Birds in the Chamonix Valley, France.

By

M. U. Hachisuka.

It was four seasons running I spent my summer vacations in the plain of Chamonix valley in French Alps, until 1926. The following is a list of birds, those cause under my notice. It never pretends to be exhaustive but the writer trusts that it will contribute something to the knowledge of the avifauna of the Chamonix Valley.

1. *Corvus f. frugilegus.*

Rooks are generally seen on fields lower than le Fayet. No doubt they are resident there.

Rookeries are not commonly seen and they are not as big as the English ones. Ravens are sure to be found in the higher ground but as they are scarce I have not met them.

2. *Garrulus g. glandarius.*

The Jay is found not uncommonly in a coniferous forest. The birds do not depend much upon the altitude.

3. *Pyrrhocorax graculus.*

The Alpine Chough is seen in suitable places but the nests are not found in this valley.

A big flock consisting of many hundreds of birds was often seen at col de Balme.

4. *Chloris c. chloris.*

The Greenfinches were seen a few times in the month of September on their migration.

5. *Carduelis c. carduelis.*

Five Goldfinches were seen from September 15th, 1926 for a few days on the plain near the station of Les Praz de
Chamonix. Thrushes are not at all common in this district and therefore the birds were not seen at any other time. They were on their way to the South.


The Chaffinch is a common resident on the plain and in the woods. Several nests were found, they were as usual made neatly of horsehair and moss.

The young are seen in June and July.

7. *Montifingilla n. nivalis.*

The snowfinch is not uncommon but they live above the snow line and are not easy to find.

8. *Passer d. domesticus.*

A small number of house sparrows are found near the inhabitants.


The yellow buntings are seen all through the summer but the number augments a little in September.

10. *Alauda a. arvensis.*

Common Larks are found normally in the lower ground near Saint Gervais. They are also found breeding in the elevated ground such as Les Praz de Chamonix.

11. *Anthus pratensis.*

Meadow Pipits were observed on many occasions in the valley of Chamonix.


A small number is always seen near Chamonix.


The White Wagtail is more common than the aforementioned species commonly seen near a river.


Tree creepers are not so common as in some other Alpine countries but small numbers are to be seen in the forests near les Tines and Bois du Paradis.
15. *Tichodroma muraria muraria*.

It was rather a surprise to find Wall-creepers in the plains of Chamonix. Two or three birds were often seen on walls of houses in the village des bois and Les Praz de Chamonix.

They were seen for a few weeks in July and August in 1926. The altitude of Chamonix is 1035 metres and it is very low for the summer resident of this bird.

I examined a good series of material in the British Museum (about fifty) which shows a certain amount of constant variations. They are all resident in mountainous districts in the Alps as far east as Eastern China and there is little difference in the variations of colours, even individually. Only two white spots on each primary being different sometimes in one district. The length of a well developed bill is variable to a certain extent but apparently this does not signify the sexual difference, however it is constant that the far Eastern bird has a short bill and European (Alps, Asia Minor, Dalmatia) has the longest. The wing and tail of the European is the smallest and that of the Far Eastern is the largest. Tarsus does not very much 22 mm. is the usual length but sometimes 1 mm. exceeds or otherwise.

When I split into three races the following nomenclatures appear to be correct.

Tichodroma muraria muraria.

*Certhia muraria* L., Syst. Nat. Ed. XII, p. 184, 1766

(South Europe).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>(24—35)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wing</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>(95—100)</td>
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<td>Tail</td>
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Alps, Asia Minor, and Dalmatia.
Tichodroma muraria longirostris.

*Metacilla longirostra* Gm., Reise Russl. III. p. 100, Taf. XIX, 2 (1774—Gebirge Persiens).

- Bill 24 (21—25)
- Wing 102 (99—104)
- Tail 60 (56—64)

Samarkand Kurdistan, Turkestan, Tibet, Cashmere, and Himalayas.

Tichodroma muraria muralis.

*Tichodroma muralis* David & Oustalet, Ois. Chine, p. 88 (1877—ex Brisson).

- Bill 22 (19—26)
- Wing 103 (101—108)
- Tail 60 av.

Yunnan, Shensi, Kansu, and Szechuan (W.)


A Nuthatch was seen in a forest near Les Tines, forests are chiefly consisted of various conifers which are not so suitable for nuthatches. It is worth while nothing a pure albino nuthatch which I examined the specimen in Geneva Museum.

17. *Parus m. major.*

Continental Great Tits are seen above Saint Gervais also they are not rare in the forest near Chamonix but Coal and Crested Tits are the predominant species.


Continental Coal Tits are probably the commonest in the high latitudes up till the tree line.


Alpine Willow Tits are not noticed so much like other species of Tits but are common along the valley especially in the higher places.
20. *Lophophanes cristatus mituratus.*

The Crested Tits are to be found commonly above les Houches. The call note of this Tit is quite different from any others which does not recall any other tits. If *Sittiparus* is generically separated from other Tits in the Far East it is also sufficient for the Crested Tit to form a genus of its own for this name.


21. *Aegithalus c. europaeus.*

The Northern Long-tailed Tit are also commonly found along the valley.

22. *Regulus c. regulus.*

The Gold Crest is also found commonly more so in Larch forests.

23. *Lanius c. collurio.*

Breeding pairs of Red-back Shrikes are seen in forests on the plain of Chamonix. They generally have grown up young in early August.

24. *Muscicapa s. striata.*

A few Spotted Flycatchers were seen during this mid summer.

25. *Phylloscopus c. collybita.*

A pair of Chiffchaffs were seen near a house in Les Praz de Chamonix in early September.


A big flock of Mistle Thrushes are often seen at the latter part of August and all September.
27. *Turdus p. phylomelus.*

Some numbers are generally seen during the autumn migration but a few are seen in a forest during the summer no doubt they breed in the Chamonix valley.

28. *Turdus m. merula.*

Blackbirds are resident here. Its number is more than the aforementioned species. All thrushes are exceedingly shy owing to constant persecution.

29. *Saxicola r. rubetra.*

The whinchat is a summer resident on the plain of the Valley, eggs are found at the end of July.


The Redstart is seen commonly during the Summer.

31. *Troglodytes t. troglodytes.*

The wren is seen at the suitable places all along the valley they are also found in a stony slope with vaccinium covered ground.

32. *Cinclus c. meridionalis.*

All the mountain streams are inhabited by pairs of Dippers.

They also hunt in the glacier streams. I have not found them lower in the valley. A pair of birds are often chased each other by capturing a food. They float in the air like warblers white patches are conspicuously shown.

33. *Hirundo r. rustica.*

A flock of twenty or so passes down the valley to southward in the middle of September. At higher ground up beyond the garden of Mer de Glace a small valley between the two high peaks is called Col des hirondelles. It is known at this place that dead swallows are often found in autumn. Therefore this place must be on the route of its migration.
34. *Dryocopus m. marius.*

The great Black Woodpecker has its headquarters in the Alps. Although they are rare but the birds are known to the local gunners.

35. *Falco t. tinnunculus.*

Kestrels are sometimes found on the plain of Chamonix I do not believe they breed in this district.

36. *Falco v. vespertinus.*

A specimen of a Red-footed Falcon I mention here did not come from the district I deal with but a bird was shot somewhere near the valley some years ago and a specimen is now in my collection. The bird is still rare enough in the Alpine district. It is worth quoting here.

37. *Accipiter n. nisus.*

Sparrow Hawks are seen commonly along the valley they probably nest at suitable places.

38. *Gypaetus barbatus grandis.*

I have examined a specimen of Bearded Vulture obtained in Basses Alps before the war. The bird was found dead among mountains. When it was skinned a big tarsal bone of a sheep was found in the throat.

I heard of no breeding records in the Alps within the last ten years or more but some odd birds are still to be seen in very rare occasions.


The Wood Pigeon is not rare in any forest.

The migration of the Wood Pigeon is not observed in the Valley of Chamonix although the migratory route of this bird is wellknown to the native gunners in many districts in France.

40. *Lyrurus t. tetrix.*

Black Grouse are rare, only half a dozen or so being
brought to the market of Chamonix within the first month of
the shooting season.

A stomach contents I have examined were Airelles and
myrtills.

The wellknown haunt of the Black Cock in the Alps is
Haute Savoire. I have examined several specimens taken
from this district in the Museum of Geneva, Lyon, Dijon and
Paris. They appear to be slightly larger than the typical race.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wing} & \quad 26-27 \quad \text{Wing} \quad 23 \\
\text{Tail} & \quad 12.5 \quad (\text{Central})
\end{align*}
\]

*Tetrao urogallus* is only found in Jura and are never seen
in Haute-Savoire.

41. *Tetrastes bonasia rupestris.*

The Hazel Grouse are also found near the limit of a tree
line. Only a few birds are killed during the season.

42. *Lagopus mutus helveticus.*

It is exceedingly scarce in this district though Ptarmigans
are known above the snow line. One was seen at Couloir du
Col de la Buche by a friend of mine. I have not acquainted
with the birds than the above mentioned district, therefore I
presume that it does not descend below 2750 m. in Summer in
this district.

43. *Phasianus colchicus.*

Chamonix valley is not a good haunt for Pheasants but a
few are sometimes to be met with. I have examined four males
which probably had not come from the valley but from not
very far from the district. They had no traces of white rings
at all, no conspicuously coloured eyebrow.

The flanks are paler than typical *colchicus*, which is yellow-
ish orange. There were not many races of Pheasants intro-
duced on the Continent and at least in the Alps so called
torquatus are not found although the above mentioned specimens were much paler than the real P. c. colchicus.

44. Perdix perdix (italica ?)

Among the game birds the Partridge is the commonest in the district.

The red-legged Partridge (Alectoris) is apparently not known from the valley.