

THE HINDU, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1960.

THE BIRDS OF MADRAS

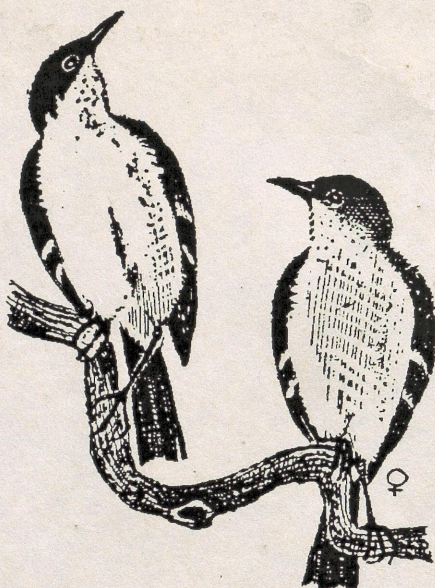
## THE COMMON IORA

By H. A. C.

THOSE who like their common birds uncommon will like the little iora, and even those who look only for vivacity in a bird cannot fail to like it. The Common Iora is one of the most familiar of the smaller birds in well-wooded gardens and the thorny scrub, in and around Madras. It is slightly smaller than a sparrow, with a neat, pointed bill and trim legs, both of a plumbeous darkness, a squat, energetic body and a tail with a squarish tip. The cock is black above and a rich yellow below—in non-breeding plumage the black of the back turns olive green in places; the hen is olive green where the cock is black, and a less pure, greenish yellow below; both have white wing patches.

The birds usually go about in pairs, and it is not too hard to find them among the trees and bushes they like, if you look and listen for them. A low, rich, remarkably human whistle, a longer whistle with a rather plaintive sound to it, and churring calls, one of them a challenging, scolding, reiterated 'chu-chu-churr' are the commonest call notes.

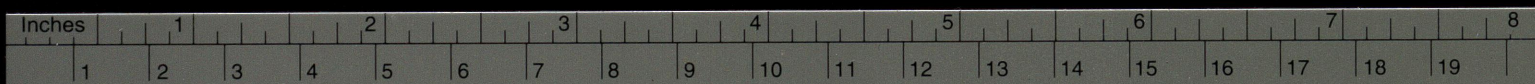
The iora breeds in summer, and it is then that the cock is at its glossiest. The courtship display is a truly wonderful sight—the cock shoots up into the air and fluffs out its thick plumage, till it is a round ball of yellow, white and black, then slowly descends in a spiral to a perch besides its mate. When roosting, too, especially when there is a drizzle, the bird fluffs itself out the head is then quite hidden in the raised feathers of the upper back, and one leg is similarly lost in the down of the abdomen, so that the bird looks, not like a bird, but like a pale-



coloured ball of fluff stuck on to the twig it rests on with the pin that is the other leg! Few other birds can fluff themselves out so roundly as the iora, but normally the plumage lies sleek and close to the skin.

It is said that ioras breed rather late in the summer, from April onwards. In South India, at any rate, they may occasionally nest earlier, even as early as February. The nest is a piece of art, a miniature coffee-cup made of the finest roots and fibres, thin-walled, close-woven and lined with glistening white cobwebs. It is usually placed well up a tree, in the fork of a twig, and with some foliage cover shading it; mango trees are frequently chosen for nesting in. Ioras are close sitters.

Ioras feed mainly on tree and bush living insects, such as caterpillars, and flit from twig to twig, inspecting the undersides of leaves for lurking prey. They do not hunt prey on the ground, in fact they rarely descend to the ground, and so you will not find them in gardens where there are no shrubs or twiggy trees, or in the open scrub.



Centimetres

**TIFFEN** Color Control Patches

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Blue

Cyan

Green

Yellow

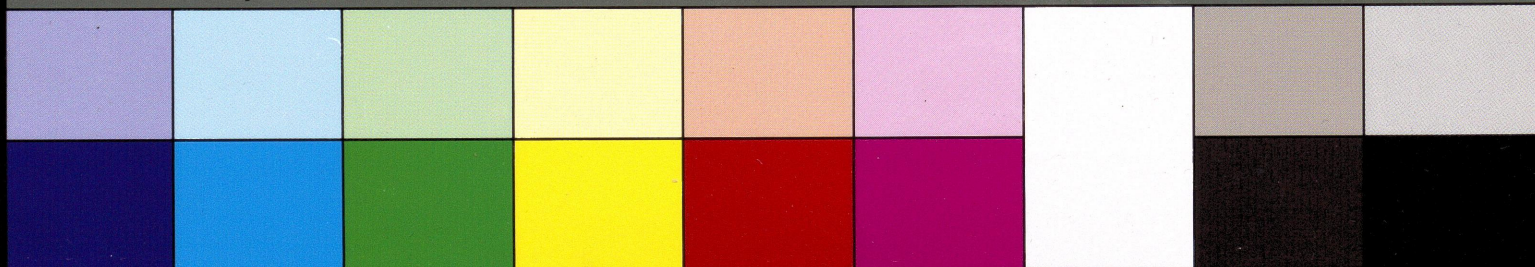
Red

Magenta

White

3/Color

Black



# THE TREE-PIE

By H. A. C.

THE tree-pie, as its name suggests, is essentially an arboreal bird, but is to be found in comparatively thin jungles, and freely enters gardens and groves. However, with the cutting down of trees in most of our towns, it is much more of a suburban than a city bird to-day.

It is a relative of the crows and magpies, and for all its fancy plumage and long, graduated tail, is very crow-like in its bill and habits. It has a sooty black head and is chestnut and pale grey on

this note, is mainly a bird of the plains, though it does seem to ascend the Nilgiris on occasion; in our southern hills we have another tree-pie, with a quite beautiful plumage, with patches of white setting off its greys and chestnut and black.

Tree-pies usually go about in pairs, occasionally by themselves, or in parties of four or more, probably family parties. They seem to be strictly diurnal, lacking the ability of the common crow to see by poor light. However, they are often very active just before sunset, as many diurnal birds are.

Tree-pies eat all sorts of fruits, and no doubt they take in some insect food as well, and hunt small animals, like tree-living lizards—they are omnivorous, like the crows. But they are even fonder of nest-raiding and baby-snatching than the crows, their more arboreal habit making them a greater menace to the nests and eggs of other small birds. For this reason, tree-pies deserve to be strongly discouraged in gardens and similar places likely to attract other birds.

The tree-pie nests in summer, and its nest is a much more luxurious affair than that of crows, lined with fine fibres and deeper. The nest is well hidden in the foliage of trees, and both the parent birds share the building and guarding of the nest. When feeding their young, the parent birds are especially given to snatching the unfledged nestlings from the nests of other birds in the neighbourhood.

Tree-pies are frequently mobbed by other birds, and rarely stay long in the same tree. They have the flight typical of other long-tailed birds, whirring and skimming alternately, with a rise and a dip in flight. However, though good fliers, they are much more given to hopping furtively from tree to tree than to long flights. Perhaps it is this restless habit of flitting from one tree to another that is responsible for their specific faunal name, which is vagabunda.



the body; the foot-long tail is grey, broadly tipped with black and with a pale band just above this black tip. It is a showy bird and one that is easily spotted, but it is its voice that gives it away much oftener than its long tail, as it goes flitting from tree-top to tree-top.

It has many calls, some grating and harsh, some almost musical! The commonest of these is a metallic 'cronk', and a pleasant, tinging, metallic 'ting-a-ling'. The common tree-pie, the tree-pie of

From Shanthi Charalata

INT.  
Who is H.A.C.

