

BIRD NOTES FROM WESTERN KWANGSI, CHINA

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The avifauna of western Kwangsi Province in China has never been adequately studied. Yen (Oiseau, 3, 1933:204-243, 615-638, 755-788; 4, 1934:24-51) and Yen and Chong (Oiseau, 7, 1937:546-553) have published fairly recent lists for this province but they state that they have not explored the area at the frontier of Yunnan which lies to the west. This paper concerns the birds of that little known region and serves to supplement previous lists. Three birds (*Elanus coeruleus*, *Upupa epops longirostris*, *Acridotheres grandis*) not previously reported from the province and notes of interest on others seen and collected are reported here.

From November 30, 1944, to July 20, 1945, I was stationed with a fighter control detachment of the Fourteenth Air Force near a town called Poseh on the West River. I was absent from the area only in the month of January and in a few days in July.

Poseh is approximately 25 miles north of the tropic of cancer, 500 miles west-northwest of Hong Kong, about 200 miles inland from the Gulf of Tonkin of the South China Sea, and about 75 miles north of the Indo-China border. The town is located at the head of navigation on the West River at about 600 feet above sea level. Mountains, which rise to 3000 feet, surround the town and valley. Downstream the valley fans out to become about five miles wide, but upstream from Poseh the river cuts precipitous cliffs through the mountainous country which is contiguous with that of Yunnan to the west and Kweichow to the north.

Like much of China the countryside has been nearly stripped of trees, but along the river are a few places which one might call forested. Bamboo, banana trees, an occasional banyan tree, and trees of the genus *Bombax* are constituents of this wooded area. Almost every available foot of the valley proper is honeycombed by rice paddies, which often extend up into the foothills of the mountains. The hills surrounding the valley are covered with grasses and in a few areas scattered pines (*Pinus sinensis*) remain. One finds occasional oases of trees along the tributaries of the river. Usually near houses at least two or three large trees have been spared to furnish shade during the hot season.

Seasonal fluctuation in temperature and amount of rainfall in the Poseh region is much more marked than it is along the Gulf of Tonkin where the tempering effect of the ocean is felt. From November to February the weather at Poseh was cool—50-60 degrees F.—during the day. At this season the rice paddies were dry. By the first of March, *Cercis chinensis* was in blossom and near the end of the month *Bombax* blossomed. At the beginning of May, the rainy season started and the farmers began planting rice. By the middle of June, the weather became very hot and humid.

Birds which wintered near Poseh departed for the north in March and the first part of April; those wintering south of the area passed through on their way north about the end of April and the first week in May. Nesting begins, for many species, about April 1 and continues to about the middle of June when the excessively hot season commences.

The avifauna of the Poseh region, as might be expected, has decided affinities with that of Tonkin, Indo-China, to the south (Delacour and Jabouille, Oiseau, 10, 1940:89-220) and of southeast Yunnan Province to the west (La Touche, A Handbook of the Birds of Eastern China, 1925-1934, 2 vols.). This may be illustrated by the presence of the following birds at Poseh: *Falco tinnunculus saturatus*, *Upupa epops longirostris*, *Artamus fuscus*, *Acridotheres grandis*, and *Dicrurus leucophaeus hapwoodi*. Other birds noted in the course of the breeding season are typical of the avifauna of southeastern China (La Touche, *op. cit.*). Examples of birds wintering at Poseh but which nest to the north of the region are *Circus melanoleucus*, *Saxicola torquata* and *Melophus lathami*.

An annotated list of birds seen and collected during my stay in the Poseh area is presented below. Those species preceded by an asterisk were collected and are now in the Cornell University Collection. Many thanks are due George Popovich, a member of our detachment, who collected many of the specimens, and to Dean Amadon and Kenneth C. Parkes for aid in their identification.

Ardeola bacchus. Chinese Pond Heron. On May 7 I saw one individual in the hills back of camp along a little tributary of the West River. This was the only individual seen near Poseh, but from the air it appeared common along the river 100 miles southeast.

Milvus lineatus. Black-eared Kite. From November 30 to December 24 kites were fairly common at Poseh but were not seen from February to July; they probably were winter visitants here.

Elanus coeruleus. Black-winged Kite. On March 27 and again on April 2 I saw one south of the fighter strip. It was perched on a telephone pole and was making short excursions out over the valley. Once the bird was seen to hover like a Kestrel for a few seconds. This bird has not previously been reported from Kwangsi.

Circus melanoleucus. Pied Harrier. One individual spent the cool months cruising back and forth over the fighter strip in search of food. The bird was first seen on November 30 and was last seen on April 11. Between these two dates I saw it almost daily. Yen (Oiseau, 3, 1933:237) collected one specimen at Yoaschan on May 7, 1931.

Circus aeruginosus. Marsh Harrier. In February a single individual hunted over the valley near the fighter strip. This species is probably a migrant here.

**Falco tinnunculus saturatus*. Kestrel. From November 30 to December 24 Kestrels hunted over the valley daily; later they were noticed less frequently. One female of this subspecies, collected on July 22 south of Poseh, had large grasshoppers in its stomach. The only record Yen (Oiseau, 3, 1933:230) cites is a pair of this species seen by Vaughn and Jones in the West River Valley.

Phasianus colchicus torquatus. Ring-necked Pheasant. I never saw this bird in the valley or in the hills surrounding Poseh, but 75 miles northwest near Anlung, Kweichow, I saw two males and a female along a five-mile stretch of road. This was in barren hilly country.

**Francolinus pintadeanus pintadeanus*. Chinese Francolin. This was a very common resident bird at Poseh. In November and December it was occasionally seen near the bases of the surrounding hills but later it seemed restricted to the hillsides. In April and May I frequently heard their calls which, to my ear, resembled the call of the California Quail (*Lophortyx californicus*). Popovich bought a live bird from a native on February 23 which was made up as a skin. This bird was a male with testes about 2×6 mm., iris brown, tarsus orange, bill grayish.

Tringa hypoleucos. Common Sandpiper. From November 30 to December 24 I saw a few individuals along the bank of the West River. Probably these were migrant birds.

Streptopelia orientalis. Rufous Turtle Dove. One individual inhabited the grove of trees surrounding a farmhouse near Poseh from November 30 to December 24.

Streptopelia chinensis. Chinese Spotted Dove. This species was a fairly common permanent resident and a favorite food at Chinese banquets.

**Centropus bengalensis lignator*. Lesser Crow-pheasant. On April 2 I saw one cross the road just south of Poseh. On May 25 Popovich collected a specimen near the fighter strip. It was a female with an egg in the oviduct and insects in its stomach.

Hirundoapus caudacutus. Spine-tailed Swift. On May 6 a flock of more than 50 swifts milled over camp for half an hour. They were probably of the migratory subspecies *caudacutus*.

Ceryle rudis. Chinese Pied Kingfisher. Along the river from November 30 to December 24 this kingfisher was fairly common.

**Halcyon smyrnensis fusca*. White-breasted Kingfisher. I saw one in the hills and one along the river between November 30 and December 24. On March 7 a dead bird was seen tied to a pole in the middle of a vegetable garden. In April and May the birds were noisy and their raucous calls were a common sound. A male collected on May 5 had testes measuring 3×6 mm.

**Upupa epops longirostris*. Hoopoe. A female was collected by Popovich on February 21. On March 7 another individual was seen back of headquarters. This subspecies occurs on Hainan and in Tonkin but has not previously been reported from Kwangsi.

Alauda gulgula. Lesser Skylark. This lark was a fairly common resident of the valley. On March 1 the first flight songs were heard.

Hirundo rustica. Barn Swallow. Between November 30 and December 24 this swallow was seen occasionally. By February 16 it appeared to be more common than in December. The first eggs of this species were found on April 2 and on May 20 young were still in nests under the eaves of houses.

Hirundo daurica. Striated Swallow. I saw a few the last of March and a small flock on April 2 along the river.

**Dicrurus leucophaeus hopwoodi*. Ashy Drongo. On May 7 I shot a female in the top of a tall tree in hills behind headquarters. Its call was loud and pleasing; the iris was orange-red and the tarsus and the bill were black.

Oriolus chinensis. Black-naped Oriole. On April 25 I saw one along the river in a wooded area and again on May 7 in a small grove of trees in the hills behind headquarters.

Pica pica. Magpie. On April 25 I saw a pair of these birds near a nest along the river.

**Garrulus perspicillatus*. Black-faced Laughing Thrush. A young bird just out of the nest was collected on May 2. The iris was brown and the tarsus gray-brown.

Pycnonotus sinensis. Chinese Bulbul. In December a flock of about 12 birds fed on small fruits of trees in a grove surrounding a farmhouse near Poseh.

**Pycnonotus aurigaster resurrectus*. Yellow-vented Bulbul. One female was collected on March 4 with an ovary measuring 4×6 mm. The iris was dark brown and the tarsus brownish-black.

Saxicola torquata. Chinese Stonechat. From November 30 to the middle of April this bird was fairly common near Poseh. I did not see it after May 1; apparently it is a migrant here.

**Copsychus saularis saularis*. Chinese Dayal Bird. In December two or three birds frequented a grove near a farmhouse at Poseh. In April this thrush was in full song. On May 25 I saw a small Chinese boy carrying three young birds in a cage. They were spotted on the breast but had black and white remiges and rectrices as in adults. A male was collected on May 1 near Poseh.

Orthotomus sutorius. Tailor Bird. On April 25 I saw one of these in a woodsy area along the bank of the river. It was whistling its loud, melodious call note.

Cisticola juncidis. Chinese Fan-tailed Warbler. In December one individual was present in a grove of trees surrounding a farmhouse.

**Motacilla alba alboides*. Pied Wagtail. I shot a female on March 18 in mountains about 75 miles north of Poseh. Wagtails of this species complex were often seen along the banks of the river and around little pools of water near headquarters from November 30 to April 2.

**Artamus fuscus*. Ashy Wood Swallow. Throughout May a flock of about 30 birds "hawked" for insects between the river and headquarters. They traveled in a compact noisy flock reminiscent of young *Sturnus vulgaris*. An adult male was collected on May 3 from this same flock.

Lanius schach. Rufous-backed Shrike. One individual inhabited a little grove of trees near a farmhouse in the vicinity of Poseh from November 30 to December 24. In February and March this species frequented the area about headquarters.

**Sturnus nigricollis*. Black-necked Mynah. I saw two of these mynahs on April 25 near headquarters. On May 3 Popovich collected an adult female with a distinct brood patch.

**Acridotheres cristatellus cristatellus*. Crested Mynah. I first saw these birds on April 2 and from then on a few were seen daily feeding near water buffalos in the valley. A female with a well developed brood patch and large ovary was shot by Popovich on May 2. The iris was orange, the tarsus yellow, and the distal half of the bill yellow, while its proximal half was pinkish.

**Acridotheres grandis*. Long-crested Jungle Mynah. A male with large testes was collected on May 3 in the same area in which the above species was collected. This is a first record for the province. The presence of this species and *Acridotheres cristatellus* in the same area in breeding condition supports their treatment as species.

Zosterops simplex. South China White-eye. On May 7 I saw one individual in a forested area of the hills behind headquarters.

Passer montanus. Chinese Tree Sparrow. This bird was a common resident about village and country dwellings. In July it was one of the few birds to exhibit activity under the scorching mid-day sun.

Melophus lathami. Crested Bunting. On April 2 two flocks of about 12 in each were seen 25 miles south of Poseh along the river. Another flock was near headquarters on March 10 and April 25.

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