

be based entirely on the feathering of the face and base of the bill. This difference, when contrasted with the overwhelming similarity of *fisheri* to the members of the genus *Somateria*, fades into insignificance. The genus *Somateria*, as presently understood, contains two species, *mollissima* and *spectabilis*, which are spectacularly different from one another in the structure and feathering of the facial region. Males of *mollissima* and *fisheri* are virtually identical in the color pattern of the body, while *spectabilis* has much more black in its plumage. The latter species also shows a greater development of the falcate tertials than does either *mollissima* or *fisheri*. The females and downy young of all three of these eiders are closely similar to one another in all respects except the feathering of the facial region, which reflects to a lesser degree the differences exhibited by the males. Judging from the literature, there seem to be no trenchant differences in reproductive habits or behavior between *fisheri* on the one hand and *mollissima* on the other. If we are to consider as congeneric such superficially diverse ducks as the Mallard, Gadwall, and Green-winged Teal, there is certainly no justification for the continued recognition of a monotypic genus for the Spectacled Eider. I therefore heartily endorse the recommendation of Delacour and Mayr (*Wilson Bull.*, 57: 33, 1945) that the Spectacled Eider be known henceforth as *Somateria fisheri* (Brandt).—KENNETH C. PARKES, *Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh 13, Pennsylvania*.

Some Comments on Vaurie's Revision of the Muscipapini.—Dr. Charles Vaurie's excellent monograph ("A Generic Revision of Flycatchers of the Tribe Muscipapini," 1953, *Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., Bull.*, 100: 445-538) has already been reviewed in 'The Auk' (1953, 70: 379-380), and it is not this writer's intention to write an additional review *in extenso*. Rather I would like to point out certain small aspects of the problem of the relationships and resulting classification of the group wherein I differ from Vaurie. These comments are offered partly because I am working on an Indian handlist involving many of the species listed.

One of the main difficulties in a revision of this kind is the end product, after all the pros and cons have been considered, of setting the generic limits within the group. Dr. Vaurie is to be congratulated for his study of the external morphology, his consideration of the value of various characters, whether morphological or behavioral, and his promising attempt to create order and to point to areas of closer relationship in this difficult aggregation of species.

In connection with his useful discussion of comparative habits, I wish that Dr. Vaurie had specified his sources of information. Many of the Muscipapini are rare and have been observed infrequently and by few observers. It is difficult, therefore, to be arbitrary about the habits of some of the species. For example, Dr. Vaurie (without citing his source) states on page 473 and again on page 512 that *Muscicapella hodgsoni*, which differs from other flycatchers in having a needle-like bill, in addition to being very small, behaves like "a leaf-warbler or *Regulus*" and it "is said to be gregarious and to flutter on bushes and in the lower trees searching for and taking insects from the leaves and twigs more often than it snaps them from the air." Dr. Vaurie goes on to say, "the habits of *Niltava*, discussed under that genus, vary, but its species do not behave like a leaf-warbler or a *Regulus*, as *hodgsoni* seems to do. *As a result of its habits* [italics are mine], *hodgsoni* has become very small and has developed a much longer tarsus and a very narrow and slender bill which, needle-like, is not hooked at the tip."

In spite of this avowed extraordinary difference, Dr. Vaurie has seen fit to throw *hodgsoni* into the genus *Niltava* although he feels that behavioral differences are important. I seriously question a statement such as the one I have italicized about

this little bird having become small as a result of its habits. I also question its habits as noted. Mr. Salim Ali, Dr. Walter Koelz, and I are, so far as I know, the only three field collectors who have seen this elusive little flycatcher in recent years. Mr. Ali (pers. comm.) tells me that he observed the bird fly to the ground, pick up an insect, flick its tail (like *Siphia parva* or *Muscicapa hyperythra*, both of which are put into the genus *Ficedula* by Vaurie) and fly back to its low branch in a thicket. I have seen the species in Nepal hunched on a low branch in a thicket, looking just like *M. hyperythra*.

As flycatchers will occasionally vary their usual behavior under the stress of circumstances, such as a sudden swarming of insects, and as no other observer has seen this species fluttering through the trees like a warbler, I suggest that this behavioral character is aberrant. I also suggest that the peculiar bill character of *hodgsoni*, its rarity, and the lack of observations in general about its life history or habits, make the conservative course of keeping it in a monotypic genus *Muscicapella* rather than submerging it in one genus or another arbitrarily, the better action. Dr. Vaurie has suggested that it is a subgenus of *Niltava*. According to his own professed criteria, I could arbitrarily suggest that it be a subgenus of *Ficedula*. After all, it does not fit his diagnosis of the genus *Niltava* in the first instance (p. 473) except that it is blue above and buffy below, a character shared with his other genera *Ficedula* and *Muscicapa*.

Following is an analysis of the characters assigned to the three genera by Vaurie:

	<i>Ficedula</i>	<i>Niltava</i>	<i>Muscicapa</i>
Size:	"small"	"medium to large" [but how about <i>hodgsoni</i> ?]	"small"
Tarsus:	"moderately long to long slender"	"relatively short, of medium thickness"	"short to very short, usually weak"
Bill:	"small"	"large" [but how about <i>hodgsoni</i> ?]	"variable"
Pattern and color- ation:	"variable but not streaked . . . with white on head and tail in about 2/3- 1/2 of species." [sic.]	"characteristic, not streaked and with blue and rufous marking, without white on head and, with one exception, without white on tail."	"dull, streaked or with indications of streaks, no white on head or tail, gray brown to blue gray or slate, one species rufous."
Habit:	"not truly arboreal with very few exceptions"	"variable, arboreal or in undergrowth"	"arboreal"
Song:	"usually varied or pleasing"	"all are said to be good singers" [On several species such as <i>hodgsoni</i> there are no observations!]	"poor singers"

On the basis of these variable characters, I feel that these composite genera cannot stand. They become meaningless as they are. The alternative, which seems more legitimate to my mind, would be to merge the majority of the species in *Muscicapap*, the oldest name, leaving a few well-marked or aberrant species in monotypic or small genera. By submerging a "mélange" of species in a few genera, I do not feel that the relationships (which ought to be the measure of the genus) are any better served. As Vaurie says (p. 496), he differs completely from Stresemann's arrangement based on wing formula (1912, *Novit. Zool.* 19: 323-330) which in Vaurie's opinion is not of equal value in the different groups of species. The characters listed by Vaurie may also be presumed to be of unequal value. Indeed, some aberrant forms such as *Siphia timorensis* are admitted by Vaurie to be not certainly flycatchers at all. The almost total lack of adequate field observations on most of these tropical species makes the use of behavioral characters in a taxonomic revision still seem relatively unimportant, or indeed at times specious.

A somewhat similar nomenclatorial situation is presented by Dr. Vaurie's treatment of some of the African species. *Bradornis* is characterized by the author as consisting of moderately large to large species with thick and relatively short tarsus, rounded wing, attenuated bill, and concealing drab coloration; "drops to the ground to feed"; usually silent. In this genus is included *Empidornis semipartitus* although that species is silvery gray above and bright orange brown below (hardly drab), has a not particularly attenuated bill, is medium to large in size without an impressively thick tarsus, has a tail which is differently shaped from the other species, and has a "pleasing musical song." However, in spite of these differences it is kept in *Bradornis* by Vaurie as a potential subgenus.

One of the few observations of *Empidornis* in the field is that of Lynes (1925, *Ibis*: 123) who notes that this species is a bird of open glades in woodland, rather than open bush country, that it has a sweet "turdine" song and might better be called a "Robin-flycatcher" (i.e. *Eriothacus*) than a flycatcher. He describes the nest and eggs as being very different from those of *Bradornis*. Without further contradictory information, the above seem to me sufficient reasons for recognizing the distinctness of the genus *Empidornis* for this aberrant species.

The species *Bradornis herero* is so little-known that it seems almost useless to comment on it, but I should like to suggest here that whether by convergence or relationship, it shows a distinct resemblance to the chat-like thrushes represented by *Erythropygia* and *Cercomela*.

The foregoing are intended as a series of precautionary comments on an excellent paper. Indeed the last word has by no means been said on the status and rank of members of this difficult group. I would certainly hope that Dr. Vaurie himself would at some time have an opportunity to pursue these studies in the field in Africa and Asia and gain personal observations on the habits and behavior of many of these provocative and little-known species.—S. DILLON RIPLEY, *Peabody Museum, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.*

Notes on Cowbird Parasitism on Four Species.—Little information appears to be available on the parasitism by the Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) of the Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icterus virens*), Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*), Redwing (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), and the Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). The following report briefly outlines the published records and my own observations for Cowbird parasitism in these host species.

The Yellow-breasted Chat.—Friedmann (*The Cowbirds*, 1929: 193) wrote: "The Robin, Catbird and Yellow-breasted Chat are examples of absolutely intolerant