

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

**The Display of the Sickle-billed Bird of Paradise.**—Crandall (*Zoologica*, 11, 1932:82-84; 31, 1946:9) has described the display of captive specimens of the eastern New Guinea Long-tailed Bird of Paradise (*Epimachus meyeri meyeri*). Few people have watched this species or its relative *Epimachus fastosus* in the wild state. In March, 1938, I was camped at 5200 feet on Mount Kourangen in the Tamrau Range which runs from east to west along the northern coast of the Vogelkop of Netherlands New Guinea. In the course of two and a half weeks on the mountain, we collected several specimens of the Sickle-bill (*E. f. fastosus*), but only twice did I manage to have any detailed view of the birds. At this season other species of Birds of Paradise were displaying on their display posts, but, at the time, thinking only of the display in a restricted cage described by Crandall (*loc. cit.*) for *Epimachus*, it had not occurred to me that I was watching a type of display when I witnessed the following activity of a Sickle-bill (notes of March 20):

"A male was sitting very high up on the bare branch of a huge dammar, *Agathis* sp., in a display posture. The pectoral shields were spread out and upwards like two raised arms. The tail was partially spread showing the shorter, outer feathers. A brownish bird, presumably a female, was sitting near on a lower branch. Suddenly the male called, a loud penetrating whistle sounding like the syllable 'whick.' Then, so rapidly that I could not see the pectoral shields retracted, he turned and dived straight downwards off the branch towards the ground, perhaps a hundred feet below."

From my position on the steep hillside partly above the base of the dammar, it was impossible to estimate the exact distance from the ground when the bird concluded its maneuver, but it must have been only a few feet from the bushes at the base of the tree.

"At the bottom of the dive, the male came out with spread wings and sailed back up again to the same branch almost as if on the rebound, so rapidly that it took me an instant to realize anything had happened at all."

In retrospect, this striking performance, which I witnessed only once, seems undoubtedly to have been a type of display. Its pattern bears an interesting resemblance to the display flight of the Anna Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) so well described by Woods (*in* Bent, *Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus.*, 176, 1940: 371-2).—S. DILLON RIPLEY, *Peabody Museum, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, January 21, 1957.*

**The Classification of the Oscine Passeriformes.**—Any arrangement of the family groups among perching birds is subject in some part to individual conviction, since it is obvious that to compress what is definitely a three-dimensional relationship into a linear sequence on the printed page requires occasional arbitrary decision as to the order among families that are closely related. However, the general framework should be based on characters that point to the basic standing of the various groups. This is particularly true of the assemblage that is to stand at the head of the list, assuming that this position is to be assigned to those birds that are believed to have advanced to the greatest degree in their general evolution from their ancestral stock.

Current acceptance of the position of the nine-primaried fringilline assemblage at the head of the list has been general in recent years, although with differences of opinion as to the family limitations within this group. My own opinions on the matter are covered in the classification that I have proposed (*Smiths. Misc. Coll.*, 117, No. 4, 1951:12, 21-22) in which the orders have followed rather closely those of Gadow, with changes due to more modern information, while the family limitations have been considerably modified.

Mayr and Greenway (*Mus. Comp. Zool., Breviora*, 58, 1956:1-11) recently have published an outline classification of Passeriformes which it is proposed to follow in the final volumes of the *Check-list of Birds of the World*, begun by James L. Peters. In this they return again to the procedure used generally by the previous generation of ornithologists, in which the Corvidae are placed at the end. In this I believe that certain basic data either have been overlooked or have not been accorded sufficient weight.

The position of the Corvidae relative to the other families is a matter that has intrigued me from my earliest studies in this field. In the beginning it seemed reasonable to accept the prominent position