UPUPA NIGRIPENNIS, Gould.

UPUPA NIGRIPENNIS, Gould.

Indian Hoopoe.

- Upupa minor*, Sykes, Proc. Zool. Soc. 1832, p. 97 (nec Shaw).
Upupa senegalensis, Blyth, Journ. As. Soc. Beng. xiv. p. 189 (nec Swains.).—Id. Cat. Birds Mus. As. Soc. Beng. p. 46.—Layard, Ann. & Mag. Nat. Hist. xii. p. 174.
Upupa nigrispennis, Gould, MSS. 1853.—Horsf. & Moore, Cat. Birds East-India Co. Mus. ii. p. 725.—Jerdon, Birds of India, i. p. 392.—Gray, Hand-list Birds, i. p. 102.—Holdsw. Proc. Zool. Soc. 1872, p. 435.—Hume, Nests and Eggs Indian Birds, p. 163.—Legge, Ibis, 1875, p. 286.—Hume, Stray Feathers, 1876, p. 458.—Legge, Birds of Ceylon, p. 278.
Upupa ceylonensis, Reichenb. Handb. Scansoriæ, p. 320, tab. 595. fig. 4036.—David & Oustalet, Ois. de la Chine, p. 79.
Upupa indica, Bp. Consp. Vol. Zyg. p. 12.—Reich. Handb. Scansoriæ, p. 320, Taf. 596. fig. 4037.—Finsch & Hartl. Vög. Ost.-Afr. p. 198.—Sharpe & Dresser, Birds of Europe, art. on *U. epops*, in pt. vii.—Anders. West-Yunnan Exped. p. 578.
Upupa longirostris, Jerdon, Birds of India, i. p. 578.—Sharpe & Dresser, Birds of Eur. pt. vii.—Blyth & Walden, Birds of Burma, p. 69.—Hume, Stray Feathers, 1875, p. 89.—Armstrong, Stray Feathers, 1876, p. 315.—Hume, tom. cit. p. 458.—Id. Stray Feathers, 1878, p. 202.

It is now many years since I first noticed the difference existing between the Hoopoe of Southern India and the Common Hoopoe of Europe; and in the name of *nigrispennis*, which I admit now to be somewhat inappropriate, I desired to point out the absence of a white bar on the crest, which is one of the distinguishing characters of the species. Another Hoopoe from the Burmese countries also wants the white subterminal bar on the crest-feathers, and, on account of its long bill, has been called *Upupa longirostris* by Dr. Jerdon, who also supposes that the presence of a white spot on the primaries is an additional character for the Burmese bird. The recent researches of naturalists, however, have tended to prove that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the Burmese Hoopoe from the species of Southern India and Ceylon; and the remarks of both Captain Legge and Mr. Hume show that this is the case. The latter gentleman writes respecting *U. longirostris*:—"Whether this species is a good one may be doubtful. In size typical males equal or exceed *Upupa epops*, but are more rufous and absolutely want even a trace of white on the crest, which *U. nigrispennis*, Gould, our commonest Indian Hoopoe, often has, and have bills incomparably larger than this latter species. I have seen no specimen of *U. epops* with a bill of more than 2·3 inches; the largest bill of *U. nigrispennis* that I have ever yet noticed was 2·1 inches; the bill of one specimen of the present species, sent by Captain Feilden, measures 2·5 inches from forehead to point. The bills of the male Hoopoes are always longer than those of the females; but, sex for sex, I believe that typical *U. longirostris* (a quite young bird, sent by Mr. Oates, has the bill at front 2·2 inches) will be found always to have a bill conspicuously longer than *U. epops*, from which, moreover, it is further separated by the entire absence of white on the crest, while from *U. nigrispennis* its much greater size at once divides it. But then my experience is that the majority of the birds are not typical, but intermediate forms, which it is very hard to separate from *U. nigrispennis*.

"As for the presence or absence of the white spot on the first primary, on which Dr. Jerdon lays some stress, it is worthless as a diagnosis of all three species: specimens of each are before me, exhibiting the spot on both first primaries, on one of them only, and, lastly, on neither of them."

Captain Vincent Legge also states that Ceylonese specimens often have bills as long as those of the Burmese birds.

Dr. Jerdon gives the range of the Indian Hoopoe as throughout Southern India, extending through part of Central India to the north-west provinces and the Dehra Doon. According to Captain Legge it is an inhabitant of many of the dry districts in Ceylon, being very common both in the north and south-east of the island, but is not found in the south-west. The Burmese race extends from Pegu, Tenasserim, and Burmah to Siam, and is also found in the island of Hainan.

The best account of the habits of the present species is contained in Capt. Vincent Legge's 'Birds of Ceylon,' from which I make the following extracts:—"This charming bird frequents, in the island of Ceylon, open sparsely-timbered ground, scrub-dotted plains, cultivated fields, dry grazing-land in the jungles of the

interior, and patnas in the Central Province. In its nature it is a tame bird, and when scratching for insects, with its handsome crest depressed, allows a near approach without taking flight; when flushed it does not usually fly far, but takes refuge in a neighbouring tree, where it will sit quietly, giving out its soft and melodious call, *hoo-poo, hoo-poo*, accompanied by a movement of its handsome crest and an oscillation to and fro of its head at each note. In Jaffna it may be seen close to the houses of the English residents; and I have known it breed in the garden of a bungalow within a few yards of the verandah. It feeds entirely on the ground, strutting about with an easy gait, and scratching vigorously for insects in dry soil. It often scrutinizes the ordure of cattle, beneath which it finds an abundance of food. . . . There is something very striking in the soft tones of this bird's note when heard amidst the chatter and chirping of the numerous Passerine birds which inhabit the Ceylon coast-jungles. Though perhaps uttered tolerably close to the listener, it seems to be wafted on the wild sea-breezes from afar off, and tends to rivet the sportsman's attention as he is returning to his bivouac beneath the already burning rays of an 8-o'clock sun, after a long morning's shooting in the parched-up scrubs of the northern coast. The flight of this Hoopoe is buoyant but undulating; and when pressed it is able to show considerable powers of wing; for in India a trained Hawk is said generally to fail in seizing it.

"The breeding-season in the north of Ceylon lasts from November until April; and possibly a second brood may be reared later on in the year, as Layard mentions the shooting of young birds in August. It breeds in holes of trees, showing in this respect, as well as in its anatomy, its affinity to the Hornbills. It sometimes, however, chooses a hole in a wall, in which I have known it to nest in the garden of an English residence in the Jaffna fort. Burgess writes, with reference to its habit of building in walls in India, that 'it breeds in the middle of April and May, constructing its nest in holes in the mud walls which surround the towns and villages in the Deccan.' The nest is composed of grass, hemp, and feathers. In the same district a nest made of soft pieces of hemp was found in a fort-wall. Miss Cockburn, again, tells us that at Kotagherry it selects holes in stone walls and in earthen banks to build in, making a mere apology for a nest of a few hairs and leaves, which in a short time has a most offensive smell. This, it is asserted, arises from the oily matter secreted by the sebaceous gland on the tail-bone, which, in the female, at the breeding-time assumes an intolerable stench, whence obtains the idea, according to Jerdon, that the bird constructs its nest of cow-dung."

The eggs of the present species are generally five or six in number; but they vary from three to seven. Mr. Hume states that they are of a pale greyish blue tint; but many are of a pale olive-brown or dingy olive-green, and every intermediate shade of colour is observable.

In the Plate I have figured a specimen from Southern India, and another from Burmah, to show the difference in the length of the bill. Both figures are of the natural size, and are drawn from specimens in my own collection.

Gould, John. 1880. "Indian Hoopoe, *Upupa nigripennis*, Gould. [Pl. 66]." *The Birds of Asia* 1(XXXII), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323098>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/115342>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323098>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/323098>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries

Sponsored by

Smithsonian Institution Libraries

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Not in copyright

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.