent survey for the Assam Government. The following notes appear worthy of setting down here.

Alcippe rufogularis

Comparison of a freshly-collected specimen of the Red-throated Tit-babbler from Gabru, Belsiri River, north Assam, on the edge of the Bhutan Duars (type locality of *rufogularis*), with a fresh specimen from Tezu, near Sadiya in the Mishmi Hills, shows that there are two races of this species as follows:

1. *Alcippe rufogularis rufogularis* Mandelli (type locality Bhutan Duars).

Characters: brown above and paler, more gray below.

Range: Bhutan Duars and northern Assam north of the Brahmaputra east presumably to the Dihang.

2. *Alcippe rufogularis collaris* Walden (type locality Sadiya).

Characters: much darker on the crown and rufescent on the back. Flanks more heavily washed with brown.

Range: northern Assam east of the Brahmaputra and Dihang, south to Manipur.

Only fresh specimens of this species are worth comparing, as is the case with some other members of the genus. I am most grateful to Mr. H. B. Usher for help in comparing my material with the types and other specimens in the British Museum.

Parus major

I have examined thirteen fresh skins from Nepal, Bengal, and Assam as well as older skins borrowed with the courteous cooperation of the authorities concerned, from the U. S. National Museum and the American Museum of Natural History. I agree with Ticehurst (Jour. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 36, 1933, p. 921) that *nipalensis* differs from *cinereus* of Java by the greater amount of white on the second outer rectrix. On the mainland there appears to be a continuous cline in color with topotypical *nipalensis* from Nepal being somewhat paler on the back than birds from Bengal or Burma.

Birds from northern Assam have a much reduced area of white on the second outer rectrix, comparable in this respect to *cinereus*, but they differ from that form in being more suffused with grayish-smokey on the flanks. I, therefore, propose:

Parus major vauriei subsp. nov.

Type: ♂ ad. (Peabody Mus. Nat. Hist. Yale No. 9334), collected December 21, 1946, by S. Dillon Ripley at Chabua, Northeastern Assam.

Diagnosis: from *nipalensis* this race differs by having reduced white patches on the second outer rectrices and a darker smokier wash on the flanks. From *cinereus* this race differs by the smokier wash on the under surface. From *ambiguus* this race differs by having somewhat more white on the second outer rectrix and by being darker, smokier on the flanks. From *decolorans* it differs by smaller size.

Measurements of type: wing 59, tail 53.5, culmen 10.5, white area on second outer rectrix (measured on inner web) 9mm.

Range: Northeastern Assam. I have not been able to determine from fresh material the extent of the range of this form into central Assam. It is possibly another of the races which attain a climax of saturation in Lakhimpur.

Remarks: it gives me great pleasure to name this race for Dr. Charles Vaurie of New York, who has been most helpful with identifications on numerous occasions.

Two new races of *Sturnidae*

Sturnus contra sordidus subsp. nov.

Type: ♀ ad. (S. Dillon Ripley Coll. No. 1802, deposited in Peabody Mus. Nat. Hist. Yale), collected November 21, 1946, by Salim Ali at Sadiya, Northeastern Assam.

Diagnosis: from *contra contra* Linnaeus, described from "India" and hereby restricted to Calcutta, Bengal, this race differs by having the streaklets on the shoulders much reduced, and quite lacking on the nape. In color these streaklets are sepia rather than vinaceous or drab. This race also differs from *contra* in the much darker underparts which are deep vinaceous-drab in tone. The thighs also are streaked with black rather than dark brown as in the nominate race.

From *superciliaris* and *floweri* this race differs as does *contra*, in not having the forehead streaked with white, in lacking the broad supercilium of those races, and in being very dark on the back.

Measurements of type: wing 120, tail 71, bill (from skull) 32.

Range: Northern Assam from Dibrugarh and Margherita north to the foothills around the Brahmaputra gorges and east through the Lohit Valley. North Cachar birds are somewhat intermediate, showing a cline in coloration between *contra* and *sordidus*, but are better placed in *contra*.

Remarks: Whistler (Jour. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 36, 1933, p. 725) expresses doubt about the race *dehrae* Baker, set up for the more western and southern population of this starling in India. I agree with him after having examined freshly-collected Indian specimens from Nepal and Central India, and suggest that *dehrae* be made a synonym of *contra*.

Acridotheres cristatellus fumidus subsp. nov.

Type: ♂ ad. (S. Dillon Ripley Coll. No. 1803, deposited in Peabody Mus. Nat. Hist. Yale), collected November 21, 1946, by Salim Ali at Sadiya, Northeastern Assam.

Diagnosis: from *fuscus* (restricted to east Bengal by Baker) this race differs by being darker, more sooty on the upper parts particularly on the rump, and darker, more smokey on the abdomen and belly. In *fuscus* this area is pinkish-ashy; in *fumidus* the pale color is much reduced in area in most specimens, and darker in tone. The thigh coverts also are blackish rather than dark vinaceous-gray as in the nominate form.

From *grandis* this race differs in the color of the bill and in the darker plumage.

Range: Assam in north Cachar and north to Lakhimpur and the Mishmi Hills.

Remarks: there is some variation in the extent of the color of the underparts in this form, but none are as pale on the abdomen as Indian specimens. The literature on this species is extensive and somewhat confusing. Much remains to be learned about the relationship of the species and its sibling, *albocinctus* in Burma.

N.B.: Previous notes in this series appeared in JOURNAL BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY 47, No. 4, August 1948, and ZOOLOGICA 33, pt. 4, December 1948.