

oxpeckers, and other species elsewhere described belong to this large family, and make remarkable community nests. The widow birds (q.v.) are closely related to them. See Plate of NESTS OF WEAVER BIRDS.

WEAVER BIRD. The popular name for a group of birds, forming the family Ploceidæ, similar to the finches. The name refers to the structure of the nests of these birds, which are woven in a wonderful manner of various vegetable substances. About 275 species of Ploceidæ are known, of which over 200 are found in Africa, and the remainder in tropical Asia, the Philippines and other East Indian islands, and Australia. They are small birds, with a strong conical bill, sometimes coral red. The claws are large and very long. The wings are pointed, the first quill remarkably short. There is great diversity in the form and appearance of the nests constructed by different species. One of the best-known species is the yellow weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*), the baya (q.v.) of India. Many other weaver birds construct nests much on the same plan—pouches elongated into tubes, entered from below; some are kidney-shaped, with entrance at the side. They often suspend their nests in the same way from the extremities of branches, and prefer branches which hang over water, probably as affording security against enemies. Social habits are prevalent among them, and many nests of the same species are often found close together. Some of them attach one year's nest to that of the year preceding, as certain Madagascan species, which sometimes thus make five nests in succession, one hanging to another. Some of the African species build their nests in company, the whole forming one structure. The social weaver birds (*Philetarus socius*) of South Africa construct in communities an umbrella-shaped roof in a tree, beneath which may be 300 bird homes. An acacia with straight, smooth stem, such as predaceous animals cannot climb, is often selected. The birds begin by constructing the roof (of coarse grass), each pair afterward building their own nest, formed in an excavation on the under side of the roof. As new nests are built every year, the weight of the structure often becomes so great as to break down its support. The waxbills, Java sparrows, nutmeg birds, African