

SHANGHAI BIRDS



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A Study of Bird Life in Shanghai
and the Surrounding
Districts

BY

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SHANGHAI

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FOREWORD

The observations summarised in this book have been spread over the last five years, and are based on what I have seen chiefly in the course of early morning walks and rides in the immediate neighbourhood of Shanghai. During my last Home leave I spent many busy days in the British Museum (Natural History) at South Kensington, and was thus enabled to check up my local observations and make certain of the various birds I had identified. I must take this opportunity to thank Dr. Frank Lowe, Mr. H. Bench Usher and other officials at the British Museum for their kindness in giving me every possible facility to study specimens in the Bird-galleries. I must also thank Mr. H. Gronvold, the great bird artist whose pictures adorn this book, for his care and patience in dealing with a very amateur ornithologist. I should indeed be ungrateful if I failed to add a word of thanks to that well-known local naturalist Mr. A. de C. Sowerby for the sympathetic interest he has always taken in my work, for his encouragement in publishing my early articles in the "China Journal" and for his ever-ready help when I have been puzzled over local or scientific names.

Finally, I wish to thank Mr. R. W. Davis of the "North-China Daily News," whose technical skill has so greatly added to the appearance of this book, and Mr. T. D. Davy and the Chinese staff of the publishers' Printing Department whose patient work made possible the excellent reproductions of Mr. Gronvold's pictures.

With these thoughts, I leave this little work in the hands of the Shanghai public, hoping that I have not laboured in vain.

E. S. W.

Shanghai, 3rd December, 1929

GLOSSARY OF SPECIAL TERMS USED BY SPORTSMEN

ALTHOUGH this book is not primarily intended for the use of sportsmen, I hope many of them may find something of interest in it : as they have been somewhat scantily catered for in the list of birds, I offer them a list of words which may help to settle some of their arguments—if indeed, it does not give rise to fresh ones !

A *flock* can be applied to any large number of birds banded together but not to a family party of young birds where special terms such as brood, covey, etc. are applied. The word *flight* is often substituted when the birds are flying.

Special words applied to family parties are :—

Nide of Pheasants (from Fr. *nid*, a nest)

Covey of Partridges (from Fr. *couver*, to brood) ; this is also sometimes used of Quail.

Sord of Mallards.

Other words are of a descriptive character, giving an idea of the occupation or habits of the bird, thus :—

Gaggle of geese on the water (because of the noise).

String or *skein* of geese when flying because of the order of flight.

Team of Duck when flying.

Paddling of Duck on the water.

Whisp of Snipe when flying.

Walk of Snipe when feeding.

Many other words are applied as the result of ancient custom or merely for the sake of euphony, such as :—

Bevy of Quail or Larks.

Company of Widgeon.

Herd of Swans or Curlews.

Dopping of Plover.

Desert of Lapwing.

Sedge of Herons.

Spring of Teal (and sometimes Snipe)

Finally there are a few purely descriptive words used of birds in flight, such as *bunch* or *knob* (these being generally applied to Widgeon), or in cases where the other special words such as *string*, *skein* or *whisp* would not apply.

INTRODUCTION

THE STUDY OF BIRDS

OUT of all the rich realms of Biology, which is the science of all things that live, there is no doubt that the small section devoted to birds has taken a firm hold on the popular imagination, and yet it is a fact that the scientific study of birds, known as Ornithology, has been extremely slow in its progress, even though such progress might be deemed rapid when compared to that made in other branches of Biology.

Some of us are attracted by plant-life and pursue its study under the name of Botany ; others become " bug-hunters " and call it Entomology ; but not one out of a hundred bird-lovers would refer to himself as an Ornithologist. In other words, while there are thousands among us who want to know all about birds, the general demand is for a book which deals with the subject on popular and not scientific lines. To the average man who left his Latin behind with his school days, the sight of a scientific name is like a red rag to a bull, and his cry is " Tell me in plain English what I want to know, and keep your scientific names for museums and places where they understand them." It is sad that such a policy of perfection cannot always be pursued, and it must be one of the objects of this small book to try to explain why a little knowledge of scientific names cannot be separated from an intelligent study of birds.

Popular books on birds in England and America have, however, become increasingly numerous, and many of the authors have made an obvious effort to avoid anything in the nature of scientific arrangement, with at least one unfortunate result, which I will try to explain.

The natural desire for knowledge possessed by anyone who will trouble to read books dealing with natural history must impel

him to increase that knowledge by reading other books on the same subject. No small and readable book, for example, on the birds of China, can attempt to be complete, and it follows that the reader will probably in course of time wish to extend his study to other and more complete books. If his first book has made no attempt at scientific arrangement, the student will be forced to begin his work all over again if he is to understand the more complete and scientific book, for he will find it utterly impossible to "key up" the second book with the first in any one section. That the first rudimentary book must be incomplete will be readily understood when the large number of birds to be dealt with is taken into account.

SIMPLICITY OF CLASSIFICATION

According to the latest list at my disposal there are over 1,000 different birds to be found in China, of which perhaps half come our way at some time or another. It would be a test of endurance if I were to attempt to describe all these birds, and I have therefore been forced to take a bold course and select from the mass of material before me a few more than 100 birds which come our way, and to describe these in the simplest possible manner, in the hope that the reader will, like *Oliver Twist*, ask for more. While simplifying the task in this way, I have, however, thought it advisable to use some sort of scientific arrangement, and at the same time to introduce the more common scientific names, so that the reader may thus be equipped to follow up his studies by reference to other books of a more complete nature. I shall also introduce a short chapter on the subject of the naming of birds, in order to show that these awkward sounding Latin and Greek names are not only necessary for an intelligent study of the subject, but even have some interest when their initial difficulties have been overcome.

A further attempt will also be made to make the book of use both to European and Chinese students, by labelling each bird with the name of its Order and Family, and a numerical reference to the list of Chinese Birds published by the Peking Society of Natural History (Bulletin No. 1). These references (C.B. No.....) will be found to refer to the corresponding bird in the Bulletin, even though it appears there under a slightly different name, and Chinese students will thus be able to read the name and

distribution notes in their own language. For the correctness of those names and notes I cannot vouch, but they at least represent the beginning of an orderly effort to classify birds for Chinese students, both in their own and the English language, so that students of any nationality in China have some common ground to meet upon.

THE FASCINATION OF BIRD LORE

The fascination of birds has to my mind no parallel in the whole field of Zoology: the rabbit has his burrow, the hare his form, and the tiger his lair, but none of these can begin to compare with the beauty and ingenuity of a bird's nest. The eggs of a bird are among the most beautiful creations of nature, and the marvels of bird migration leave us amazed even in these modern days when man himself has to some extent conquered the dangers and difficulties of the air. What shall we say, then, of the wonders of plumage of such birds as the Paradise Flycatcher, or even the more familiar Pheasant? And what would we say if we were familiar with the Australian Bower-bird, which, in addition to making an ordinary nest, builds itself a bower as play-ground (sometimes fencing it round) and decorates it with shells and coloured flowers, which are continually changed as they fade. Such marvels as these must appeal to the popular imagination, and when we realize that so little is known, that so much is to be learnt, and that every intelligent observer of birds is the potential discoverer of many of their unknown gifts and habits, it is no wonder that so many people are interested in this fascinating subject.

THE BIRD IN LITERATURE

This popular interest in birds is reflected to-day not only in the many articles written on the subject for such papers as "The Times" (London), but by the frequent introduction of bird-life by popular writers, when describing a particular place or season. Here is an example taken from the opening pages of one of Mr. John Buchan's novels:—

"The season was absurdly early. . . . The partridges were paired, the rooks were well on with their nests, and the meadows were full of shimmering grey flocks of fieldfares on their way north. I put up half-a-dozen snipe on the boggy edge of the stream, and in the bracken in Sturn Wood I thought I saw a Woodcock, and hoped that the birds might nest with us this year."

The fact that a novelist can (and does) describe to us not only the season, but the general lie of the countryside, by naming five different birds and their actions, is, I think, a sure sign that bird-life has taken a firm hold on our imagination, even though our knowledge of it may be extremely limited.

In England the literature on birds is almost endless, and practically every family possesses at least one popular book on the subject for reference. There are, perhaps, five hundred different birds, both rare and common, to be seen in England, and as regards their mere description and identification the bird-lover has plenty of material to hand. But even in England much remains to be done, and the organized watching of birds in national preserves, the systematic banding of birds to aid the study of migration, and even the Bird Protection Laws themselves, may be said to be in their infancy.

In America much greater strides have been made. The literature is prolific, the unnecessary killing of birds is being reduced to a minimum, and the scientific trapping, banding and watching of birds has been made a matter of national organization during recent years. With the knowledge that birds are a national asset and the friend of the farmer, as well as a mere object of admiration, State aid has been obtained for the study of ornithology, and wide-flung societies are working for knowledge of, and for the good of, even the most humble of the feathered world.

What can I say of China? Let me begin by saying that here at least is a most fertile soil to work upon, for the Chinese must be classed as one of the greatest nations of bird-lovers. Who can deny this, who daily sees the tradesman, artisan, and humble coolie squatting, cage in hand, "exercising the bird" for mere love of its song? Yet China as a State has not yet made any intelligent effort to protect and encourage bird life. I have been credibly informed that this country has an ancient law for the protection of frogs, but none to protect any bird; game birds are slaughtered mercilessly and are fast becoming almost extinct in many areas, while even small song-birds are netted for food. To the best of my knowledge there is little or no popular literature on birds, and such as exists has been either written, or at least inspired, by a handful of foreigners in their spare time. Yet, in spite of all this, there is the innate love of the Chinese for all birds,

including even those which do not sing, as a nucleus of hope for the future. The humblest Chinese cottager encourages the swallow to build under his eaves, and he forgives even the mischievous, thieving magpie his many sins.

BOOKS ON THE BIRDS OF CHINA

Before attempting to explain to the reader the proposed scope and object of this book, it would be as well to refer to the existing literature which deals with the subject ; by this I mean literature which deals solely with the birds of China, and more particularly with that part of China best known to Shanghai readers. This short review will, therefore, exclude any reference to such articles as appear in the " Encyclopaedia Sinica " and the magazines of various Societies, as also the work of really scientific writers such as Dr. Ernst Hartert, whose great work on the Birds of the Palearctic Fauna, written in German, is one of the classics of modern times.

I would add that in my own definition of a " popular " work I mentally include the words " with illustrations " ; and it is not to be wondered at that such books with illustrations are rare, if they exist at all, for the trouble and expense of obtaining and reproducing coloured illustrations in any profusion are such as to deter any but the most enthusiastic amateur.

First and foremost we have David and Oustalet's " Les Oiseaux de la Chine," which is, at the time of writing, the only existing comprehensive and illustrated work on the birds of China. Since this work was completed in 1877 by the great naturalist and missionary, Abbé Armand David and his collaborator, Dr. E. Oustalet, of the Paris Museum, many new names have been added to the list of known birds, and the modern methods of painting and reproduction in colour have made some of their illustrations appear rather crude. However this may be, the book is now practically impossible to acquire, and the few remaining copies are treasured in the leading museums and libraries of the world.

Another French missionary, Père Courtois, has written of the birds of China, and particularly of those represented in the Siccawei Museum, but this book is also in the French language and difficult to obtain to-day.

Coming to the works in English we have Gee and Moffett's "Birds of the Lower Yangtze Valley," first published as a series of newspaper articles and subsequently in book form (1917). The field here chosen is an interesting and fairly wide one, but the fact remains that, lacking illustrations and including many birds which are rarely if ever seen in our neighbourhood, it has hardly filled the gap so far as Shanghai is concerned.

Commencing in 1925, J. D. D. La Touche has published four parts of a comprehensive work entitled "A Handbook of the Birds of Eastern China," but it will obviously be some time before the whole work can be completed. The descriptions of birds are generally scientific in their nature, with a certain amount of explanatory matter written in more popular style; there are no illustrations, except photographs; but readers who have mastered the contents of a more elementary book, such as the present work is intended to be, will find La Touche's a most useful book of reference.

Mr. A. de C. Sowerby, in Volume III of "The Naturalist in Manchuria," has described in lucid style a large number of birds which are familiar to us in Shanghai, and it is only the fact that his geographical area does not coincide with ours that makes it impossible for the writer to state that his book supplies exactly what the Shanghai reader wants (excepting always the lack of illustrations common to his and other books). Mr. Sowerby's book is, however, a far more interesting and valuable work of reference to Shanghai readers than its title would suggest.

Mr. George Lanning's "Wild Life in China" (1911) does not call itself a book on birds, yet two-thirds of the matter is about birds and consists of a series of most entertaining pen-sketches of local birds and their habits. Many scientific names applied to these birds have been changed in recent years (as, alas! they are always changing), and without an alphabetical index or any attempt at scientific arrangement, this work does not supply a modern guide to birds such as many of us have been looking for.

Finally, I must refer to the Bulletin entitled "Chinese Birds," by Wilder, Gee and Moffett, published by the Peking Society of Natural History in 1926. This is nothing but a list of 1,031 birds identified in China; it contains no illustrations and no descriptions, but only notes as to distribution. This is the first attempt to

give such information side by side in English and Chinese, and as such it must be welcomed as a valuable work of reference and a pioneer in the field of bi-lingual endeavour. As stated above, I have thought it wise to refer all birds described in the present work to the appropriate number in this list of "Chinese Birds," so that any Chinese readers may have a reference to existing notes and names published in their own language.

With the above list of books before me I have decided to publish this modest illustrated work under the title of "Shanghai Birds," in the hope, and I might almost say the firm belief, that the city of Shanghai is now large enough to support a work of this nature. The residents of this city, both foreign and Chinese, who speak or at least understand the English language, have no handy guide to which they may turn to identify the birds around them. If I can fill this gap with any reasonable efficiency I shall be abundantly content, and perfectly willing to leave it to others far more competent than myself to provide the scientific text-books which actually add to the existing knowledge of the birds of China.

DEFINING THE BIRDS OF SHANGHAI

Having decided to write about "Shanghai Birds," the first difficulty is to define what that title means. For example, if I include a Dusky Ousel, which may be seen only during a few weeks in the winter, critics may ask by what right I adopt this Ousel as a Shanghai bird. On the other hand, if I omit it, the first man who sees half-a-dozen of these birds hopping round his lawn in search of worms will charge me with the omission if he cannot find them here described.

A title which would adequately meet the situation would be "Birds to be Seen in and around Shanghai, including the more common residents, visitors and migrants," but such a title is, to say the least of it, clumsy, and we shall do better with the shorter one. I may add that in the Bird Gallery of the Natural History Museum (South Kensington) there is a large case bearing the label "London Birds," so that we have a well-established precedent in support of an effort to provide the residents of Shanghai with some guide to the birds they are likely to see under a short, though quite unscientific, title.

Birds, by reason of their natural mobility, are most difficult to confine even in theory to any one locality, and this is probably one of the basic difficulties striking at the root of bird study by the average amateur whose spare time is limited. The scientific writer, finding himself forced to set some geographical limit to the sphere of his endeavour, yet anxious to make his work scientifically complete, will include in his lists such entries as "casual vagrants," "stragglers," and birds whose appearance in the area concerned has only once or twice been authenticated; but not content with this, he will leap his geographical boundaries and follow the distribution of the birds through the two hemispheres, to the final confusion of the beginner, who is really only anxious to learn the main differences between a thrush and a shrike, or a tit and a warbler, or, in fact, any other birds which may commonly be seen in his own neighbourhood.

One further limitation to the meaning of "Shanghai Birds" must be explained. It will be the main object of this book to describe what are scientifically known as the *Passerine* or Perching Birds, since these are undoubtedly the birds of our fields and gardens, and I shall include with these some familiar birds belonging to other scientific orders, such as the woodpeckers and the waders. But as time and space enforce a limit, I shall exclude all the rarer ducks and geese and birds of the sea-shore; of the latter, I shall, however, include such as are sufficiently common as to obtrude themselves on our notice when we are travelling by land or water anywhere in the neighbourhood of Shanghai.

PICTURES BY A FAMOUS BIRD ARTIST

When considering these remarks concerning the objective we have before us, the beginner should bear in mind, for his own encouragement, that the value of learning to identify, say, twenty different birds in any one locality, is not limited to the knowledge so gained. Thus, if the reader will learn to identify by shape, size and plumage, let us say, a *red-backed shrike*, a *pieb wagtail* and a *lesser grey tit*, he will quite unconsciously have equipped himself to identify any other shrike, wagtail or tit which he may meet in other parts of China, or even the world in general, merely by adding a little local knowledge wherever he may find himself.

The illustrations must be the key-note of a book of this nature and the reader will be interested to know that every picture now published has been especially painted by that famous bird artist Mr. Henrik Gronvold. Each figure has been drawn and coloured from a skin in the British Museum collection, and each skin was selected as being that of a bird collected either in Shanghai or as near thereto as possible. But for the care and patience of Mr. Gronvold and the expert assistance of Mr. Usher, of the British Museum staff, this task would have been almost impossible, for it is no mean accomplishment to depict accurately in London the bird-life of a city ten thousand miles away.

With these introductory remarks, I must now present this book to the reader for better or for worse. The first part will be found to contain a few chapters intended to show how living birds may be identified by sight and sound, and how their scientific names are arranged, together with a chapter on bird migration which I offer with all due deference to the special authorities on that subject. The second part contains the descriptions of something over one hundred birds, of which about seventy are illustrated in the coloured plates. In these descriptions I have avoided as far as possible all scientific phraseology, in the hope that by so doing any loss of scientific accuracy will be more than made up by ordinary lucidity from the point of view of the average reader.

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PART II

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Siberian Ground-Thrush	<i>Turdus sibiricus</i>		90
White's Thrush or Golden Thrush	<i>Oreocincla aurea aurea</i>		91

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ORDER—*PICI*FAMILY—*PICIDÆ*

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Green Woodpecker (Yangtze) ...	<i>Picus guerini</i> or <i>Picus canus guerini</i>	XV	158
Spark-headed Woodpecker ...	<i>Yungipicus scintilliceps</i>		159
Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla japonica</i>	XV	160

ORDER—*HALCYONES*FAMILY—*ALCEDINIDÆ*

Little Blue Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo ispida bengalensis</i> ...	XVI	164
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ORDER—*UPUPÆ*FAMILY—*UPUPIDÆ*

Hoopoe (Eastern)	<i>Upupa epops saturata</i>		168
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