

The Races of the Swiftlet, *Collocalia brevirostris* (McClelland)

by MR. H. G. DEIGNAN

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In the course of a critical review of the swiftlets of Thailand, based upon a considerable number of recently collected and previously unstudied specimens, I have found it necessary to investigate the status of the mysterious *Collocalia innominata* Hume, 1873, established upon a unique type from the Andaman Islands (where it has never been found again). The name has been attached by various workers to a number of specimens from both inland mountains and offshore islets between Tongking, northern Thailand and Selangor, inclusive, but no characters have been adduced by which the form could certainly be distinguished from its relatives. In this dilemma, I have called upon Mrs. B. P. Hall, of the British Museum (N.H.), requesting the loan of a skin compared with and most nearly like Hume's type.

Mrs. Hall wrote me that, from a box containing "a dozen or more" specimens of "*innominata*," after removing those that evidently belonged with *Collocalia maxima maxima* Hume (cf. Deignan, *antea* 75: 82) or with *C. brevirostris* subsp., she was left with one skin, the type, which itself could not be separated from *brevirostris*! Mr. J. D. Macdonald, checking her conclusions, arrived at the same results. The specimen designated by them as the nearest match in colour with the type of *innominata* is a worn bird from Myitkyina, north-eastern Burma, Brit. Mus. Reg. No. 1941.21.1.-704, which represents *Collocalia brevirostris brevirostris* (McClelland), but the wing length of the type (136 mm.) places it only with the Chinese race, *C. br. "inopina"* Thayer and Bangs.

This startling intelligence led me to re-examine the one skin of putative "*innominata*" in Washington, together with the one skin of putative "*maxima*". The former has proved to be an excellent example of the true *maxima*, while the latter, which after all the standard revisions should be the true *innominata*, like the bird in London cannot be separated by any character from the Chinese *C. br. "inopina"* Thayer and Bangs.

Through the courtesy of Mr. Macdonald and Mrs. Hall, I now have before me 30 London Skins of *Collocalia brevirostris* subsp. from the pertinent areas of south-eastern Asia, to add to three kindly sent me from the Princeton Museum of Zoology, nine from the Chicago Natural History Museum, and 31 in the collection of the United States National Museum. Examination of this rich material has led me to conclusions quite at variance from those of earlier revisers.

The several breeding populations represented in my series may be grouped in three nameable races. That the three belong to a single species is indicated by their possession of a common colour pattern and degree of caudal furcation, by their continuous range, and by their showing an even cline from North to South in length of wing and degree of tarsal feathering, with intermediates appearing at just the expected areas. While no information on their nests and eggs is yet available, all seem to breed in mountainous regions of the interior; some individuals of the more northern populations move southward in winter as far as the Malay Peninsula, and there occur indifferently in the mountains and along the coasts.

It seems probable that *Collocalia brevirostris* may not properly be united specifically with any of its Malaysian congeners, and I must even doubt whether Peters is justified in linking it with *C. unicolor* of Ceylon, which has a dark rump, is geographically isolated from other populations, or (if we may trust Stuart Baker) is sympatric with *brevirostris* in the western Himalayas.

Juveniles of any race may be recognized by their lesser size, less well-developed rump band, the greater amount of concealed white in the contour feathers above and below, and by having the tarsi more sparsely feathered than their adults. Individual variation in older birds appears in a general fading and browning of the upper parts (probably resulting from exposure to sunlight) in the most worn specimens, often accompanied by a greater distinctness of the rump band. The under parts of individuals may be greyer or browner in any population, and the increase of brownish suffusion seems to be connected with plumage wear. The degree of tarsal covering cannot readily be ascertained in every specimen whether because of the difficulty of examination without causing injury to the skin, or because insects or handling during preparation may have more or less completely stripped the tarsal skin of feathers.

I accept the following forms:

1. *Collocalia brevirostris innominata* Hume.

Collocalia innominata Hume, Stray Feathers, 1 (2, 3 & 4): 294, Feb. 1873 (Andaman Islands).

Collocalia fusciphaga (sic) *capnitis* Thayer and Bangs, Bull. Mus. Comp. Zoöl., 52 (8): 139, May, 1909 (Hupeh Province, China).

Collocalia inopina Thayer and Bangs, Bull. Mus. Comp. Zoöl., 52 (8): 139, May 1909 (Hupeh Province, China).

Collocalia inopina pellos (sic) Thayer and Bangs Mem. Mus. Comp. Zoöl., 40 (4): 158, Aug. 1912 (Wa-shan, Szechwan Province, China).

Diagnosis: Upper parts Chaetura Drab (Ridgway), the crown somewhat deeper in colour and, like the remiges and rectrices, lightly glossed with steel blue or green; the rump (in unworn specimens) greyish brown, only slightly differentiated from the mantle; tarsi densely feathered; wing length 132–141 mm. (15 specimens).

Range: Breeding in central and south-western China (Hupeh and Szechwan Provinces); in winter found in Tongking, peninsular Thailand (Nakhon Si Thammarat Province), and the Andaman Islands (straggler?).

Remarks: The judgment of Mrs. Hall and Mr. Macdonald in allocation of Hume's name is confirmed by that author's own remarks on *Collocalia innominata* in Stray Feathers, 2 (1, 2 & 3): 160, 1874: "This species is described, Stray Feathers, 1873, p. 294. We only procured one specimen, and I have nothing to add to what I formerly said in regard to it, except that it is a considerably larger bird than either *unicolor*, Jerdon, of the Nilghiris, or the very closely allied, and barely separable race from the Himalayas, of which also I have numerous examples. In no one of the twenty odd specimens that I possess from the Nilghiris and the Himalayas does the wing exceed 4.73 (120.14 m.m), whereas in *innominata* it is 5.5 inches (139.70 mm.)."

I have not seen the unique type of Thayer and Bang's *capnitis*, but have had the advantage of helpful comments from Dr. Ernst Mayr, who has

kindly examined it for me. In all its main characters — short wing, less well-developed rump band, greater amount of concealed white in the contour feathers, highly green-glossed crown and back — it appears to be a juvenile of the Chinese race of *Collocalia brevirostris*.

2. *Collocalia brevirostris brevirostris* (McClelland).

Hirundo brevirostris McClelland, Quart. Journ. Calcutta Medical & Physical Soc., 1 (3): 322, July 1837 (Assam). *Nomen nudum* !

Hirunda brevirostris McClelland, Proc. Zool. Soc. London, 7 (82): 155, March 1840 (Assam).

Diagnosis: Separable from the preceding race by having the rump brownish grey (rather than greyish brown) and thus markedly differentiated from the mantle, and by having the wing length 123–132mm. (13 specimens).

Range: Breeding in southern Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam, Manipur and northern Burma.

Remarks: Five adults from Myitkyina, north-eastern Burma (not included among the 13 mentioned just above), show different degrees of tarsal feathering, some having the tarsi but sparsely feathered and thus approximating members of more southern populations; their wing length, 128–132 mm., places them with nominate *brevirostris*.

3. *Collocalia brevirostris rogersi*, subsp. nov.

Type: U.S. National Museum No. 450071, adult male, collected at Ban Hin Laem (lat. 14°40' N., long. 98°40' E.), Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand, on 20th November, 1952, by H. G. Deignan ; collector's number 218.

Diagnosis: Separable from the two preceding races by having the tarsi *naked*, and by having the wing length 116–128 mm. (19 specimens).

Range: Breeding in the Southern Shan States, north-western Tongking, northern Laos, northern and western Thailand south to Kanchanaburi Province (everywhere associated with limestone crags) ; in winter found in peninsular Thailand (Prachuap Khiri Khan and Surat Thani Provinces) and Malaya (Selangor State).

Remarks: Twelve adults from the Southern Shan States, Tongking, Laos, and north-western Thailand (not included among the 19 mentioned just above), show different degrees of tarsal feathering, some having the tarsi lightly feathered and thus approximating members of more northern populations ; their wing length, 118–129 mm., places them with *rogersi*. Three winter-taken adults from Selangor, with wing length 120–129 m.m., similarly have the tarsi lightly feathered, and accordingly seem to represent migrants of this more northern, atypical population of *rogersi*.

The new form is named for my friend Charles Henry Rogers, Curator of the Princeton Museum of Zoology, Princeton, New Jersey.

National Wildfowl Counts

The following is an account of the most interesting talk given to the Club at its October meeting

by MR. GEORGE ATKINSON WILLES

The National Wildfowl Count scheme was started in 1948 under the aegis of the British Wildfowl Inquiry Committee, and rapidly expanded.



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