of reed buntings at the Reserve and elsewhere in eastern China deserves further study.

REFERENCES


The eggs of the Grey-crowned Prinia

Prinia cinereocapilla

MICHAEL WALTERS

The Grey-crowned Prinia Prinia cinereocapilla is said to occur commonly in the eastern Himalayan foothills, but little is known of its habits. Of its nidification almost nothing is known, and the accounts that exist appear to be suspect. Ali and Ripley (1973) merely quote two accounts by Stuart Baker, and nothing seems to have been discovered subsequently. The earlier of the two accounts was from a paper on the birds of Cachar (Baker, 1894, p. 15):

‘Very rare indeed. I have taken five nests which were quite indistinguishable from those of P[runklinea] gracilis and the eggs were all a pure skim-milk blue, rather lighter in shade than those of P. gracilis and also less glossy. In shape they are rather broad regular ovals, one or two being lengthened. My last specimen was taken in July 1890, and since then I have seen no others. Ten eggs average .59 x .42.’

However, Baker does not seem to have had much faith in the authenticity of these eggs for he retained none of them. The only eggs of this species in Baker’s collection when it was received by The Natural History Museum are two referred to in Baker (1933). Since he said that these were the only known eggs of the species, Baker had apparently forgotten the eggs he previously collected and attributed to this species. These earlier eggs were presumably collected in Cachar in 1890, and a single egg which is almost certainly one of them, was received in The Natural History Museum with the collection of J. Davidson: the whereabouts of the remaining eggs does not seem to be known. (The Davidson collection contained one other egg attributed to this species which will be discussed later).

The Cachar egg was apparently given by Baker to Lietz, H. E. Barnes; on Barnes’s death his entire collection was purchased by Davidson and incorporated with his own. This egg is stated to have been collected in 1890 at Dunjunmakla, Gujrong, N. Cachar, and Barnes in his MS catalogue described it as ‘pale, unspotted blue in colour. Damaged.’ The egg is indeed slightly damaged, and to my eyes very pale blue in colour, paler than the two eggs in Baker’s collection.

According to the MS catalogue of Baker’s collection, these latter were collected by Mr J. Shillongford in the ‘Nepal terai, Bengal, India’, but his published account (Baker 1933) stated that they were collected in the ‘Bhutan Doors’ in Assam/West Bengal. The eggs were collected with the nest and the bird, Baker commenting, in manuscript, in his catalogue: ‘The very tattered remains of the bird were, I think, correctly identified as of the species.’ From this it
would appear that the identity of the bird was, at best, unproven, and that all three eggs are of uncertain identification. Baker's account (1894) was accepted by Roberts (1992), but he unfortunately misprints the date as 1984!

The other Davidson egg is quite unlike the others, being smaller, white with a cap of light sienna spots round the large end. It is said to have been obtained in north Cachar at an unspecified date, and Davidson obtained it from the collection of Col. Rattray. As there is no other authentication for its identification, it cannot be accepted unless other similar eggs are found. I think it is probably spurious, but as both the egg types attributed to this species occur in others of the genus, no definite statement can be made on this point.

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Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus* and Singing Bushlark *Mirafra cantillans*:

**two new species for Nepal**

HEM SAGAR BARAL

**FINN'S WEAVER *Ploceus megarhynchus***

Sukila Phanta Wildlife Reserve (28°53'N 80°11'E) lies in the far west of Nepal and is the westernmost protected reserve of Nepal. The reserve has three different kinds of vegetation namely Sal forests, riverine forests and grasslands, the last being the most interesting and of the greatest ecological interest. Grasslands constitute almost half of the reserve's vegetation. Sukila Phanta proper is the largest protected patch of continuous grassland in Nepal. It is approximately 16 km² in area. There are other phantas (open patch of short grasslands) in the reserve which are smaller but equally important for birds. These are Singhpur, Karaiya Phanta, Dudhiya Phanta, and some smaller phantas near Jhilmila.

In the eastern half of Sukila Phanta the grassland is damp and has large areas of marshes and pools. It remains inaccessible for most of the year but in the driest months a domesticated elephant can take one through some parts. A big area (4.5 km²) of marsh in the northeast corner is not penetrable by any means of surface transportation. Thus there are still areas in the reserve which have not been visited by any ornithologist.

While carrying out my field work on grassland birds of Sukila Phanta Wildlife Reserve I spent a few weeks in the reserve. On 8 May 1996 I joined the reserve's patrol team, with their elephants, which were passing through an area which had not been visited by any ornithologist before. While going towards the southeast sector of the grasslands at Sukila Phanta, I observed five weavers perched on tall grass reeds. These birds were more thick-set than Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*, and all had completely yellow underparts. In the flock at least two birds were brighter yellow than the others. The brighter ones were obviously adult males and duller individuals either immature males, or more likely, females.

Thus, it appears that there is no authentic description of the nest and eggs of this species, and if a field worker in the area were able to provide one, it would be a most important addition to the literature.

**REFERENCES**


