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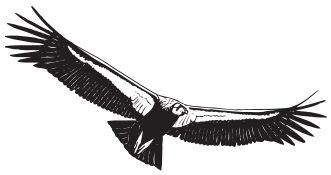
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BOOK REVIEWS

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The Birds of the Thai-Malay Peninsula. Volume Two (Passerines).—David R. Wells, with contributions from Philip D. Round and Uthai Treesucon. 2007. Illustrations by John Gale, Dana Gardner, Kamol Komolphalin, and Brian Small. Christopher Helm, London. 800 pp., 55 color plates, including 4 addenda to Volume One (Non-passerines), regional maps and species distribution maps. ISBN 978-0-7136-6534-5. $100.00 (cloth).

The Malay Peninsula, the continental part of the Sunda subregion, comprises the tip of Tenasserim (Myanmar), peninsular Thailand, peninsular Malaysia, and Singapore, including all associated islands in the Andaman Sea, the Straits of Melaka, and the South China Sea. In avifaunal terms, this review area is rich, with a total of 692 species. The publication of Volume One (Non-passerines) of this set in 1999 helped to pave the way for a comprehensive, up-to-date, and well illustrated handbook series of the birds of the Malay Peninsula, to fill in the niche long left vacant by the now-outdated handbook series, *The Birds of the Malay Peninsula, Volumes I–IV* by Herbert C. Robinson and Frederick N. Chasen (1927–1939) and *Volume V* by Lord Medway and David R. Wells (1976). This volume, published eight years after Volume One, is just as comprehensive as the first but gives a more systematic and detailed treatment of the 307 passerine species occurring in the Malay Peninsula up to 31 December 2005. This volume also represents a milestone in Malaysian, Thai, and Singaporean ornithological literature.

The taxonomic sequence and the scientific nomenclature of this volume follow *The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World, 3rd ed.* (Dickinson, 2003). The English names follow *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (Inskipp et al. 1996). There is, however, a notable exception. The Spectacled Laughingthrush (*Garrulax mitratus*), referred to in most texts as Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush, was named as such so that it would not be confused with the Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush (*Garrulax erythrocephalus*), with which it shares a similar range. Like in Volume One, Malay and Romanized Thai names are included, making the volume especially useful to readers in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

The introduction to Volume Two discusses biogeography, family sequence, updated bird names, format changes, and a gazetteer supplement, the details of which appear in Volume One. Indexes for scientific names, English names, and Romanized Thai names appear at the end of the volume for quick and easy reference. The inclusion of a detailed chronology of ornithologists that have worked in the review area up to the mid-20th century is especially useful (see Appendix One). A brief update for all nonpasserine species is provided in Appendix Two, and this includes species not appearing in Volume One, such as the Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*).

The material for this volume has been painstakingly researched and meticulously collated by the author throughout his 30-year sojourn in the review area. Much of the source material is from the author's own field observations, sound recordings, and research as well as the examination of museum specimens from a number of sources within and outside the review area. Unpublished and published field notes from a number of independent observers, especially G. C. Madoc, have also been included. These are either acknowledged in the main text or referenced to a rich bibliography of over 800 sources. The language used is scientific and technical but can still be understood by the reader with an average command of English.

On average, one species is covered in 2–3.5 pages or more, reflecting the detailed information packed in this volume. Like in Volume One, the species accounts are written in the contemporary handbook format and are systematically categorized under subject headings, which include group relations, identification, habitat and ecology, survival, social organization, voice, breeding, and conservation. "Group relations" details the close relationship between different species within a genus and is an extremely useful section. The terms commonly used are "free-standing," "conspecific," and "superspecies," to explain the degree of relationship. For example, the Pied Fantail (*Rhipidura javanica*) is free standing, showing no close relationship between its other congeners, whereas the Spotted Fantail (*Rhipidura perlata*) may form a superspecies with the White-bellied Fantail (*Rhipidura euryura*) of Java. In the "Identification" section, detailed descriptions of plumage, and bare part coloration are given for adults (male and female) in breeding and nonbreeding plumages, and for juveniles. A range of anatomical measurements (length of specimen, length of tarsus, and width of gape) is also provided. The inclusion of weights (of both wild and captive specimens), where available, is especially useful for researchers. The "Habitat and Ecology" section gives details of habitat types as well as the altitudinal distribution of the species. The "Survival" section lists the known longevity in the wild, based on the retrapping of ringed individuals. The section on "Social Organization" provides information on whether the species is solitary or gregarious as well as known nuptial displays. A whole range of vocalizations is described in detail together with the different circumstances in which they are uttered in the section on "Voice." In the section describing "Breeding," current and detailed information on breeding biology is provided, and this covers nest, egg and brood cycle, and seasonality. Finally, the section on "Conservation" treats the species' status in both global and local terms, including whether it is currently threatened and what the long-term implications on its conservation would be if suitable habitats are lost. This volume reveals a great deal of new information on the biology of most passerine species, greatly filling in many of the information gaps left by Medway and Wells (1976).

A distribution map is included for each species. Unlike in Volume One, where distribution was indicated by bold black

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lines, distribution areas in Volume Two are shaded pink, and for montane species, the mountain ranges on which they occur are outlined in pink. The maps are drawn based on the most recent data on species distribution. This has helped to fill in many gaps in the known distribution patterns of most species. However, because observations from the rainforests have been very limited, the maps may not necessarily show the exact distributions since in some secretive species like the Marbled Wren Babbler (*Napothera marmorata*), distribution data are based on sightings and calls from certain localities only. Further research and observations will fill in more gaps and keep these maps up-to-date. This is certainly one of the stronger points of this work, as cartographical representation of resident and migratory birds in the Malay Peninsula is almost nonexistent, making both volumes the only authoritative sources.

The color plates are without doubt of a very high standard and are all grouped together at the back of the book, separate from the main text. This position makes it easy for quick reference. Because the illustrations come from four different artists, individual styles are evident among the plates. Illustrations are well spaced, with an average of 8–10 species per plate. Most plumage types (adult, subadult, juvenile, breeding, and nonbreeding) are illustrated. All plates accurately show the correct posture and color of the species. John Gale and Brian Small, being assigned difficult groups (babblers and warblers), have done an excellent job. For example in Plate 19, the differences between the Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* in worn and fresh plumages are clearly and accurately depicted. Plates 1, 2, and 3 are among the best illustrations of pittas that I have come across so far. Kamol Komolphalin has done a good job with plates 15, 16, and 17 (bulbuls), a group with which he is obviously most familiar. The illustrations of Dana Gardner, as in Volume One, show the shape and color of most species accurately but lack the detailed treatment so prominently featured by the other artists. The higher quality of the illustrations as compared with Volume One reflects constant coordination between the author and the artists and is most definitely a positive point in this volume.

This volume presents a wealth of new and current information and, like Volume One, becomes the authoritative text on ornithology in the region. The detailed treatment of each species will be extremely useful for the study of birds, not only in the Malay Peninsula, but also throughout the rest of Southeast and South Asia, which share many families and species. An updated background on the physical and biological diversity of the Malay Peninsula together with the high-quality color plates add to its value. Like Volume One, vital conservation issues are also addressed in this volume, which other publications have failed to fully treat. This volume will be an ideal addition to the libraries of high schools, colleges, and universities. Together with Volume One, this work is the most authoritative text on the birds of the Malay Peninsula. Past reference works were not revised and eventually became outdated and obsolete. Therefore, the revision of both volumes from time to time will be an essential task for both the author and the publisher to undertake in order to keep them up-to-date and maintain them as the standard reference work on the birds of the review area for many years to come.—ALLEN JEYARAJASINGAM, SM Sains Alam Shah, Alam (Shah Science School), Jalan Yaacob Latif, Bandar Tun Razak, 56000, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA, E-mail: allenj59@gmail.com.

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