

4. NOTES ON INDIAN BIRDS 1—*CEYX ERITHACUS*
RUFIDORSUS STRICKLAND IN THE SIKKIM TERAI,
EASTERN HIMALAYAS : AN ADDITION TO THE
INDIAN AVIFAUNA

While examining the small series of Threetoed Kingfishers *Ceyx erithacus* (Linnaeus) in the Society's collection, I noticed one which was uniformly rufous and washed with lilac on the upper surface and had a large 35.5 mm. bill (from feathers) against 30-33, av. 31.5, in the others. The label was marked 'Male, *Ceyx tridactyla*, Sikkim Terai, 22.7.09, C. M. Inglis' in Mr. Inglis's handwriting. This specimen appeared so different from the others that I sent it for identification to Mr. J. D. MacDonald of the British Museum, who reported that it was *rufidorsus* and referred me to a paper, 'The *Ceyx erithacus* and *rufidorsus* species problem' by R. W. Sims, in the *Journal of the Linnean Society of London, Zoology*, **44** : 212-221 (1959). He also said that, though the bill was longer than in the majority, one or two had them just as long.

Sims examined 351 specimens from various sources and came to the conclusion that the forms *Ceyx erithacus* (Linnaeus) (type loc. : Benghala) and *rufidorsus* Strickland (type loc. : Malacca) are different races of the same species, with varying intermediate stages some of which are constant enough to permit their being separated as races. Typical *erithacus*, according to him, is characterised by:

- (i) a blue-black spot on the forehead,
- (ii) an ultramarine patch on each side of the neck,
- (iii) a black mantle and scapulars washed with ultramarine, and
- (iv) black wing-coverts tipped with ultramarine,

while *rufidorsus* lacks all these four characteristics and has the colour of the upper parts uniformly rufous washed with lilac. The eight other specimens available in the Society's collection, from Bombay (3), North Kanara (3), Goalpara (Assam), and Cachar, have all the necessary characteristics of *erithacus*, while the specimen collected by Inglis has none and is uniformly rufous above, washed with lilac.

Sims gives the range of *rufidorsus* : 'throughout the Malaysian subregion in Mindoro and Tawi Tawai in the Philippines and Lombok, Sumbawa and Flores in the Indo-Australian archipelago'.

The race *rufidorsus* does not appear to have been recorded before within Indian limits, the specimen having remained unrecognized for many years.

The examination referred to earlier was prompted by a Threetoed Kingfisher, *Ceyx erithacus erithacus* (Linnaeus) flying into my house

at Bandra, Bombay, at about 8 a.m. on 13 September 1963. It was discovered just as our cat had pinned it against a glass window in the verandah facing west. This species visits the neighbourhood of Bombay as far north as Suriamal, Wada, Thana District, during the monsoon and breeds among the forested hills. It is well known as a wanderer and has often flown into houses—the other two specimens from Bombay were apparently similarly obtained, being marked 'Govt. Dockyard, 18th June 1902' and 'Caught in Bombay. Purchased, 3rd October 1910'.

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July 25, 1964.

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5. NOTES ON INDIAN BIRDS 2—RACES OF *STERNA ALBIFRONS* PALLAS, IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

(With a text-figure)

ABSTRACT

Ripley's account of the races of *Sterna albifrons* Pallas in A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (1961) differs from that of Stuart Baker in the FAUNA (1929, 6). The material and literature available in Bombay indicate that typical *albifrons* breeds along the Persian Gulf to Bhavnagar in Gujarat, and apparently also on the Brahmaputra and the rivers in the Indus basin; *saundersi* has been obtained in Ceylon and the Maldives, but there is no evidence of its nesting anywhere except around Karachi, Pakistan; *sinensis* breeds along the coast from China, through Malaya and Ceylon, as far north as Bombay; *pusilla* is indeterminate.

Stuart Baker in the FAUNA (1929, 6 : 134) accepted 5 races of the Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* Pallas from Indian limits: *albifrons* Pallas (Holland), *sinensis* Gmelin (China), *pusilla* Temminck (Java), *praetermissa* Stuart Baker (Mesopotamia), and *saundersi* Hume (Karachi). Ticehurst (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 34 : 484) merged *praetermissa* with *albifrons* and removed *pusilla* as insufficiently described. Earlier (*Ibis* 1924 : 142) he had merged Hume's *gouldi* (which name incidentally is preoccupied by *gouldi* Reichenbach) with *albifrons*, the form nesting on the rivers of north-west India. Hume (*Stray Feathers* 9 : 131) found *gouldi* nesting at Goalundo on the Brahmaputra.



Abdulali, Humayun. 1964. "Notes on Indian Birds. 1. Ceyx Erithacus Rufidorsus Strickland in the Sikkim Teral, Eastern Himalayas: An Addition To the Indian Avifauna." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 61, 439–440.

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