

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON BIRD-LIFE OF THE MIDDLE ME PING.

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The Middle Me Ping, embracing the famed Rapids, seems to have been all but completely neglected by students of Siam's ornithology. That this part of the Kingdom is not without considerable importance from the distributional point of view is evident from the fact that the northernmost rapid constitutes part of the southern boundary of the zoo-geographical division known as North Siam, while the river itself, from this point south to Raheng, divides Western from Central Siam. The three areas come together a short distance below the village of Mu't Ka (มู้ด กา).

The writer made a hurried trip down the river during the winter holidays of 1935, embarking at Chom Tong, 19 December, and finally leaving boat-travel behind at Raheng, 29 December. From this place return was made to Chiangmai by motorcar and train, *via* Sukhotai-tani and Bandara Junction. So far as limited boat-space and the exigencies of time permitted, birds of especial interest were collected *en route*, but it was unfortunately not at all possible to make a general collection of the avifauna of the interesting regions traversed. However, an excellent opportunity was afforded to observe the approximate limits of distribution of certain species, and, as might be expected, some forms were met with which have rarely or never been previously recorded from Siam.

Between Chom Tong and Mu't Ka there occur numerous marshes and swamps of greater or less extent, on either bank of the river and distant from it a few hundred metres to several kilometres. Practically all of these were visited, but only the largest still had open water at this season. On the marsh near Ban Nong Khiet (บ้านหนองเข็ชด) were found about one hundred Whistling-Teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*), a dozen Cotton-Teal (*Cheniscus coromandelianus*), and one female Pochard (apparently *Nyroca baeri*), which was taken. Here the Purple Coot (*Porphyrio poliocephalus poliocephalus*) was abundant and conspicuous, as were also the two species of Jacanas. At Nong Luang (near Ban Ta Nong Luang [บ้านตำหนองหลวม]), visited 21 December, were a flock of more than one thousand

Whistling-Teal and a group of three Pochard (species not ascertained). Also present were a Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), which seems not to have been previously recorded from North Siam, and a small number of Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*). As this marsh approached the proportions of a small lake and no boats were available, nothing was collected here. On 23 December, on a lagoon just behind the river bank opposite the village of Ban En (บ้าน เอน) was found a Brahminy-Duck (*Casarca ferruginea*), a species only once before recorded from Siam. The bird flew onto a near-by sand-bar devoid of vegetation and was too alert to be taken.

An Osprey (*Pandion haliaëtus haliaëtus*) was noted the same day on some cliffs just north of Ban Mu't Ka; this bird is very rare in North Siam, but became not uncommon on the river between the southern mouth of the Gorges and Raheng. By far the most numerous raptor of the river was the Brahminy-Kite (*Haliastur indus intermedius*), although it only occurred north and south of the Gorges and not within them. The Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus calidus*) was seen flying about high crags in the Rapids, and between Ban Ta Pui (บ้าน ต่ำ ฝ้าย) and Ban Mai Ngam (บ้าน ไม้ ราม) no less than four were noted, two of which were collected.

Shore-birds were numerous on all the sand-bars, but in the Gorges only three species were represented—the Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*), the Red-wattled Lapwing (*Lobivanellus indicus atronuchalis*), and the Spur-winged Plover (*Hoplopterus duvaucelii*). The last named is without doubt the most abundant bird on the river through this area; it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that every bar and sandy beach has its pair, if not a flock.

The Milky Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*) was seen only once in North Siam, at Ban Sop Huai Khieu (บ้าน สบ ห้วย เขี้ยว) on 20 December, but was rather common between Raheng and the southern mouth of the Gorges.

Hérons of five or six well known species were numerous on the river except in the Rapids, where only the Paddy-bird (*Ardeola* sp.) was seen. While possessed of doubtful scientific value, it may be not uninteresting to record that somewhere between Ban Ta Pui

and Raheng was seen an individual of the Large Egret (*Casmerodius albus modestus*), which had survived the remarkable injury of being spitted on a long bamboo stick. This stick, which had entered the body at an angle of about forty-five degrees, extended some five inches out of the centre of the bird's back and about the same distance out of the abdomen. That it was not an optical illusion was shown by the fact that, even during flight, the stick retained its position relative to the bird's body. There was no apparent inconvenience to the victim, although the end protruding from the belly would doubtless make copulation impossible. The stick may well have been an arrow of the type used with the cross-bow.

At Ban Ta Pui, a short distance south of the Rapids, Terns were first seen, and thence to Raheng were very conspicuous. They are known to the river men as *leu kin pla* (เลอกินปลา) "fish-eating Hawks," and two species are distinguished. The Black-bellied Tern (*Sterna melanogaster*) and the Indian River-Tern (*S. aurantia*) seemed to be equally numerous; of the latter two specimens were taken. All Terns appeared to be in nuptial plumage.

Kingfishers were to be seen everywhere. The White-breasted and the Common Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis fusca* and *Alcedo atthis bengalensis*) were abundant in the Gorges as well as both north and south of them. The Stork-billed Kingfisher (*Ramphalcyon capensis burmanica*) was uncommon north of the Rapids, very common in them, and entirely absent below them. The Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis leucomelanura*) abounded until the northernmost rapid was reached, then was not seen again until the mouth of the Gorges was attained at Tala Luang (ตะลาลูวง), whence it was once more abundant as far as Raheng. The Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) was found only in the wildest parts of the Rapids, and then but two birds were seen. In North Siam this species is rare and confined to uninhabited areas, where it is very shy.

In the Gorges there is little space for birds which do not fancy precipitous slopes, and as a result non-aquatic forms are comparatively scarce there. In the belt of tall bamboo which edges the river, such door-yard species as the Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*

sularis) and Blanford's Bulbul (*Pycnonotus blanfordi blanfordi*) were common even in the wildest places, as were certain of the common small Babblers, such as *Mixornis*. Nothing was seen of *Cursonia*, which might be expected to occur on these limestone slopes.

Daurian Swallows (*Hirundo daurica* subsp.) were very common over the river north of the Rapids. But in the Gorges, from the first rapid to the last, the dominant Swallow was the Wire-tailed (*Hirundo smithii filifera*), flying in pairs or small parties over the sand-bars. Of this species, hitherto unrecorded from Siam, several specimens were taken. Also in the Gorges was encountered a small group of Crag-Martins (presumably *Krimnochelidon concolor sitaungensis*). South of the Rapids the Common Swallow (*Hirundo rustica gutturalis*) became abundant and small numbers of Sand-Martins (*Riparia paludicola brevicaudata*) were found almost to Raheng.

No Starlings occurred within the Gorges, and only the Black-necked (*Gracupica nigricollis*) and the Siamese (*Aethiopsar grandis grandis*) were found to be equally numerous both north and south of them. The House-Mynah (*Acridotheres tristis tristis*), abundant at Chom Tong and again at Raheng, was noted only thrice between these towns—two at Ban Ta Tan (บ้าน ต้า ทาน) and a small number at Ban Wang Lung (บ้าน วัง ลุง), both north of the Rapids; and a few at Ban Na (บ้าน นา), just south of them. The White-headed Mynah (*Gracupica leucocephala leucocephala*) and the Chinese Mynah (*Sturnia buffoniana*), two species unknown in North Siam, were first met with between Ban Ta Pui and Ban Sam Ngao (บ้าน สาม เถา), feeding on islands together with several other species of the family.

The Tree-Sparrow (*Passer montanus malaccensis*) was not observed at all until Raheng was reached, and there it proved to be as common as is usual in Siamese towns. The Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Otocompsa jocosa erythrotis*), abundant in the North, was found only at an island near Ban Sam Ngao; elsewhere its place as a door-yard bird was usurped by its near relative, the Yellow Bulbul (*Otocompsa flaviventris flaviventris*).

A few miscellaneous records seem worthy of mention. On 27 December a single specimen of the Forest-Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) was found near Ban Sam Ngao. A specimen of the Red-spotted Blue-throat (*Cyanosylvia suecica robusta*) was taken 28 December at Ban Mai Ngam, near Raheng, and at the same time and place the Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola rusticola*) was seen. Two specimens of a White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher (*Leucocirca aureola* subsp.) were collected in tall deciduous jungle (ป่าแดง) at a point 42 kilometres east of Raheng, 29 December; in this country the species has been previously known only from South-west Siam. The Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus vociferus*) was found to be not uncommon in the open country west of Sukhotai and Sawankhalok, and one specimen was collected, 29 December.

