

structure and plumage pattern and colour would not be out of place in the latter genus, and I propose to transfer this babbler to it as the White-bellied Babbler *Stachyris zantholeuca*.

**CHESTNUT-EARED BABBLER** This species usually appears under the name of White-browed Yuhina or Striated Yuhina *Yuhina castaniceps*, and was earlier called the Chestnut-headed Staphida or Chestnut-headed Staphidia, the latter being a misspelling. In the past it has been lumped as constituting five species, now lumped as subspecies, in the genus *Staphida*, with a range from Bengal to Borneo (Deignan 1964). It lacks a distinct crest, and has a small blunt-tipped bill more like those of some fulvettas *Alcippe*. The tail is distinctly rounded with most of its feathers having bold white tips. It does not show any obvious affinities with the yuhinas; nor, for that matter, does it appear to fit satisfactorily into another existing genus, and I propose to return it to its monotypic genus. Plumage pattern and colour vary considerably between the various subspecies, and since the chestnut ear-coverts are one of the few consistent features I suggest that these would provide a more suitable name – the Chestnut-eared Babbler *Staphida castaniceps*.

**CHESTNUT-BACKED MINLA** This species is generally known as the Chestnut-backed Sibia (Rufous-backed Sibia in King *et al.* 1975) *Heterophasia annectans*, and occurs from the Himalayas to northern Thailand and Viet Nam (Deignan 1964). It does not resemble the other sibia species, which are reasonably consistent in their plumage patterns and generally slender build. Although larger, the Chestnut-backed Sibia resembles the Red-tailed Minla *Minla ignotincta* in bill-shape, general proportions and various aspects of plumage pattern. It appears to belong to this genus and I propose to re-assign it as the Chestnut-backed Minla *M. annectans*.

**BLUE-WINGED SIVA** This species occurs from the Himalayas to Malaya and Viet Nam (Deignan 1964). Formerly placed in the now unused genus *Siva*, it has in recent times been assigned to the genus *Minla* and the English name changed accordingly. If one discounts the extensive blue of the plumage as a purely specific character, it is closest in general appearance, and in aspects of head pattern and tail-feather shape, to the two species in the genus *Leiothrix* – the Pekin Robin or Red-billed Leiothrix *L. lutea*, and the Silver-eared Mesia *L. argentauris*. It differs from the minlas in almost all details. Its most appropriate place would appear to be either in the genus *Leiothrix* as *L. cyanouroptera*, or possibly retained in the monotypic genus *Siva*.

In listing these proposals I would add a comment based on my personal view that an English name should be no longer than is necessary to identify a species. The scientific name is the one that defines the taxonomic relationships. Since both the names *Siva* and *Minla* now apply to single species only, it would be reasonable to discard the adjectival appendages 'blue-winged' and 'silver-eared' and refer to these birds by the shorter name which adequately identifies them. Such rationalisation of names would be appropriate for a number of species not discussed here. Since I do not believe that the English name should be of the same hierarchical type as the

scientific one I do not see a problem in later taxonomic changes. I would prefer to see a series of short varied vernacular names as exemplified by the English names of European ducks and finches.

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## Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalensis* new to Thailand

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The observations described below were made at Phu Kradeung National Park in Loei Province, northern Thailand. The main topographical feature of the park is a 60 km<sup>2</sup> plateau rising from the surrounding lowlands at c. 300 m to a maximum of 1,360 m. Much of the perimeter of the gently undulating plateau is made up of a series of sandstone cliffs, which fall vertically c. 10–50 m to meet the steep slopes which in turn form the lower part of the plateau's sides.

On 30 November 1984, we watched a large mixed flock of hirundines and swifts at one of the cliffs, Pa Makduk, feeding over and out from the cliff edge. Brown Needletails *Hirundapus giganteus*, White-rumped Swifts *Apus pacificus* and Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* all fed singly or in small groups above the grassland and open pine woodland of the plateau itself and occasionally joined or flew through the main flock: hence the numbers of these species in the main flock were variable. The main flock fed primarily above the broadleaved forest on the slopes of the plateau's sides, just out from the cliff, and comprised about 40 Dusky Crag Martins *Hirundo concolor*, 50–60 Red-rumped Swallows *H. daurica* and 30 small house martins *Delichon* sp. Our field description of the house martins was as follows: 'Small

martin. Black throat, undertail-coverts and tail; black/blue upperside; underside white, not dusky; white rump fairly narrow; tail more or less square; looks "neater" than European House Martin *Delichon urbica*; noticeably smaller than Dusky Crag Martin. We watched these birds for over 30 minutes, while they flew in front of us, above and below our own elevation, often passing within 20 m.

The above description seems diagnostic of Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalensis*, which has not been previously recorded from Thailand (P. D. Round *in litt.*). In particular, the combination of square tail with black throat and undertail-coverts eliminates the other *Delichon* species. Our description fits well with that in Ali and Ripley (1972) except that we did not see the 'broken white collar on hind-neck'. This is shown in Ali (1977) as a very fine broken line, and examination of museum specimens suggests that it would be visible in the field in less than 10% of individuals (less than three birds in our flock).

The avifauna of Phu Kradeung has been poorly studied to date (P. D. Round *in litt.*). The Nepal House Martin may occur there regularly but has perhaps been overlooked hitherto. Although not recorded before in Thailand, it is known from northern Burma and northern Viet Nam (Ali and Ripley 1972). In Burma it breeds in the Arakan range in the west (subspecies *nipalensis*) and occurs in the north-east (subspecies *cuttingi*) where its status is uncertain (Smythies 1953) and from where it may extend into Yunnan (Meyer de Schauensee 1984). It is recorded as resident in Viet Nam, in north-west Tonkin (King *et al.* 1975), although the subspecies there has not been determined (Vaurie 1959). We were not able to determine the subspecies of the Thai birds.

The records from north-east Burma, Yunnan, north-west Tonkin, and our record from north-central Thailand, all fall along the margins of the Yunnan range of mountains, which reach their southernmost extent in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Viet Nam. Possibly, the race *cuttingi* breeds widely within these mountains, moving to lower altitudes and latitudes in winter. Along the margins of the Himalayas, the Nepal House Martin's altitudinal breeding range is 2,000–4,000 m, descending to c. 350 m in winter (Ali and Ripley 1972). We saw it, in winter but further south, at c. 1,300 m.

The species is highly gregarious and subject to sporadic winter movements (Ali and Ripley 1972), suggesting that it might well be expected to occur in the ornithologically little-known areas of northern Thailand, east Burma (Shan States) and Laos. The status of the Nepal House Martin in Thailand remains uncertain: our record was from the non-breeding season. The large flock seen, rather than one or two birds, suggests it is not a vagrant but may be (at least) an irregular or regular winter visitor. If it is a migrant, it presumably comes from further north in Laos, Burma or Yunnan, whereas the known populations to date seem to undertake only short-distance, altitudinal migrations (Ali and Ripley 1972). Hence, either the birds we saw come from a migratory population or, possibly, they breed locally in northern Thailand. Suitable breeding habitat is present at Phu Kradeung and other mountainous areas in north-west Thailand, where rock overhangs occur on vertical cliff faces (its preferred nest site: Ali and Ripley 1972), some at over 2,000 m.

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## Does the Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* breed in the Philippines?

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On 5 July 1975 I saw a pair of Pied Harriers *Circus melanoleucos* in the rolling cogon grasslands (*Imperata* sp.) east of Laguna de Bay along the road from Tanay, Rizal, to Siniloan, Laguna Province, Luzon. The male was in full adult plumage and the two birds executed an apparent aerial food-pass, though no actual prey exchange could be confirmed. After the birds separated neither landed within view. All my other records of this species from the Philippines are from October to February inclusive.

Parkes (1973) considered an August record of Lint and Stott (1948) to be unusually early, citing Brown and Amadon (1968). The timetable of migration given by the latter authors agreed with that of Smythies (1953) for Burma and with my own experience in Thailand, but adequate data on the seasonal occurrence of the species in the Philippines has not been published.

The species has nested in Burma – in April/May in a grassy plain south of Myitkyina – and may do so regularly in small numbers (Smythies 1953). Brown and Amadon (1968) underlined that breeding in Burma, in the south of its range, is six to eight weeks earlier than in the north. Hence one might expect records in the Philippines as late as May to be northern migrants, and for these to have returned by August would indeed be unusually early.

M. LeCroy (*in litt.*) has revealed the existence of a skin from Mindoro collected on 30 July 1963, and additional evidence of 'oversummering' is to be found in the manuscript notes of E. A. Mearns held by the United States National Museum (USNM). Much of his information was gathered in Mindanao and he found *C. melanoleucos* there in every month except July and December. Many of his records were from 'the broad sweep of cogonal country extending from the Serenaya Marsh