The Shining Flycatcher

(Piezorhynchus alecto)

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The geographical distribution of the bird is as follows:—Ternate, Timor Laut, Aru Islands, Papua, the Bismarck Archipelago, Australia from the north-west around the north coast and down the coast of Queensland, the 18th parallel roughly limiting its southern range on both sides of the continent, although a specimen has been recorded from as far south as Port Denison.

The Shining Flycatcher was originally described by Temminck and Laugier as Drymophila alecto in 1827, and the locality given is Celebes. Rothschild and Hartert, however, say that is an error, as the bird does not occur in Celebes, and they have selected Ternate, an irregularly-shaped island to the east of Celebes, as the type locality. It was known from the Aru Islands and New Ireland before the Australian type was collected by Mr. E. Dring, surgeon on H.M.S. "Beagle," and described by John Gould as Piezorhynchus nitidus in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London in 1840. Gilbert, collecting for Gould, obtained further specimens at Port Essington, about 100 miles north-east from Darwin, and wrote an excellent account of its haunts, habits and nesting, which has hardly been improved upon. Since then many collectors have written of it, and published their observations.

Mr. W. R. McLennan, collecting for me at Cape York from 1910 onwards, came to know the bird intimately, and sent down a full account of its natural economy, together with specimens of the birds, the nests and eggs. I joined him in a three months' camp on the Claudie River at the end of 1913, and there became personally acquainted with the bird. It is a denizen of the mangroves, the tea-tree (Melaleuca) swamps behind the mangroves, and the muddy mar-
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Upper: Female; Lower: Male
gins of the rivers where they are bordered by tropical scrubs or rain forests. Mr. Rogers has recorded it from as far inland as 40 miles, but in similar environment. It is a restless active bird, searching for its prey on the mud, amongst the roots of the mangroves, or up into the nearby bordering trees and climbers of the forest. The beautiful glossy blue-black plumage of the male makes marked contrast with the female, the head and neck only of which resemble the male, the rest of the plumage being a rich rufous with a white under surface. The young male resembles the female, but gradually changes to the colouring of the adult male. In the adult the iris is dark brown, bill leaden blue with black tip and edges, and the legs and feet are black.

The stomachs of all specimens examined contained the remains of insects. The call note is a clear, piping whistle; it has a shorter conversational note and a harsher call when feeding, likened variously to the croak of a frog by Gilbert and to the creaking of a door by Hill, who attributes the call to the female only. In that the species resembles the Restless Flycatcher (Seisura inquieta), the Leadbeater Flycatcher (Myiagra rubecula), and the Satin Flycatcher (M. cyano-leuca), which all have three distinct notes.

The majority of nests are placed in upright forks of small tea-trees or mangroves, at any height from two to twenty feet above the water. We also found them on a loop of a vine and on horizontal branches over the water. The nest is a compact cup-shaped structure of fine bark, bound with cobwebs, with patches of whitish tea-tree bark decorating it, and is lined with fibres and rootlets. The eggs, two or three in number, are bluish-white, spotted with brown and pale lavender.

The skins figured are as follows:—Adult male, No. O.17078, Cardwell, Northern Queensland, 1867. Adult female, No. O.17068, Cardwell, Northern Queensland, 1867. Both in the Australian Museum Collection, Sydney.

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The Lotus Bird

(Irediparra gallinacea)


The general distinguishing characteristics of the family Jacanidae, as described in the Catalogue of the Birds of the British Museum, Volume XXIV, at page 68, is as follows:—

"General aspect that of a rail; toes enormously long, and armed with straight, spur-like claws; the hind toe very long, with a claw exceeding it in length." Gould, in Volume VI of his monumental work, the Birds of Australia, pub-