

Nidification of the genus *Melanocharis* Sclater (Dicaeidae)

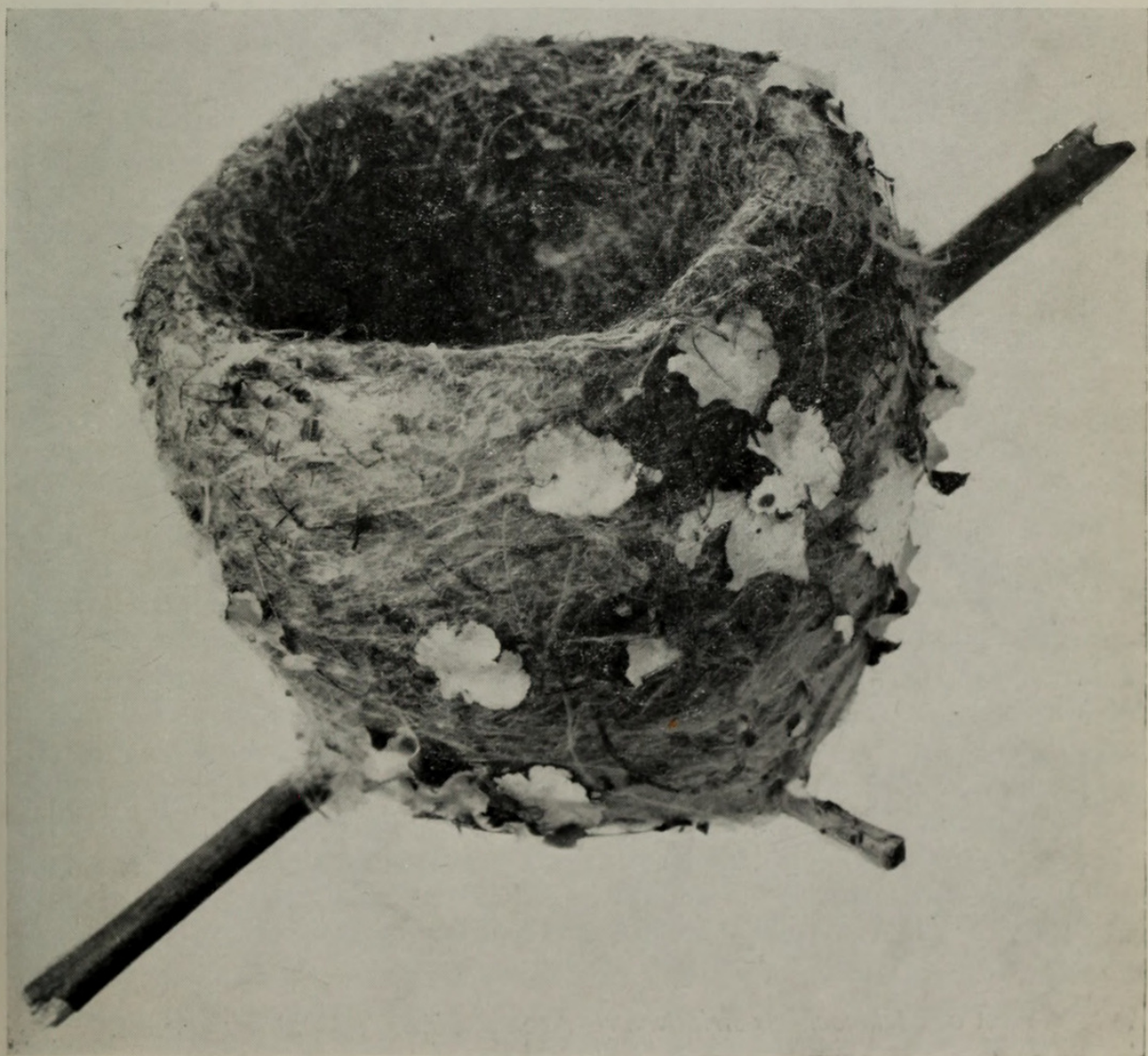
by S. A. PARKER

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Mayr and Amadon (1947, p. 12), state that the nidification of the New Guinea flowerpecker genera *Melanocharis*, *Oreocharis* and *Rhamphocharis* is unknown. A revision of part of the egg collection in the British Museum of Natural History has brought to light the nests and eggs of two species of *Melanocharis*, *M. nigra* (Lesson) and *M. striativentris* Salvadori; the eggs of the latter were described by Ogilvie-Grant (1912, p. 12-13). The nest and egg of *M. nigra* were collected in 1906 by C. Wahnes in the Sattelberg Range, Huon Peninsula, for W. Rothschild. The nest and eggs of *M. striativentris* were obtained by Emil Weiske during 1899-1900, at 5,000 ft. on the Aroa River, south-east New Guinea.

Nests

The nest of *M. nigra* (B.M. No. N.193.457) is an exquisitely woven, unlined cup of umber-brown fern scales, smoothly rounded inside and out, and as deep as it is broad. It is built on to the lateral fork of a horizontal twig (which has been incorporated into the base of the nest) and covered externally, especially basally, with a thin meshing of white plant



Nest of *Melanocharis nigra* Sattelberg, Huon Pen. New Guinea.
x 1½ natural size.



Nest of *Melanocharis striativentris* Aroa R., 5,000'. S.E. New Guinea.
x 1½ natural size.

down and seed pappi; some of the finer strands may well be spiders' silk. It is decorated externally with pieces of a lichen (*Parmelia* sp.), the black lower cortices against the nest and the creamy upper sides facing outwards, in which position the lichen naturally grows. Measurements in mm.: external diam. 51, internal diam. 32, ext. depth 51, int. depth 23.

The nest of *M. striativentris* (B.M. No. N. 60. I.) is similar in shape; its larger size reflects the relatively larger owner. It is a tightly woven, unlined cup of terra-cotta fern scales, bound with plant down and pappi (and spiders' silk?) to the fork of a twig growing downwards at an angle of 50° from the horizontal, and thinly covered externally with the same material. The fern scales used here are much finer than those in the first nest, and the interior of the cup has the appearance of baked clay. This nest is also decorated externally with a lichen (*Sticta laciniata* [Swartz] Ach.), the creamy-green upper cortices facing outwards, though as the under side of this lichen is similar in colour to the upper, the birds have occasionally placed a piece on the nest lower cortex outwards. Measurements in mm.: ext. diam., 62 int. diam. 42, ext. depth 74, int. depth 27.

Eggs

The egg of *M. nigra* (B.M. No. 1941. 9.4.925) measures 17.9 x 14.3 mm., and almost fills the bottom of the nest. It is ovate and fairly glossy; the ground colour is white, faintly pinkish; blotches and streaks of umber, pale purplish-browns and secondary lilac-greys are distributed over the surface and form a concentrated zone around the larger end.

The c/2 of *M. striativentris* (B.M. No. 1901. 7.4.63-4) has already been described by Ogilvie-Grant (*loc. cit.*). Only one egg is measurable; the other is represented by a large fragment. The whole egg is ovate and measures 20.4 x 14.9 mm. It resembles that of *M. nigra* closely, although its markings are darker shades of the same colours, and the zone occurs nearer the pole of the egg, giving it a capped appearance.

All three eggs are similar to those of *Dicaeum agile*, another flowerpecker, though much less heavily marked.

Discussion

Rand (1942, p. 513) describes a nest of *Paramythia*, another New Guinea flowerpecker. This nest was in the dense branches of a shrubby bush on the forest edge, and not far above the ground. (The sites of the *Melanocharis* nests are not recorded). It was a large, untidy cup composed chiefly of moss-like hepatics, with some lichens and semi-woody stems throughout, and had a scanty lining of fine grass stems, rootlets, etc. In the bottom of the nest was a substantial pad of fern scales. It thus differs somewhat from the nests of *Melanocharis* in the nature of the materials, the only mosses and hepatics found in the nests of *nigra* and *striativentris* being small pieces of *Floribundaria* and *Lejeunea*, which were detected on the outsides with a hand lens. It agrees in general shape and use of fern-scales in the construction, however. Apart from the hole-nesting *Pardalotus* (which also constructs domed nests), *Paramythia* and *Melanocharis* are the only dicaeids known to build cupshaped nests. *Dicaeum* and *Prionochilus* (= *Anaimos*) make pensile nests with side entrances.

Mayr and Amadon (*loc. cit.*) and Salomonsen (1960) postulate two groups within the family Dicaeidae, expressed by the evolutionary sequence *Melanocharis*, *Rhamphocharis*, *Prionochilus*, *Dicaeum* and *Oreocharis*, *Paramythia*, *Pardalotus*, with *Melanocharis* the least and

Pardalotus the most highly-evolved. It is interesting to note that nests built by members of the first group are often of greater structural complexity than those belonging to the second, *Melanocharis* and *Paramythia* respectively serving as good illustrations.

Acknowledgement

My grateful thanks are due to members of the Cryptogamic Herbarium staff at the B.M. (N.H.) for kindly identifying the materials used in the construction of the two nests described.

References:

- Mayr, E. & Amadon, D. (1947) A review of the Dicaeidae. *Am. Mus. Nov.* 1360: 1-32.
 Ogilvie-Grant, W. R. (1912) *Catalogue of eggs in the British Museum*, vol. 5.
 Rand, A. L. (1942) Results of the Archbold Expeditions. No. 43. Birds of the 1938-39 New Guinea Expedition. *Bull. Am. Mus.* 79: 425-516.
 Salomonsen, F. (1960) Notes on flowerpeckers. 1. The genera *Melanocharis*, *Rhamphocharis* and *Prionochilus*. *Am. Mus. Nov.* 1990: 1-28.

Footnote

A. L. Rand, (1961 The tongue and nest of certain Flowerpeckers. *Fieldiana: Zoology*, Vol. 39, No. 53, pp. 581-587) describes the nest of *Melanocharis versteri*. From the description and photograph it appears to be very similar to the nests described above.

Unfortunately, Rand's paper was not seen until the present note was in press.-S.A.P.

The Golden-backed Woodpecker, *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* (Scopoli) in the Kangean Archipelago

by A. HOOGERWERF

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Both specimens of this woodpecker shot by me on the Kangean Islands are females of which only one is adult. The Bogor collection contains only three males and one juvenile female from Java, so that as far as this material is concerned, the adult female from Kangean could not be compared with relevant material from Java, but after my return to Holland I compared the Kangean birds with a good series of the subspecies *cheronesus* and *strictus* from Java at present in the Museum for Natural History in Leyden.

Attention was concentrated on this latter race because it is *strictus* of which the females have a yellowish crown as in birds from the Kangean Archipelago.

Hartert¹ found that the only female from Kangean studied by him did not differ in plumage from the females from Java, but he measured a somewhat smaller bill: this is also the case in my material.

Vorderman² obtained a single male when he visited Kangean in 1892, which, he thought, differed from Javan birds on account of the more pinkish under parts. This bird is now in my hands but I cannot discover such a tint, but together with my recently collected female this male differs in other respects from Javan specimens. The feathers of the under surface, especially those on throat, foreneck and chest have much narrower dark edges than is the case in birds from Java, causing the light centre of the feathers to be larger, which gives the under parts quite a different appearance. Moreover the narrow dark streaks on the throat and chin, in nearly all Javan specimens available, are less pronounced or absent in skins from the Kangean Archipelago. The black streak on the sides of the head and the neck is less distinct too; the crown of Vorderman's male



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