PHASIANUS REEVESII, J.E. Gray

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Reeves's Pheasant.

- Phasianus Reevesii*, J. E. Gray in Griff. Anim. Kingd., vol. iii. p. 25.—Id. Hardw. Ind. Zool., vol. i. pl. 39.—G. R. Gray, Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 497, *Phasianus*, sp. 6.—Sclat. in Proc. of Zool. Soc. 1863, p. 117.—J. E. Gray, List of Spec. of Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., part v. *Gallinæ*, p. 28.
- Barred-tailed Pheasant*, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. viii. pl. cxxiv*.
- Phasianus veneratus*, Temm. Pl. Col. 485.—Jard. Nat. Lib., vol. xiv. pl. xvi.
- *superbus*, Jard. Nat. Lib., vol. xiv. p. 202.
- Syrmaticus Reevesii*, Wagl. in Isis, 1832, p. 1229.—G. R. Gray, Cat. of Gen. and Subgen. of Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 104.—Bonap. Compt. Rend. de l'Acad. Sci., tom. xlii. séance du 12 mai 1856.
- *superbus*, Strickl. in Ann. & Mag. Nat. Hist., 1841, vol. vii. p. 36.

CONSIDERABLE confusion respecting the nomenclature of this remarkable species has been occasioned by the late M. Temminck having in his 'Histoire Naturelle Générale des Pigeons et des Gallinacés' assigned its two lengthened tail-feathers to the old *Phasianus superbus* of Linnæus, an error which he subsequently corrected when describing and figuring the bird in his 'Planches Coloriées' as *P. veneratus*. In the interval between the publication of the two works above mentioned, Dr. J. E. Gray named it *Phasianus Reevesii*, in honour of the late Mr. John Reeves, a gentleman ardently attached to natural science, who, during his many years' residence in China, contributed so largely to our knowledge of the productions of that highly interesting country; and this name it is now by common consent allowed to retain, on the score of priority to that of *veneratus*.

The error of M. Temminck was adopted by Dr. Latham; and hence, while the description of the Barred-tailed Pheasant in his 'General History of Birds,' vol. viii. p. 196, has reference to the old *P. superbus*, some of his remarks apply to the present species. It is probable that the bird did not escape the notice of the celebrated traveller Marco Polo, since he states "There be plenty of Feysants and very great for 1 of them is as big as 2 of ours with Tayles of eygth, 9 and ten spannes long from the Kingdom of Erguyl or Arguill, the W. side of Tartary"; but I question if he ever saw more than the central tail-feathers, which, being held in high estimation by the Chinese, were deemed suitable presents to foreigners, and hence these feathers found their way to Europe many years before the entire bird; the time however arrived when, through the instrumentality of Mr. Reeves, we were favoured with the sight of the skin of a perfect male (which, as above mentioned, Dr. Gray dedicated to him), and some years later of a female.

To him we are also indebted for the introduction of the first living bird into Europe, a fine male specimen having been imported by him about the year 1831. The son of this gentleman, Mr. John R. Reeves, brought over a female in 1838; "and the pair," says Mr. Tegetmeier, in the 'Field' for June 7, 1867, "were living in the Gardens of the Zoological Society at the same time; but the male being unfortunately an aged bird, they did not breed." The next living example that reached this country was a fine male, received direct from China by John Kelk, Esq., in 1862, and which roamed in perfect liberty and in excellent health for two successive years among other pheasants at his seat, Stanmore Priory, near Edgware.

Out of evil comes good; and thus war, with all its horrors, is the precursor of extended knowledge. The productions of the vast empire of China were but the other day so little known to the man of science that it was only by surmise, by grotesque drawings, and the receipt of remarkable feathers of birds that he formed any idea of its ornithology; the late war, however, has placed Europeans and the inhabitants of the "celestial empire" upon a different footing; and we now not only get skins of this fine pheasant, but living examples in considerable numbers—so abundantly, in fact, that at this moment (May 1868) the bird is being successfully bred in more than one menagerie both in England and on the continent.

"The successful introduction of the living birds now in this country," says Mr. Tegetmeier, in the No. of the 'Field' above referred to, "is owing to the combined efforts of Mr. John J. Stone and Mr. Walter H. Medhurst, H. M. Consul at Hankow. For several years past Mr. Stone had made continuous efforts to obtain this and other new pheasants from Northern China, with no satisfactory result, until the valuable aid of Mr. Medhurst was obtained; and it is mainly due to that gentleman's thorough knowledge of the natives of China and of their language that the true habitat of this bird was ascertained and its introduction accomplished. Mr. Medhurst employed an experienced Chinaman to proceed into the interior for the express purpose of collecting this and other rare pheasants, of which coloured drawings had been supplied for his guidance. The first three lots obtained, with a single exception, all died before they reached England. The fourth was obtained in the direction of Syechney, about thirty days' journey from Hankow; and of these, seven

Reeves's Pheasants were landed here alive and deposited in the Zoological Gardens; Mr. Stone has since received several others, which are located in his pheasantries. In sending home these birds Mr. Medhurst was anxious that the Queen should have early possession of specimens; and in compliance with this wish one male and two females were offered to and graciously accepted by Her Majesty, and they are now in the aviaries at Windsor Castle."

That the *Phasianus Reevesii* is likely to breed in and ornament our aviaries for many years to come, there can be little doubt; for its native country, the neighbourhood of Pekin, and the British Islands being nearly in the same parallel of latitude, our climate cannot be an uncongenial one. Besides the locality above mentioned, the bird is also said to be found in the Taihoo district of Central China, on the north side of the Yang-tsze-Kiang.

Latham mentions that he saw at Sir Joseph Banks's some fine drawings taken from Lady Banks's curious collection of ancient porcelain, wherein is represented a mock fight on the water for the Emperor's amusement, supposed to be between his Tartarian and Chinese subjects, personated by the females in his seraglio,—the chieftains of the former having one of the barred feathers of this species on each side of the bonnet (perhaps as an insigne of one order), the opponents or Chinese having two feathers of a Pheasant of a smaller kind, probably of the Golden one; and hence he concludes that the present bird is a native of Tartary, and not unlikely to be as common there as the other is in China.

As every scrap of information respecting a bird of which so little is known is of interest, I copy the following extract from the 'Wanderings in New South Wales, &c.,' of Dr. George Bennett:—

"In Mr. Beale's splendid aviary and garden at Macao the beautiful *Phasianus veneratus* of Temminck, the *P. Reevesii* of Gray, now commonly known by the name of Reeves's Pheasant, was seen. It is the *Chee Kai* of the Chinese. The longest tail-feathers of this bird are six feet in length, and are placed in the caps of the players when acting military characters. This I observed in Canton, where some of the beautiful tail-feathers (rather in a dirty condition, like the actors themselves, who in their tawdry dresses reminded me of the chimney-sweeps in London on a May-day) were placed erect on each side their caps as a decoration. The Chinese do not venerate this bird, as was first supposed, and which may have caused Temminck to bestow upon it the name of *veneratus*; but it is superstitiously believed that the blood of the bird is possessed of poisonous properties, and that the Mandarins, when in expectation of losing their rank and being suddenly put to death by order of the Emperor, preserve some of it upon a handkerchief in a dried state, on sucking which they fall down and instantly expire.

"Mr. Beale's first male specimen, obtained in 1808, was kept in a healthy state for thirteen years; after its death he endeavoured to procure others, but did not succeed until 1831, when four specimens were brought from the interior of China, and purchased by him for 130 dollars; these were, I believe, subsequently taken to England by Mr. Reeves."

I am greatly indebted to James J. Stone, Esq., of Scyborwen, Llantrissant, for his kindness in submitting to my inspection examples of this and many other fine Pheasants when they unfortunately die in his aviary.

The male has the crown of the head, a spot under the eye, chin, and a broad collar round the neck white; forehead, face, a V-shaped mark on the throat, a broad collar round the base of the neck, centre of the abdomen, and under tail-coverts jet-black; feathers of the upper surface and breast buffy yellow, each feather with a crescent of black at the tip; centre of the wing black, with a mark of snow-white in the centre of each feather; flanks rich chestnut, mottled with white and black; primaries blackish brown, mottled with buff; tail silvery grey, margined with tawny buff, and crossed with numerous bands of black and chestnut, those on the two central feathers being about sixty in number; bill and raised nostrils pale pea-green; legs and toes nearly uniform pale horn-colour; spurs nearly black at tips; naked skin before, above, and behind the eye blood-red.

The female has the parts of the head and neck, with the exception of the crown, yellowish buff, in lieu of white as in the male; back of the neck beautifully marked with black, chestnut, and white, the latter of a spear-shaped form in the centre of each feather; chest and flanks light chestnut-brown, with pale grey edgings and trifurcated centres; centre of abdomen and under tail-coverts light buff; wings mottled brown and black, each feather with a narrow streak of buff down the centre; rump dark, freckled brown, with a dark streak down the centre; five or six of the outer tail-feathers on each side rich chestnut, crossed by irregular bands of black and white, and largely tipped with white; central tail-feathers freckled brown and black.

The annexed Plate represents both sexes nearly of the size of life, with the exception of the splendid feathers of their tails, which are of necessity omitted; but their relative proportions are well shown in the reduced figures in the distance. The length of the two central feathers of the male varies considerably in different individuals, some being nearly six feet long, while others are only four or five. The female, as is the case with the females of other Pheasants, is considerably smaller than the male, and has a relatively shorter tail.

Gould, John. 1869. "Reeves's Pheasant, Phasianus reevesii, J.E. Gray. [Pl. 33]."
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