

ON THE OCCURRENCE OF SWINHOE'S SNIPE, *CAPELLA MEGALA* (SWINHOE), IN BENGAL, WITH REMARKS ON ITS DISTRIBUTION IN THE INDIAN REGION.

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(Plate III.)

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I. INTRODUCTION.

Swinhoe's Snipe, *Capella megala* (Swinhoe)¹, breeds in summer in Eastern Siberia and North China. In winter it migrates south and is found in South China, Eastern and Southern India, the Philippines, Borneo, Palawan, Bali, Celebes and Solar Islands, the Moluccas, Admiralty Islands, New Britannia Island, New Guinea, Palau Islands, Northern and North-Western Australia and finally, the Guam Islands in the Marianne or Ladrone Group.² It also occurs in the Malay Peninsula and Siam.³ In India it was first obtained in 1903 by Stuart Baker⁴ at Dibrugarh in North-Eastern Assam. Subsequently, a number of specimens were collected in Burma and the Madras Presidency, but none from the intervening regions, namely, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the Central Provinces. The Indian distribution of this snipe is not fully known. Stuart Baker⁵ remarks: "Probably it occurs early in some numbers in Madras and more often in Eastern India and Assam but is overlooked owing to its resemblance to the Pintail Snipe."

I am greatly indebted to Dr. Bains Prashad, Director, Zoological Survey of India, for kindly going through the manuscript and discussing with me several points raised therein, especially with regard to the distribution of Swinhoe's Snipe in India and adjacent countries.

II. DISTINCTION BETWEEN SWINHOE'S SNIPE AND THE PINTAIL SNIPE.

Swinhoe's Snipe, *Capella megala* (Swinhoe), closely resembles the Pintail Snipe, *Capella stenura* (Bonaparte), and is often mistaken for

¹ 1861. *Gallinago megala*, Swinhoe, *Ibis* III, p. 343. (Peking, North China.)

² Hartert, E., *Vögel paläarkt. Fauna* II, p. 1665 (1921).

³ Robinson, M. C. and Chasen, F. N., *Birds Malay Penin.* III, p. 171 (1936).

⁴ Stuart Baker, E. C., *Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* XX, p. 596 (1911).

⁵ Stuart Baker, E. C., *Fauna Br. India, Birds* (2nd ed.) VI, p. 265 (1929).

the latter. The usual distinction between the two is in the number of tail-feathers which are about 26 (never less than 22) in the Pintail Snipe and 20 in Swinhoe's Snipe. In moulting birds this number cannot often be ascertained with accuracy, and La Personne¹ has recently given the following alternative key which has been confirmed by Stuart Baker in the same note :—

A. Bastard wing always over 19 mm.—*C. megala*.

B. Bastard wing always under 19 mm.—*C. stenura*.

From an examination of four specimens of Swinhoe's Snipe and some twenty-one of the Pintail Snipe in the Indian Museum collection I am able to confirm the above diagnosis.

III. OCCURRENCE OF SWINHOE'S SNIPE IN BENGAL.

Recently, the Director, Zoological Survey of India, received from Mr. G. H. Johans, Assistant Superintendent (Goods), East Indian Railway House, Calcutta, a snipe skin which on examination proved to be *Capella megala* (Swinhoe). In his letter Mr. Johans remarks that the snipe was "shot at 7 hrs. on 6. 9. 39 near village Sankargachi in the Sub-division of Barasat² amongst young paddy. The bird constituted one of a bag of 30 snipes of which the balance, *i.e.*, 29 were Pintail." He adds that "at least one more snipe of similar build was seen on the morning of 6. 9. 39 in the same area"; and further that in 1938 he shot a bird of similar build.

Mr. Johans's specimen constitutes the first record of the occurrence of Swinhoe's Snipe in Bengal. The specimen sent by Mr. Johans is now preserved in the collections of the Indian Museum (Zoological Survey of India), Calcutta, and bears the Registered Number 26481.

IV SPECIMENS OF SWINHOE'S SNIPE AND THE PINTAIL SNIPE IN THE INDIAN MUSEUM, CALCUTTA.

Of Swinhoe's Snipe there are only four specimens in the Indian Museum. Three of these (I. M. Registered Nos. 20902; 20903 and 20904) were collected by Mr. C. B. Rickett in September 1890 from Foochow in East China, while the fourth (I. M. Registered No. 26481) is the Bengal specimen recorded in the present paper.

Of the Pintail Snipe there are some twenty-one specimens in the Indian Museum from the following areas, all, with one exception, in India :—East of Temktze (Central Asia?); Tenasserim and Arakan Districts in Burma; Kamrup and Darrang Districts in Assam; Hooghly and 24-Parganas Districts in Bengal; the Nepal Valley; Raipur District in the Central Provinces; and finally, Travancore in South India.

V RECORDS OF SWINHOE'S SNIPE FROM THE INDIAN REGION.

In view of the comparative rarity of Indian records of Swinhoe's Snipe and the desirability of recording its occurrence wherever found

¹ La Personne, V. S., *Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* XXXVII, p. 734 (1934).

² 24-Parganas District, Lower Bengal.

in India, a compilation of its hitherto known occurrences is given below (Table 1 and Plate III).

TABLE 1.

Known records of the occurrence of Swinhoe's Snipe, Capella megala (Swinhoe), in the Indian Region.

LOCALITY.	DATE.	COLLECTOR.	PUBLISHED RECORD.	REMARKS.
Burma.				
1. Shan States	Dec. 1908.	..	E. C. Stuart Baker, <i>Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. XX</i> , p. 596 (1911).	First record from Burma, and second record from the Indian Region. One specimen.
2. Myitkyina (Myitkyina District).	Jan. 1910.	Capt. Venning.	Harrington, <i>Rangoon Gaz.</i> 1910. ¹	
3. Katha District	Mar. 7, 1910.	H. Blanford.	Harrington, <i>Rangoon Gaz.</i> 1910. ²	
4. Maing Kaing (Upper Chindwin District).	Sept. 29, 1911.	C. S. Barton.	E. C. Stuart Baker, <i>Game Birds India, Burma and Ceylon II</i> , p. 105 (1921).	One specimen, in company with 12 Pintail and 8 Fan-tail Snipes. In young paddy.
5. Thayetmyo (Thayetmyo District).	Oct. 5, 1911.	J. P. Cook.	Ditto.	
6. Pyawil (District ?).	1911.	Capt. Venning.	Ditto.	
7. Around Rangoon	1911 (?).	Mr. Bloech.	Ditto.	
8. Tharrawady District.	Nov. 5, 1913.	C. Gwyer.	Ditto.	
Assam.				
9. Dibrugarh (Lakhimpur District).	Jan. 1903.	E. C. Stuart Baker.	E. C. Stuart Baker, <i>Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. XX</i> , p. 596 (1911).	First record from the Indian Region. One specimen.
Bengal.				
10. Village Sankargachi (Barasat Sub-division, 24-Parganas District).	Sept. 6, 1939.	G. H. Johans.	M. L. Roonwal. (Present paper.)	First record from Bengal. Shot in young paddy in company with 29 Pintail Snipes. One specimen shot, and one seen. One specimen also seen in 1938, but not collected.
Madras Presidency.				
11. Tindivanam (South Arcot District).	Mar. 3, 1912.	R. F. Stoney.	R. F. Stoney, <i>Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. XXI</i> , p. 1083 (1912).	First record from the Madras Presidency. One specimen.
12. Chingleput District.	1911-12 shooting season.	I. S. Fraser ; R. F. Stoney ; G. Ross.	I. S. Fraser, <i>Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. XXI</i> , p. 1083 (1912).	Six specimens.
13. Chingleput District.	Sept. 30, 1914.	R. F. Stoney.	H. Whistler and N. B. Kinnear, <i>Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. XXXIX</i> , p. 262 (1936).	One specimen.
14. Madura (Madura District).	Nov. 29, 1914 ; Nov. 3, 1915.	R. F. Stoney.	Ditto.	Two specimens.

^{1, 2} Quoted from E. C. Stuart Baker, *Game Birds India, Burma and Ceylon II*, p. 105 (1921).

TABLE 1—continued.

LOCALITY.	DATE.	COLLECTOR.	PUBLISHED RECORD.	REMARKS.
Madras Presidency—contd.				
15. Cannanore (Malabar District).	Sept. 21 ; Nov.; Dec.; Jan.; Feb. 22. (Shooting seasons 1925-26 to 1934-35.)	E. G. Phy- thian Adams.	E. G. Phythian Ad- ams, <i>Journ. Bom- bay Nat. Hist. Soc.</i> XXXII, p. 606 (1928); and H. Whistler and N. B. Kinnear, <i>Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.</i> XXXIX, p. 262 (1936).	Fifteen specimens shot in ten shooting seasons.
Mysore State.				
16. Within 40-mile radius of Mysore.	1938-39 shooting season.	E. G. Phy- thian Adams.	E. G. Phythian Ad- ams, <i>Journ. Bom- bay Nat. Hist. Soc.</i> XLI, p. 178 (1939).	First record from the Mysore State. Three specimens.
Ceylon.				
17. Maduramadu, a small tank on the road from Madawachehiya to Mannar (North Ceylon).	April 8, 1934.	E. H. S. Schrader.	W. F. Wait, <i>Spol. Zylenica</i> XIX, p. 337 (1936).	First record from Ceylon. Latest date of occurrence in the Indian Region.

The following tentative conclusions may be drawn from Table 1 and Plate III :—

1. Swinhoe's Snipe is a regular winter visitor to India, usually from the beginning of September to about the middle of March, and sometimes the middle of April. During this period (Tables 1 and 2), the earliest known date of its occurrence in the Indian Region is September 6 (Bengal), and the latest April 8 (Ceylon). The earliest date for South India is September 21, and the latest March 3.

On April 8, 1934, Mr. R. H. S. Schrader shot the first specimen of this snipe from Ceylon, as was recorded by Wait¹. This is the latest date for the whole of the Indian Region, and probably represents a straggler left behind in the northward migration with the advent of warmer weather.

TABLE 2.

Earliest and latest recorded dates of the occurrence of Swinhoe's Snipe in the Indian Region during the snipe season (winter).

Province.	Earliest date.	Latest date.
Burma	Sept. 29.	Mar. 7.
Assam	January.	
Bengal	Sept. 6.	
Madras	Sept. 21.	Mar. 3.
Ceylon		April 8.

¹ Wait, W. E., *Spol. Zylenica* XIX, p. 337 (1936).

2. Swinhoe's Snipe has been recorded from practically the whole of Burma (several specimens); both the south-eastern and the western areas of the Madras Presidency (several specimens); Mysore (a few specimens); Ceylon (one specimen); Assam (one specimen); and Bengal (a few specimens). However, it seems likely that this snipe will be found to occur throughout the remaining portions of Eastern and Southern India, *viz.*, Bihar, Orissa, probably Nepal, Hyderabad State, the northern portion of the Madras Presidency and the southern portion of the Bombay Presidency.¹ It is, therefore, desirable that all bags of snipe shot in these areas should be carefully examined and finds of Swinhoe's Snipe published. The western limit of Swinhoe's Snipe in North India must remain a matter of conjecture until actual records are forthcoming.

VI. SUMMARY.

1. Swinhoe's Snipe, *Capella megala* (Swinhoe), has been recorded for the first time from Bengal.

2. A list of the known occurrences of Swinhoe's Snipe in India, Burma and Ceylon is given.

3. Swinhoe's Snipe is a regular winter visitor to the Indian Region usually from the beginning of September to the middle of March and sometimes the middle of April. The earliest recorded date is September 6 (Bengal) and the latest April 8 (Ceylon).

4. Swinhoe's Snipe is expected to occur in the whole of Eastern, Southern and South-Western India. Its western limit in India is not precisely known.

5. All future records of the occurrence of Swinhoe's Snipe in the Indian Region deserve publicity.

¹ This expectation is based on the assumption of a more or less continuous distribution of the bird from Burma to Peninsular India *via* the existing coast-line.

In the course of a discussion on the subject, Dr. B. Prashad suggested another possible explanation which needs to be considered. He has noted, in the course of studies on the geographical distribution of animals in India, that several species common in Burma reappear in Peninsular India, while they are absent from the intervening land area, *viz.*, Bengal, Orissa and the northern portion of the Madras Presidency. Dr. Prashad surmises that this anomaly is explicable by the probable existence, in geological times, of a direct and straight land connection between South-Eastern Asia (Burma, Malay, Indo-China and Southern China) and Peninsular India. The existence of such a land connection is supported by some geological evidence, as also by evidence from fresh-water fish distribution (Hora, S. L., *Curr. Sci.* V, pp. 351-356, 1937). To the objection that such an explanation could not be applied to those animals which progress through the air, and less so to a bird like Swinhoe's Snipe which is highly migratory, it can be said that the bird originally immigrated by the *direct* land route which then existed between South Eastern Asia and Peninsular India, and continues to do so to-day as a matter of instinct even after the submergence of the direct land connection. If that is so, one would not expect to find, except as stragglers, Swinhoe's Snipe in Eastern India (Bengal, Orissa and the northern part of the Madras Presidency), and the scanty records so far obtained in this zone would seem to support this contention. Further, one would expect to find the birds migrating *via* the Bay of Bengal; so far no such records have been obtained and only future finds of Swinhoe's Snipe in the Bay can settle the question, at least partially.