



TETRAO MLOKOSIEWICZI. Tacz.



# TETRAO MLOKOSIEWICZI, *Tacz.*

## Georgian Black Grouse.

*Tetrao mlokosiewiczii*, Taczanowski, Proc. Zool. Soc. 1875, p. 267.—Dresser, Birds of Europe, part lii. (1876).

THE habitat of this species is, so far as we yet know, limited to the Caucasus range, where it was discovered by a Polish gentleman, Mr. Mlokosiewicz, who forwarded specimens to Dr. Taczanowski at Warsaw in 1875; and they were described by the latter gentleman in the same year. It is a most interesting fact that a second species of Black Grouse should turn up in the Caucasian Mountains, where the appearance of a Snow-Partridge (*Tetraogallus caucasicus*) and other genera tends to demonstrate an affinity to the mountain-fauna of the Himalayas. So thoroughly characteristic, however, of our northern avifauna is the common Black Grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*), that the discovery of a second species only shows that the mountainous regions of the Caucasus form a kind of border-line on which many of the Palæarctic and Indian forms inosculate.

The following account of the habits of the present bird was contributed by the discoverer of the species to Mr. Dresser for publication in the 'Birds of Europe':—"I found this Grouse generally distributed throughout the principal chain of the Caucasus from Kadora (Kachétie, opposite the village of Sabuji, fifteen versts from Kwarel) to Zakataly, a distance of about a hundred versts. I observed it in the mountains of Kapuczynsk, the principal place in which is Bezyt, and near Balakna, one of the Bogosk Mountains; and I fully believe that it occurs throughout the entire chain of mountains. It occurs in the mountains of Armenia to near the Achalcyk, near the frontiers of Turkey, at Delizana, the highest place on the route from Tiflis to Erivan, and on Mount Ararat, which makes it probable that it occurs also in Kurdistan. In general it is found in hilly districts covered with herbage.

"I saw a specimen in the Museum at Tiflis, but do not know whence it came, as it is labelled merely '*Tetrao tetrix*, L.' It is difficult to define the altitudes of the different localities frequented by this species, as they vary according to circumstances. For instance, at Lagodechi, on the further end of the mountain, behind which begins the arable region, it is found at 8700 metres, whereas at Manglis the height attained is 6320 metres, &c. The localities in the neighbourhood of Lagodechi, as well as in the lowlands in the district of Kapucrinske, are very varied in their characteristics—cold and damp, owing to fogs and incessant rains; marshes, however, there are none. On the lower border of this region the hill is sprinkled with the following trees:—*Fagus sylvatica*; *Acer*, sp.; *Sorbus*, sp.; *Rosa canina*; *Rubus indicus*; *Fragaria vesca*; *Vaccinium myrtillus*; and a species of creeping Juniper which is found at a great height.

"This Grouse is nowhere numerous, as the region it inhabits is narrow, and it never descends down the mountains. About twenty years ago it was much more numerous than it now is, being, as it were, protected, owing to the war, as was also *Tetraogallus*; for the herdsman were afraid to enter the country with their cattle. Now the entire district is full of flocks and herds, especially in the spring, when the grass is still more scanty in the more elevated regions. The birds are therefore continually disturbed, and their eggs are taken and eaten by the shepherds. I have generally, I may add, found the males more numerous than the females.

"I know but little of the habits of the present species. I have shot them late in May and early in June, when the males were busy with their courtships and were drumming; but we were never fortunate enough to witness them when engaged in the combats for the possession of the females so characteristic of the Black Grouse, nor did we hear their pairing-call. It is partial to the grassy land; and I have also met with it at an altitude of at least 11,000 feet amongst the snow; but I may remark that I never saw any but solitary males there. I have often seen a male standing motionless amongst the grass or on a stone for hours together, whilst some six or seven others were scattered concealed amongst the surrounding scrub; and though I racked my brain to think what could possibly be the use of this strange proceeding, I never could properly understand it. It is not improbable that this solitary bird may be placed there as a sentinel: but if so, he always failed in his duty; for he was always the first one shot, and my companions killed most of the specimens they procured when in this position. Possibly the bird has not yet learnt to regard man as its natural foe; or, perhaps, it takes up its position thus to more easily watch the movements of the females. Be it as it may, there must be some valid reason for the bird sitting so long in this stationary position. The flight of the male is audible at some distance, the sound resembling an agreeable whistling. With the



aid of my dog, I found one nest. It was situated at the foot of a rock, which afforded shelter from the rain; the hollow was slight and lined with dry grass. This nest contains ten eggs.

"I made a post-mortem examination of a male in the spring; the crop contained *Triticum repens*, a great many blossoms of the ranunculus, and some twenty hymenopterous insects, all of one species. The crop of a male which I killed in the autumn was empty, whilst that of a female contained five blossoms of *Taraxacum*, a little grass, and some leaves of different sorts. With the exception of the shepherds, no one in the country is acquainted with these birds; and the native hunter does not care to expend his powder on such insignificant game, preferring to save it for Deer and Ibex, which abound and afford both flesh and leather, and also to destroy the wolves and bears. This bird is, in their eyes, of no more value than a sparrow; and their astonishment was great indeed at seeing us so earnestly occupied in the pursuit of such game. Notwithstanding this, the bird is known by different names in different districts. The Lerzginians call it *Ryezta*, the Tonhines *Roczso*, the Tartars *Kara-touch* (Black Fowl) or *Mesza-touch* (Wood-Fowl).

"Shooting these birds with either pointer or setter is next to impossible in the mountains, where the walking is excessively heavy, and where you cannot always follow the dog, let alone the difficulty of shooting flying whilst standing in an awkward and not unfrequently a dangerous position. It also often happens that one cannot get within shot of a tree upon which one finds the Grouse 'treed' and quietly watching the dog as he keeps barking at him. When the bird is thus hunted and 'treed' by a dog, it always allows the gunner to come within easy range, so as to ensure his killing it. The bird is so little afraid of man that my companion, after shooting the male out of a tree, has also secured the female with which he was in company, she having only flown a few paces further on and perched again, allowing him time to reload whilst she sat there, and he then shot her down. This sport (?) is best in the spring, without a dog; for one can see the birds at a great distance amongst the herbage, which is neither high nor dense at that season, whereas in the autumn shooting the present species is much more difficult, as it is by no means easy to find the birds amongst the high grass-tufts, which are, moreover, very slippery."

The male in the accompanying Plate is drawn a little less than the natural size, with a reduced figure of a female in the background.



Gould, John. 1879. "Georgian Black Grouse, Tetrao mlokosiewiczzi, Tacz. [Pl. 66]." *The Birds of Asia* 6(XXXI), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323227>.

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