

XIV.—BIRDS EATING BUTTERFLIES

Mr. Hopwood's letter in No. 3, vol. xxxi reminds me that in the Teesta Valley I once saw a Red-legged Falconet catch and eat a Butterfly. It was a female *Papilio memnon* absorbing nectar from a flower and I was in the act of sweeping a net at it when the falconet swiftly passed in front and left no butterfly for the net to collect. I was only just able to turn my eyes from the flower to the bird in time to see the butterfly's wings fall from each side of its beak as it flew to its perch on a tree to swallow the body.

MUNGPOO P.O.,
via SILIGURI, BENGAL,
March 19, 1927.

G. E. SHAW.

[With reference to Mr. S. F. Hopwood's note on the Red-legged Falconet (*Microhierax eutolmus*) hawking butterflies which appeared on page 826, vol. xxxi of this Journal together with our editorial comments, our attention has been drawn by Sir Peter Clutterbuck to some notes published recently which form an interesting supplement to our knowledge on the subject.

Vol. i, Part ii of the Proceedings of the Entomological Society of London (p. 32) has the following report:

'The Pigmy Falcon capturing Butterflies in Kelantan. The President drew attention to the following observation recorded by Mr. F. F. Laidlaw, M.A., in *Journal 88 of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, October, 1923, p. 377:—"Whilst I was at Kuala Aring in Kelantan in September 1899 I was interested to notice on more than one occasion a small party, three or four individuals I think, of the Pigmy Falcon (*Microhierax fringillarius*). These birds used to sit on the higher branches of a dead tree which stood in the middle of a small clearing in the forest close to the kampong. Their occupation seemed to consist chiefly in capturing butterflies, and there was constantly a litter of wings on the ground about the foot of the tree. Amongst them were the wings of *Papilio delesserti* (Guer.), an insect I did not at the time have means of identifying. It was, however, common at Kuala Aring, in fact abundant; and though I am writing from memory more than twenty years after making the observation I am quite sure of the fact."

Mr. Laidlaw's observation supplied interesting confirmation of the notes recorded by the late Col. C. T. Bingham in *Essays on Evolution*, Poulton, 1908, pp. 289-91. Col. Bingham also found that *Papilios* formed a large portion of the butterflies captured by *Microhierax*, and among them were those of *Papilio caunus*, Westw., a mimic of *Euploea*. The observations suggested, as did Dr. V. G. L. Van Someren's note in *Proc. Ent. Soc.*, 1923, p. lxi, that the birds referred to discriminated between the *Papilio* mimics and their Danaïne or Euploëine models.'

Dr. Van Someren's note referred to above appears as follows: 'A Hawk attacking *Papilio rex* Oberth., at Nairobi.'—Prof. Poulton exhibited a male *rex* with the male of its Danaïne model *Tirumala (Melinda) formosa*, Godm., taken on the same day, January 14, 1919, at Nairobi, by Canon St. Aubyn Rogers, and read the following note written on July 28, 1923, by Dr. V. G. L. Van Someren:—"I rescued a *P. rex* the other day from a small species of hawk—*Accipiter minullus tropicalis* Reichenow—rather strange, particularly as *M. formosa* swarmed in the patch of flowers where *rex* was taken.'

The other notes on the subject to which Sir Peter refers are to be found in Dr. G. D. Hale Carpenter's recently published book *A Naturalist in East Africa*. On page 21 the author records that in a quarter of an hour's watching he counted sixteen little 'Blues,' nine *Atella* (a brown butterfly about the size of the English 'Tortoiseshell'), three sulphur-yellow *Terias* and one *Eronia leda* which resembles the English 'Brimstone', devoured between two wagtails—*Motacilla vidua*. Dr. Carpenter continues: 'But they made no attempt to eat any of the extremely abundant "White" (*Belenois* and *Pinacopteryx*) which were there, and walked about among them without appearing to take any notice of them, nor did they pay any attention to the Danaïne *Tirumala mercedonia*, a typically aposematic butterfly, of which numbers were sitting together on a stone on which one of the birds was actually perched. I never saw them pay any attention to the mimetic *P. ridleyanus*.'



Shaw, G E. 1927. "Birds Eating Butterflies." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 32, 377-377.

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