



NECTARINIA OSEA. Bonap.

NECTARINIA OSEA, Bonap.

Jericho Sun-bird.

Cynnyris Osea, Bonap. Compt. Rend. de l'Acad. Sci., tom. xlii. p. 765.

Nectarinia Osea, Trist. in Proc. of Zool. Soc. 1864, p. 445.—Id. in Ibis, New Ser. vol. i. (1865) p. 72, pl. ii.

I AM indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Amhurst, of Diddington Park, Norfolk, for several examples of this beautiful but hitherto little-known Sun-bird for illustration in the 'Birds of Asia,' and also for a specimen of the plant on which I have figured it, all of which were obtained during their visit to Syria. Science is not less indebted to the Rev. H. B. Tristram for the very interesting account of this bird published by him in the 'Ibis' for 1865, from which I take the liberty of extracting some interesting passages:—

"Our acquaintance with the Sun-bird commenced at Jericho, on the last day of the year, when six specimens were obtained close to our camp at Ain Sultān. The oases of the plains of Jericho appear to be its metropolis. We never met with it except in the neighbourhood of water; but wherever a few tamarisks, zizyphus bushes, or graceful 'retem' shade a fountain or straggling pool in some deep glen opening on the Dead Sea, there a few occur. The larger oases, however, of Jericho at the north-west and Safieh at the south-east end of the Dead Sea are the resorts of great numbers, which, though there to be found in almost every tree, are nowhere gregarious. They are noisy and pugnacious, the males chasing each other with loud cries, and being as tenacious of their respective freeholds as the Robin of Europe. The note is clear and monotonous, very much like the call of the Willow-Wren, but sharper, and often reminding one of that of the Blue Tit, yet with a more hissing sound. It is incessantly repeated from sunrise to evening, and the whereabouts of the male bird can at once be detected; but to see him is not so easy, as he ceaselessly hops in the centre of the thickest and most impenetrable scrub, and darts very quickly and suddenly across the open from tree to tree. The male is extremely restless, and, as it twists and clings to one twig after another in search of insects, its actions remind one of those of the Tits much more than of those of the Creeper. Like *Trichodroma muraria* it opens and closes its wings with a curious jerking flap. Occasionally I have seen two rivals for the favours of a female singing on the top of a tree, and puffing out their brilliant orange and red axillary tufts, which only at such times are at all conspicuous.

"We found these Sun-birds plentiful by the wooded banks of the Jordan, but never far removed from the stream, and ascertained that their summer range is more extensive than we had expected; for one day in the month of March while shooting on the south side of Mount Carmel, on the slopes which run down to the Plain of Sharon, I secured a pair close to the edge of the plain, and not far from the sea. This was the only occasion on which we met with the bird far away from the Jordan valley; but I have reason to believe it has been obtained in Asia Minor, as a French collector at Smyrna described to me a bird he had once received from the interior, which could only, I think, have been a female of this species.

"In April I returned to our old quarters at Ain Sultān, near Jericho, and in the afternoon of the 13th I discovered no less than seven nests—one with three eggs in it, another with two hard-set, a third in the course of construction, and four containing young birds. All were in precisely similar situations, suspended from the extremity of a small twig hanging down in the centre of a 'nubk' tree, the thorny branches of which spread in a circle so close to the ground that I had in every instance to creep on all fours to get under them. These nests were perfectly inaccessible to the attacks of the serpents and lizards which there abound,—and were very neatly made and compact internally, with a small hole in the side, long straws and fibres being attached to the extremity of the drooping branch, and on these the bag is woven; when finished, a few leaves and straggling straws are loosely fastened all round, to elude observation and remove the appearance of art.

"In form and size *Nectarinia Osea* resembles *N. Asiatica*, but has the upper portion of the axillary tufts rich red instead of orange, and the metallic reflexions of the back and throat bright green in lieu of dark purple, which colour only appears on the forehead and the lower part of the breast. It is also allied to *N. affinis* from Abyssinia, but differs in the greater extent of the green instead of purple reflexions.

"The male varies much in colour, and does not appear to attain the nuptial dress till after Christmas, and loses it again in the summer. Not more than one in four of the males we shot in January was in full plumage, the brilliant metallic reflexions of the back, throat, and breast being interrupted by many brown feathers; and I have several times taken paired and breeding birds in this incomplete livery.

"The female plumage is always brown grey above and lightish olive grey beneath, with palish-yellow vent and under tail-coverts; and the tail black, with metallic-green reflexions."

The Plate represents the two sexes, of the natural size. The plant is *Psoralea bituminosa*.



Gould, John. 1867. "MacGregor's Niltava, Nectarinia osea, Bonap. [Pl. 23]." *The Birds of Asia* 2(XIX), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323009>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/118636>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323009>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/323009>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Smithsonian Institution Libraries

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Not in copyright

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.