MEROPS PHILIPPINUS, Linn.

J. Gould and H. C. Richter del et lith.

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Philippine Bee-eater.

- Merops Philippinus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 183.—Ib. Gmel. Edit., tom. i. p. 461.—Lath. Ind. Orn., tom. i. p. 271.—Vieill. Ency. Méth. Orn., part i. p. 275.—Gray, Cat. of Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., part ii. sec. 1. p. 69.—Ib., Cat. of Spec. and Draw. of Mamm. and Birds presented to Brit. Mus. by B. H. Hodgson, Esq., p. 57.—Jerdon, in Madras Journ. of Lit. and Sci., vol. xi. p. 228.—Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. of Calcutta, p. 52.—Horsf. Cat. of Birds in Mus. East Ind. Comp., vol. i. p. 86.—Layard, Ann. and Mag. Nat. Hist., vol. xii. 2nd ser. p. 173.
- Apiaster philippensis minor*, Briss. Orn., tom. iv. p. 560. pl. xliii. fig. 1.
- Grand Guépier des Philippines*, Buff. Pl. Enl. 57.
- Guépier vert à queue d'azur*, Buff. Hist. Nat. des Ois., tom. vi. p. 404.
- Philippine Bee-eater*, Lath. Gen. Syn., vol. ii. p. 674.—Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. viii. p. 165.—Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. iv. p. 129.
- Merops Daudini*, Cuv. Règn. Anim. (1829) tom. i. p. 442.
- *typicus*, Hodgs., Gray, Zool. Misc. (1844) p. 82.
- *Javanicus*, Horsf. Trans. Linn. Soc., vol. xiii. p. 171.—Raffles, Trans. Linn. Soc., vol. xiii. p. 294.—Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 86, *Merops*, sp. 9.—Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., p. 162, *Merops*, sp. 14.
- Javan Bee-eater*, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. iv. p. 132.
- Kachangan*, Javanese, Horsfield.
- Biri-biri* or *Barai-barai*, Sumatrans, Raffles.
- Berray-berray*, Malays, Eyton.
- Boro-putringa*, Hindoos, Dr. F. B. Hamilton.
- Bans-putter*, Bengalese, Ib.
- Putrainga*, Capt. Boys.
- Kattalan cooroovi*, Mal.; lit. "Aloe Bird," (from a fanciful resemblance in the tail of the bird to the aloe plant.) Layard.

THIS species of Bee-eater, although less common than the Hurrial (*Merops viridis*), is nevertheless very generally dispersed over the Continent of India, with the exception of Scinde and the North-Western provinces, where I believe it is seldom and perhaps never seen; in the Madras Presidency and Ceylon it is very common, and in Tenasserim and the Malay countries generally, it is still more numerous; most of the collections from Singapore contain examples; it is also found in Java and Sumatra, and, as its name implies, in the Philippines. It is a very fine and elegantly formed species, and if its markings be less strongly defined than in some other members of the genus, it must still be one of the most showy and attractive birds of its native forests, particularly when seen in such numbers as are mentioned by Mr. Jerdon in the following note, which, as well as the others I have taken the liberty of transcribing, I have thought it but right to give in the words of the respective writers.

"This bird," says Mr. Jerdon, "prefers a well-wooded country, and I have seen it in Goomsoor in open parts of the jungle, and on the west coast occasionally in similar situations. It is almost always found in small parties seated on the tops of high trees, frequently among wet paddy-fields, and in general, perhaps, making a much longer circuit than the *M. viridis*, capturing several insects before returning to its perch. I have on one or two occasions seen it perched on a low palisade overhanging some water, and every now and then picking an insect off the surface. I once saw an immense flock of them at Caroor, in the Carnatic (Coimbatore district), and in the beginning of March there were many thousands of them perched on the lofty trees lining the road there, which sallied forth for half-an-hour or so, making a great circuit before returning. These birds were most probably those which had been spread over great part of that country, now collected to migrate into a more wooded region during the approaching hot season, when insect life is scarce. Like the *M. viridis*, this has a loud and pleasing sort of whistle, but more full and mellow."

"I first observed this bird," states Capt. Boys, "at Mandoo in Malwa, in the month of May 1837; since then I have seen it at Cawnpore, Sultanpore and at Ferozepore, where, on the 17th of May 1846, I killed

three at one shot, which, evidently tired from their transit, were packed close to each other on a prominent twig of a mimosa, in the compound of my garden. This bird builds in holes of steep banks near rivers. At Cawnpore it has taken possession of a steep bank, in the face of which it has perforated numerous holes. It flies exceedingly high, and frequently utters a little *chiruk-chiruk*. It goes forth of a morning and returns to these holes at night in great numbers, but does not fly in flocks, though many may be observed in the air at one time."

Mr. Layard, in his 'Notes on the Ornithology of Ceylon,' informs us that "this Bee-eater is very common throughout the island during the period of its visitation; it is the harbinger of the Snipe, and appears about the middle of September.

"It frequents open fields, perching on fences, or on the tops of low bushes, always choosing a dry projecting twig from which to dart at any insect that may pass by, returning with an elegant sailing flight; before the prey is devoured it is beaten against the perch till sufficiently broken to be swallowed entire. In the evening it frequently pursues insects after the manner of swallows, uttering the while a pleasing chiruping note, and soaring to a great height in the air."

Capt. R. C. Tytler mentions that at Barrackpore, it "is a well-known cold weather visitor, and is less common than the *M. viridis*."

Mr. Blyth has "been informed that *M. Philippinus* may occasionally be seen in the vicinity of Calcutta, but is rare."

A figure of this species occurs among the drawings of the late Hon. F. J. Shore, with the following note:

"Futtehghurh, Oct. 11, 1833.—Does not appear to be near so common as *M. viridis*. The colours vary in every light between blue, green, bronzed, gilded, &c."

Latham mentions that "it is sometimes caught alive, and that attempts have been made to keep it in cages; but it seldom survives long, as it feeds only on the wing and on living insects."

Head, neck, back and wing-coverts coppery-green; lores, stripe beneath the eye and ear-coverts black, bounded above, from the nostrils to the centre of the eye, by a narrow streak of verditer-blue, and below by a broader streak of blue; rump and upper tail-coverts greenish-blue; primaries dark brown, margined externally with coppery-green at the base and blue-green towards the end, and tipped with brownish-black; secondaries rufous, margined externally with coppery-green and tipped with brownish-black; tertiaries bluish-green; tail bluish-green with brownish-black shafts, the elongated portion of the two central feathers black; chin yellow; throat deep chestnut; sides of the neck and breast coppery-green, gradually passing into grass-green on the abdomen, which again passes into pale blue on the vent and under tail-coverts; under surface of the wing deep fawn-colour; irides deep red; bill black; feet purplish-black.

So little difference occurs in the outward appearance of the sexes, that I question if actual dissection must not be resorted to, to distinguish the one from the other.

The figures are of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1855. "Philippine Bee-eater, *Merops philippinus*, Linn. [Pl. 36]." *The Birds of Asia* 1(VII), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323166>.

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