

## II. SIGHT OBSERVATIONS OF SOME SOUTH VIETNAMESE BIRDS

From November 1965 until November 1966 I was in the Republic South Vietnam. During this time hardly a day passed that I did not spend some time in the field observing birds. During the latter half of my stay I spent months at a time in the jungles of Central Annam. For various reasons I was unable to collect specimens, however I carried with me at all times 9×35 binoculars and obtained excellent views of all species on which definite identification was made. I had several reference books containing illustrations and descriptions of nearly all species found in southeast Asia. In addition I communicated with members of the Department of Birds of the United States National Museum to whom I frequently sent descriptions and sketches and from whom I received assistance in identification.

When a bird's identity was not immediately apparent to me I recorded a detailed description or made a field sketch with coloured pencils. At times my observation permitted me only to narrow the identification to a few similar species within a genus. In such instances I made notes of the distinguishing features, sought the bird where I had seen it before, and studied it for these features. None of the following accounts includes birds observed under less than ideal conditions in which critical distinguishing features could not be seen.

After returning to the United States I examined specimens of all species of birds in the United States National Museum known to occur in southeast Asia and compared these with my descriptions and sketches to confirm identifications.

Though the value of a specimen in removing doubts regarding sight identifications cannot be disputed, I feel that it would be unfortunate that observations made at a time when ornithological activity in Vietnam was practically nonexistent should be ignored for lack of specimens. I wish to offer some sight records that appear to be range extensions of some South Vietnamese species.

*Porzana bicolor* Walden—On the morning of 31 March 1966 I watched a rail feed along the edge of a grassy mountain marsh in the vicinity of Deo Mang Pass. It remained in sight for about ten minutes. It was

about 11 in. long with a conspicuous red bill, olive brown back and wings and a grey head and underparts. Since I was not familiar with the bird I sketched it in the field with coloured pencils. None of my texts were sufficiently descriptive to identify the bird with certainty, but I narrowed the identification down to the present species or *Amaurornis akool* which fits the same general description. After returning to the United States I compared the sketch with specimens of both species and noted that *A. akool* was a darker brown with more extensive brown above, whereas the colour and pattern of the present species was identical with that of the sketch.

*Mirafra assamica* Horsfield—two species of this genus were observed in Quang Ngai. The commoner, *M. javanica*, which was seen on many occasions between 28 November 1965 and 6 March 1966 had white outer tail feathers and indistinct rufous on the wings in flight. On 11 February 1966 among a flock of these I saw a different lark with brownish outer tail feathers and a much more distinct rufous patch in the wings corresponding exactly in these features to the present species.

*Corvus torquatus* Lesson—On 23 February 1966 a distinctive crow was seen near the coast east of Quang Ngai. Unlike the common *C. macro-rhynchus* which was seen almost daily, this bird had a large white patch extending from the mantle down the sides of the neck. Though none of my texts described such a bird I suspected that it was this species, since it was the only other one likely in the area. I asked Richard Zusi of the United States National Museum to send me a sketch of the species. His sketch match exactly the pattern of the bird I had seen. This crow is so distinctive there could be no doubt of its identify.

*Parus major* Linne—This species was observed in Da Nang on 1 and 2 January 1966. The birds seen had greyish backs and buffy breasts. The only other species which resembles this in Vietnam, *P. monticola*, has a greenish back, yellow breast and a double wingbar. Furthermore, the latter is a bird of higher elevations, while these were observed at sea level.

*Seicercus burkii* (Burton)—At Plateau de Gi at about 3000ft elevation on 29 April 1966 I saw a new warbler that I recognized as belonging to this genus. It had yellow underparts and a yellow eyering. A detailed description made in the field was found to compare exactly with specimens.

*Abroscopus albogularis* (Horsfield & Moore)—This distinctive bird was seen at Plateau de Gi on 1 May 1966. The combination of black 'bib', rufous crown, eyebrow and cheeks renders it unmistakable when seen well. A detailed description made in the field matched specimens in every detail. Though several birds were seen they were seen only on this date.

*Phylloscopus subaffinis* Ogilvie-Grent—As spring migration gained momentum the confusing warblers of this genus became a vexing field problem. After the first day in which I saw numbers of warblers that I was unable to identify I prepared a key adapted from that in *Birds of Burma*, Smythies, Edinburgh 1953, and thereafter I carried the key in the field with me at all times. Only four members of this genus found in southeast Asia lack wingbars: in addition to the present species *P. fuscatus*, *P. armandii* and *P. schwarzi*. Of these four only two are olive above, *fuscatus* and *armandii* being distinctly brown above. The present species is more olive green while *schwarzi* is more olive brown. Furthermore, the present species is considerably more yellow below, while *schwarzi* is more buffy. At various times during spring migration I saw birds which I left were of this species in that they lacked wingbars, were olive-green above and yellowish below. But on only one occasion did I see a bird well enough to permit certain identification. This bird, observed from within ten feet, was in an area of scrub surrounded by dense jungle in Kon Tum Province, north of Kon Tum at an elevation of 2740ft.

*Phylloscopus ricketti* (Slater)—This species was observed repeatedly and in large numbers at Plateau de Gi every day I spent in the area (27 April to 1 May 1966). Its bright yellow underparts, yellow central crown streak bordered with black and black eyelines make this one of the most distinctive and recognizable of the genus. It was observed at the tops of tall trees in dense mountain forest.

*Muscicapa hainana* (Ogilvie-Grant)—Several birds of this species in both male and female plumages were noted in the vicinity of Plateau de Gi on 30 April and 1 May 1966. In the male plumage this is one of the more easily distinguished of the blue flycatchers. The male is blue above with a blue chin, throat and chest, but no rufous on the underparts.

Every other blue flycatcher in the region has some orange or rufous on the underparts. Likewise, females seen with the males corresponded exactly to the description of this species. They were brown above with a rufous breast and lacked the eyering that is present in the other similar females.

*Muscicapella hodgsoni* (Moore)—A pair of these flycatchers was observed at Plateau de Gi on 1 May 1966 from within a few feet. It was immediately apparent that, these birds were minute in comparison to other blue flycatchers, that had been seen in the area and comparison with other birds in the vicinity of known size enabled determination that they were about 4 in. in length. This is sufficiently smaller than the size of the nearest relatives to permit easy determination in the field. The male was blue above and pale orange below. The female was brownish above and yellowish below. In addition to the size, the bill was noticeably smaller and thinner than that of any *Muscicapa*, and its shrill high-pitched call was quite different from any of the other blue flycatchers.

*Nectarinia asiatica* (Latham)—From 27 March until 13 April 1966 this sunbird was seen frequently and appeared to be the commonest of its family in the vicinity of An Tuc. After leaving An Tuc for several weeks I did not record it again on my return. No other sunbird resembles the male in breeding plumage, which is entirely black with a purple gloss, so it appears unlikely that there could be any mistake in its identity.

*Emberiza fucata* Pallas—A flock of about a dozen of these birds was seen at An Tuc at about 2000ft elevation on 28 March 1966. The clearly observed chestnut ear coverts distinguish from all other members of its genus found in Vietnam.

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