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THE SYSTEMATIC POSITION OF THE  
BIRD GENUS *APALOPTERON*

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The Ornithological Society of Japan's (1942) list of Japanese birds indicates that, by 1942, 100 species of birds had been reported from the Bonin Islands, an oceanic group of volcanic origin lying about 500-600 nautical miles southeast of Yokohama. Of these, only 19 species (four of them by then extinct on the islands) were known to have bred. Of the 19, eight pelagic forms (two albatrosses, four shearwaters, one gannet, and a tern) may be disregarded at this time. Of the land birds, seven are mere races of species common in the Japanese Archipelago (one hawk, one pigeon, one bulbul, one crow, one thrush, one warbler, and one greenfinch), while two (a pigeon and a hawfinch), extinct and not examined by me, may be presumed to have had similar origin. An anomalous element in the avifauna is found in the former presence of a night heron characteristic of the coasts and islands of the southwestern Pacific and otherwise not occurring north of the Palaus and the Philippines. Finally, there is the genus *Apalopteron* Bonaparte, the subject of these remarks.

First named *Ixos familiaris* by its discoverer, F. H. von Kittlitz,<sup>1</sup> and considered a bulbul, it was removed to the "Timaliidae" by

<sup>1</sup> Mem. Acad. Imp. Sci. St. Petersburg, vol. 1, pt. 3, p. 235, pl. 13, 1830.



Bonaparte<sup>2</sup> in 1854 as a monotypic genus, *Apalopteron*. Sharpe (1882, p. 120, footnote) restored it to the bulbuls as a member of the type genus *Pycnonotus*, and the most recent Japanese writers, using the name *Apalopteron*, have retained it in that family. Delacour (1946, pp. 21, 29), on the other hand, has considered it to be a timaliine closely related to the genera *Actinodura* and *Minla*. It is my contention, however, that *Apalopteron* is in fact a fairly typical genus of the Australasian Meliphagidae or honey-eaters.

The true meliphagid tongue, fringed and quadrifid at its distal end, has been most recently discussed and portrayed by Scharnke (1931, pp. 454-466) in the genera *Myzomela*, *Myza*, *Melidectes*, *Orodytes*, *Philemon*, *Xanthotis*, *Ptiloprora*, and *Toxorhamphus*; by the same author (Scharnke, 1932, pp. 117-119) in *Promerops*; and by Dorst (1952, pp. 185-214) in *Meliphaga*, *Gliciphila*, *Melithreptus*, *Zanthomiza*, *Meliornis*, and *Melipotes*. Comparison of the flattened tongue of *Apalopteron* (pl. 1) with the drawings of the tongues of *Myzomela* and *Philemon* (Scharnke, 1931, pp. 456, 457) and the schematized drawing of the tongue of *Meliphaga* (Dorst, 1952, p. 187) will show that all are modeled upon a common pattern.

The Meliphagidae are unusual, if not unique, among oscinine birds by their pervious nostrils. I have noted this character in freshly collected specimens representing the Australian genera *Melithreptus*, *Entomyzon*, *Ramsayornis*, *Conopophila*, *Myzomela*, *Meliphaga*, *Lichmera*, *Myzantha*, and *Philemon*. Specimens of *Apalopteron* in the U. S. National Museum that quite certainly have never had the nostrils pierced by a needle are similarly devoid of the narial septum.

Such unspecialized genera of the Meliphagidae as *Myzomela*, *Lichmera*, *Ramsayornis*, *Conopophila*, *Meliphaga*, et al. have the tarsus in the adult so obscurely scutellate as to appear booted (bilaminar behind), although scutellation is usually apparent in the young. The tarsus of adult *Apalopteron* shows the same quasi-booted aspect, and it is interesting to note that, according to a recent communication from Dr. Yamashina, scutellation cannot be seen even in the newly hatched chick.

In its gross external features, *Apalopteron* certainly more nearly resembles the unspecialized honey-eaters than it does any member of either the Pycnonotidae or the Timaliinae. Its but slightly decurved bill, with strongly operculate nostrils, is not strikingly different from that of *Lichmera*, while its general coloration and pattern about the head are reminiscent of those found especially in certain species of *Meliphaga* (e. g., *M. chrysops* and *M. melanops*). The short, somewhat recurved, bristle-like feathers that appear on the front and

<sup>2</sup> Comptes Rendus, Acad. Sci. Paris, vol. 38, pp. 54, 59, 1854.



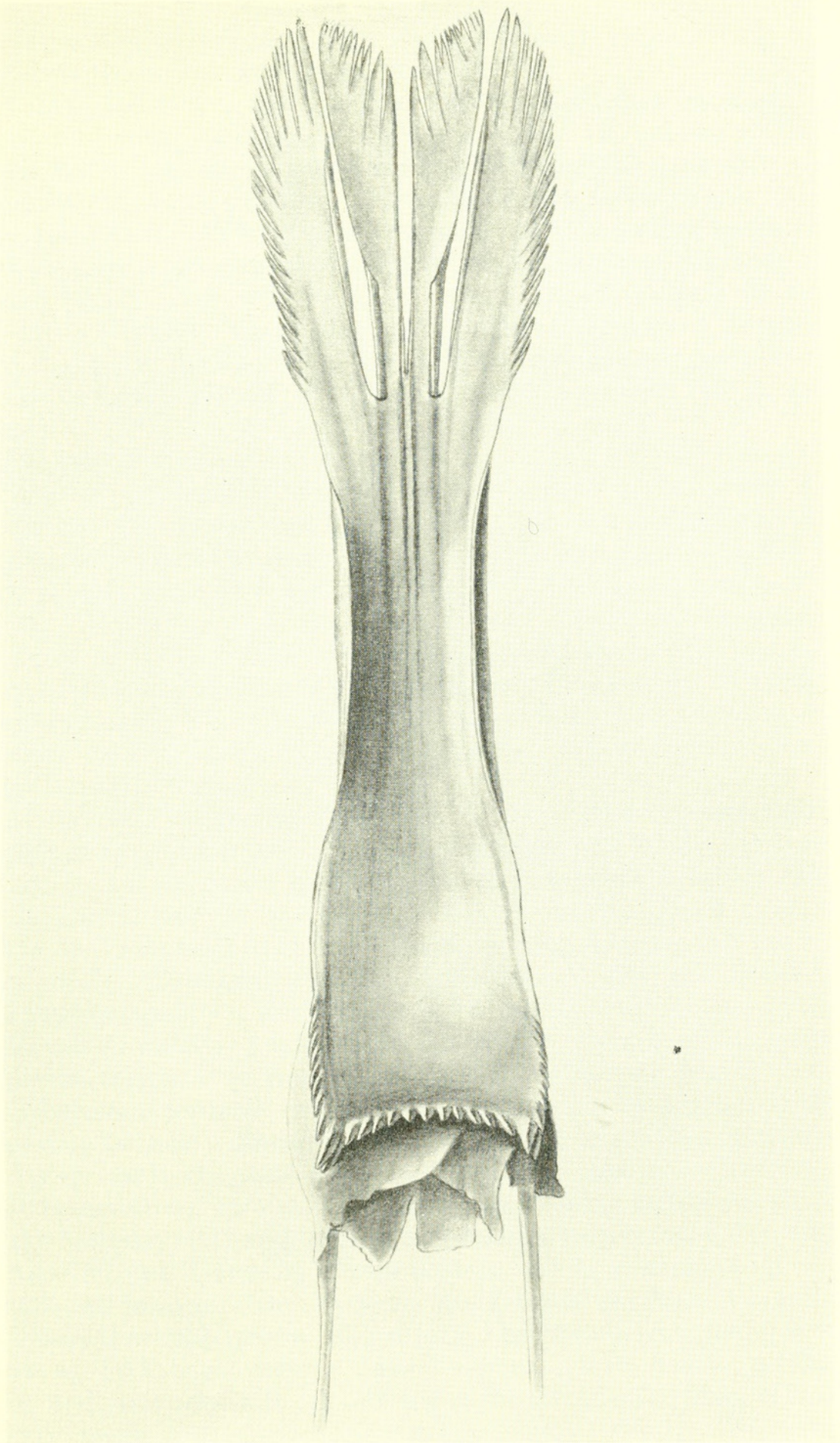


PLATE 1.—Dorsal view of tongue of subadult *Apalopteron familiares*. Magnification,  $\times 15$ .





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