CERIORNIS MELANOCEPHALA.

Illustrated by W. B. Hooper.

J. Gould and W. B. Hooper del. et lith.

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Western Horned Pheasant.

- Satyra melanocephala*, Gray in Griff. Anim. King., vol. iii. p. 29.—Ib. Ill. Ind. Zool., vol. i. pls. 46, 47, 48.—Gray, Cat. of Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., part iii. p. 28.
- *Nipalensis*, Gray in Griff. Anim. King., vol. iii. p. 29.—Ib. Ill. Ind. Zool., vol. ii. pl. 40.
- Tragopan Hastingsii*, Vig. in Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., part i. p. 8.—Gould, Century of Birds, pls. 63, 64, 65.—Hutton, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xvii. part ii. p. 695.
- Ceriornis melanocephala*, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 499, *Ceriornis*, sp. 2.—Ib. Cat. of Spec. and Draw. of Mamm. and Birds presented to Brit. Mus. by B. H. Hodgson, Esq., p. 125.—Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 240.
- Jewar*, *Jewari*, Simla, Blyth.
- Jahjee*, Simla, Hutton.
- Iwire*, Mussooree, Hutton.

THE only living example of this species that has come under my notice, and perhaps the only one that has ever reached this country, was the splendid adult male presented to Her Majesty by Lord Hardinge on his return from India. This fine bird lived for several years in the gardens of Buckingham Palace, and while there, I was graciously permitted to take a drawing of it for the present work; I was also allowed to examine the bird immediately after death, and by these means I have been enabled to give for the first time a correct representation of the gaily-coloured soft parts, the hues of which vanish so rapidly after death. The circumstance of this bird having lived in good health for some years, in a situation so little suited to its habits as a garden in the midst of a great city, tends to prove that if introduced into more favourable localities, the species might ere long be constantly seen in our aviaries, if not even naturalized in this country. It is to be hoped then, that with the vast facilities for transport we now possess, some steps will be taken towards promoting so praiseworthy an object. The route by which this might be most readily effected would be by way of the Indus to Kurrachee, and thence to England by the overland route, care being taken that the transit be performed during the cool season.

The bird is strictly a mountain species, and appears to be confined to the slopes of the North-western Himalayas, particularly those of the hills to the northward of Simla.

I am indebted to Major-General Hearsey for the following notes respecting this fine species:—

“The district of the Himalaya Mountains where I obtained the Horned Pheasant was Gurhwal, to the north-west of Almora in Kumaon, where I was encamped at a village named Rammee from April to September. Immediately above this village the mountain rises in three steps of about a mile in length, east and west, and half a mile in width; these steps are cut across by rather deep and narrow khuds or small gulleys, the sides of which are covered with high brushwood, but to the north-west there is a considerable valley, which terminates at the crest of the hill, forming the third or highest step. In these khuds or gulleys, and in the valley, I was frequently successful in bagging the *Dhappæa* and *Moonaul*, the former being the Gurhwalee name of the male, and the latter of the female. At the top of the third step leading to the crest of the mountain are extensive tracts of the ‘Negallee’ or thin Himalayan Bamboo, which although not much thicker than a finger, grows from fifteen to twenty feet in height, and is so thick-set that you cannot force your way very far into it. A spur from the snowy range is not more than eight miles distant, and during the early winter months—October and November—the different kinds of Pheasants are driven down from the more inaccessible portions of the spur by the accumulation of snow, and are frequently taken in the strong hair-snares set for them by the natives in the places to which they resort to feed. Their principal food is the small bulb of a ground Orchis, which they scoop out of the earth with their strong hooked bills. The natives in this part of the country call them Singal Punchee, which signifies ‘Horned Bird.’ We kept some living examples for several months, and brought a very fine one down with us to the plains in Rohilcund. The azure-blue horns are usually pendent, but when the bird is excited they become erect, and a similar hue pervades parts of the curiously-shaped wattle attached to the under mandible and the front of the neck.

"A favourite resort of these alpine Pheasants is the brushwood and forests clothing the sides of the high Toongassee mountain, which lies between Rammee and Joseemuth, where the hazel-nut is abundant, and where the pink-flowered *Rhododendron* with yellow under-surfaced leaves also abounds at the highest elevation of brushwood growth. This mountain is, I believe, about 18,000 feet high, and is only traversable during the months of August and September, when it is tolerably free from snow; its top is undulated and studded with small hills or rounded cupola-shaped mounds, among which flowering bulbs and grass abound, and among them the bird, doubtless, finds a supply of its favourite food. I never met with any young birds, nor did I ever find any of the nests or eggs."

Captain Hutton informs us that a pair kept in confinement lived contentedly, became exceedingly tame, and produced two eggs in June, both of which, however, were destroyed by the male; their colour was pale rufous-brown, like those usually termed in India 'game hen's eggs.' Captain Hutton adds that the species is peculiar to the confines of the snow on the loftier hills of the North-western Himalaya.

The sexes of few birds differ more widely in colour than do those of the present species, the female being dressed in a sombre-coloured livery, while the male is adorned with the deepest tints and most conspicuous markings, and with wattles and horns of the most brilliant hues; the colouring of these horns and wattles is, however, only conspicuous during the breeding season; at other periods of the year they are greatly contracted or shrivelled up as it were, and their colours are very much less brilliant, so much so, indeed, as to present little or no indication of the tints they exhibit at the pairing season; of which the following is an accurate description.

Crown of the head, crest and ear-coverts black; bill black; irides hazel; naked skin of the throat rich deep bluish-black in the centre, passing into rich indigo-blue on the sides, into verditer-green at the base of the bill, and beset with black hairs; wattles thin, free, the upper part deep blue, the lower four-fifths rich reddish flesh-colour, corrugated and edged with rich blue, and with four diagonal stripes of the same hue proceeding from a central black line towards the outer edge; orbits, a series of small fleshy wart-like papillæ, of a rich yellowish-vermilion with light blue interspaces; the upper edge of the orbits, and the pointed fleshy horn-like processes proceeding from their posterior upper angle, bluish verditer-green; back and sides of the neck and a large patch on each shoulder maroon-red; all the upper surface and wings freckled black and sandy-buff, with numerous spots of white encircled with black; primaries dark brown, crossed by irregular freckled bars of sandy-buff; on the upper tail-coverts the sandy freckles are larger and more conspicuous, and at the end of each feather is a large spot of white, bounded on the sides with pale chestnut-brown, and above and below with black; tail black, freckled with sandy-buff at the base; on the centre of the breast a number of stiff lanceolate blood-red feathers; feathers of the under surface maroon-red, freckled at the base with buff and brown and largely tipped with black, in the centre of which is a spot of white; these white spots are of small size on the breast, but gradually increase until they become very large towards the tail; the black tips and white spots, too, occupy so much of the feather, that the maroon hue only occasionally appears; legs and feet reddish flesh-colour.

In the young male the plumage is less brilliant, the horns and wattles but little developed, the orbits are of a dull yellow, and the lanceolate feathers of the breast are orange instead of blood-red.

The general hue of the female is light brown, mottled and barred with fine zigzag lines and spots of blackish-brown; the feathers of the back with a narrow central streak of buffy-white, and those of the under surface with larger and more conspicuous markings of the same hue near the tips of the feathers; bill and legs paler or more horn-colour than in the male.

The Plate represents two males about three-fourths of the natural size, and two females in the distance much reduced.

Gould, John. 1855. "Western Horned Pheasant, *Cerionis melanocephala* [Pl. 45]." *The Birds of Asia* 7(VII), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323290>.

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