

THE OCCURENCE OF THE PIED STONECHAT
(*SAXICOLA CAPRATA BURMANICUS* STUART BAKER)
IN EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN THAILAND

by

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DEIGNAN (1945) describes the distribution of the Pied Stonechat, *Saxicola caprata burmanicus* as "On the open plains of Mae Hong Son, Chiangmai and Chiangrai Provinces". He also points out that "It is extraordinary that no form of the species has been recorded from the districts east of Khun Tan range, although the present race occurs again in the southern parts of Indochine". More recently, in his "Checklist of the Birds of Thailand" he gives the following localities: "The northern plateau (Chiangrai, Chaiya Prakan, Mae Hong Son, Chiangmai, Tak), the northwestern portion of the central plains (Kamphaeng Phet)." The present paper reports additional occurrences of this species from Northern, Eastern and Southeastern Thailand.

RILEY (1938) states that the species is found over the whole of Burma, Yunnan, Assam, South of Brahmaputra, Northern Siam, Cambodia, Cochinchina and Laos". I understand, however, that exact localities in Laos and Cambodia are not known. SMYTHIES (1953) states that the species is absent in Southern Tenasserim.

From my observations over the past ten years, this bird occurs in all areas of Northern Thailand mentioned by DEIGNAN. It occurs along the foothills at the base of the Thanon Thongchai Range (although occasionally found as high as 4,000 feet where I have collected several specimens from Huai Mae Sanam (Hawt, Chiangmai) at 4,500 feet, and through the open plains at the base of this range west to the Khun Tan range and as far south as Tak and Kamphaeng

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Phet. However, it is clear that the range of this species extends considerably beyond these areas.

The bird is also common on the open plains of Lampang and Lamphun Provinces. At Lamphun, only 25 kilometers south of Chiangmai, the species is frequently seen in the ricefields along the road to Pa Sang, Ban Hong and Li. At Lampang, it is common at least along the railways from Hang Chat Station to the vicinity of Amphoe Muang and along the roads radiating from that town. The species is less often seen in Ban Hong and Li (Lamphun Province), and Sop Plap and Thoen (Lampang Province) districts.

At the end of November 1958, while I was on a truck travelling north to Amphoe Pua (about 70 kilometers north of Nan Province), I saw several of these birds either in flight or perching on the telegraph line and bushes at Ban Muang Tai, about 45 kilometers north of Muang Nan. Unfortunately, I was unable to collect specimen.

At the end of May 1963, when riding on a jeep during a field trip near Chong Mek (Ubonrachathani, Easternmost Thailand), I saw a pied bird similar to this species. At the time, I thought the bird might be the common magpie robin (*Copsychus saularis*) and was surprised by its smaller size. A few days later, I saw many individuals perching on the telegraph line, open plains covered with lalang grass, bushes and in cultivate areas. Finally, two birds were collected on the morning of June 7th, 1963. Chong Mek is a district of Amphoe Phibunmangसान, 75 kilometers east of Ubonrachathani (often called Ubon), and only a few kilometers west of the Laos border. These birds were seen in an area about 50 kilometers west of Ubon along the road to Chong Mek and Laos (ending at Pakse, on the Mae Khong, about 60 kilometers east of Thai border). However, I failed to see this species in Laotian territory. The birds were most common only on the right side (south) of the road from Thailand to Laos, although some were also seen on the left side (north) of the road. This appears to be due to the differences in habitat on either side of the road. On the right side of the road (south) are open plains covered with lalang grass, ricefields, and cultivated areas in which water-melon is grown along with beans and sugar cane, etc. To the left side (north) of the



Fig. 1. Map showing the Distribution of *Saxicola caprata burmaicus* in Thailand.

road is the secondary forest, containing mainly *Streblus taxoides* and other related species.

The skin measurements of the two specimens described above are:—

Number	SMRL 2446	SMRL 2447
Wing length	61.1 mm.	64.5 mm.
Tail	52.5 mm.	51.5 mm.
Tarsus	18.2 mm.	18.4 mm.
Culmen	9.7 mm.	9.1 mm.

These two birds are juvenile males and are exactly alike except that SMRL 2446 has more brown spots on the occiput, hind neck and upper back. Both of them have the throat and cheeks streaked with brown mixed with black feathers. The other parts are like the adult male of this race.

When I visited this place again in August and November 1963, and again in January 1965, I failed to see this species in the places where the bird was common on the first trip. However, several birds were seen in the late April 1965. On each occasion, I spent about two weeks in that region.

Recently, while working at Aranyaprathet, Prachinburi, in the northern portion of Southeastern Thailand, close to the Cambodian border, I saw birds of this race flying and perching on the telegraph line and bushes at the roadside on several occasions and also in the open plains around the town. However, the birds were seen only on the northern side of the town. I had an opportunity to observe this bird closely along the railroad from Aranyaprathet to Bangkok on the morning of November 19, 1965. The birds were seen perching on the telegraph line, small trees and bushes, along the railroad as far as Nong Sang Station (about 80 kilometers west of Aranyaprathet, 200 kilometers east of Bangkok and about 20 kilometers east of Krabinburi). Nong Sang is a unique place, which I believe forms a natural barrier separating the central and southeastern parts of Thailand. KLOSS (1915) regards Prachinburi and its vicinity as in the central part of Thailand, a conclusion which I find difficult to accept. Some mammals and birds which I collected from Aranyaprathet are clearly close to the races found from Chantaburi. Further-

more, the drainage from Ban Nong Sang (or Nong Sang Station) spreads in two directions, east to Aranyaprathet and onward to the big lake of Cambodia, and west to Bangpakong River of the central plain and finally into the Gulf of Thailand. In my opinion, Nong Sang should be regarded as sharply dividing the two zoogeographical zones.

Absence of the birds at Chong Mek during the late rainy and winter seasons and their appearance at Aranyaprathet during the cold season would suggest migration (local migration?). The birds may breed at Chong Mek in the late summer or early rainy season and then migrate along the foothills of the Dong Rek Range, arriving at the open plains of Aranyaprathet in the winter. Further observation in these districts are required to confirm the hypothesis.

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