CURSORIUS COROMANDELICUS.

Scould and Mc Cormick, Dec. 1854.

Illustrated by W. B. B. B. B. B.

CURSORIUS COROMANDELICUS.

Indian Courser.

- Charadrius Coromandelicus*, Gmel. Edit. Linn. Syst. Nat. tom. i. pars ii. p. 692.—Vieill. Ency. Méth. Orn. part i. p. 24.
- Cursorius asiaticus*, Lath. Ind. Orn. vol. ii. p. 751.—Temm. Man. d'Orn. 2nde édit. tom. ii. p. 514.—Sykes in Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc. part ii. p. 165.—Less. Traité d'Orn. p. 530.
- Courvite de la côte de Coromandel*, Buff. Pl. Enl. 892.—Ib. Hist. Nat. des Ois. tom. viii. p. 129.
- Tachydromus Coromandelicus*, Ill. Prod. p. 250.
- Coromandel Courser*, Lath. Gen. Syn. vol. v. p. 217.—Ib. Gen. Hist. vol. ix. p. 353.
- Cursor frenatus*, Wagl. Syst. Av. *Cursor*, sp. 2.
- Tachydromus Asiaticus*, Vieill. Gal. des Ois. tom. ii. p. 90.
- *Coromandelicus*, Vieill. Ib. pl. 232.
- *Orientalis*, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 365.—Ib. Anim. in Menag. &c. p. 339.
- Cursorius Tarayensis*, Hodgs. in Gray's Misc. 1844, p. 86.
- *coromandelicus*, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 537, *Cursorius*, sp. 3, and App. p. 25. App. to p. 537.—Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 259.—Gray, List of Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus. part iii. p. 60.—Gray, List of Spec. and Draw. of Mamm. and Birds presented to Brit. Mus. by B. H. Hodgson, Esq., p. 131.—Jerd. Madras Journ. Lit. and Sci. vol. xii. p. 216.—Layard, Ann. and Mag. Nat. Hist. 2nd ser. vol. xiv. p. 108.

THE members of the genus *Cursorius* are but few in number, and all are natives of the Old World. India is the natural habitat of two, if not of three species; of these, the one here figured has been noticed by nearly every writer on Indian ornithology, and would therefore seem to be almost universally dispersed over the country.

My son, the late Dr. J. H. Gould, says, in one of the last letters I received from him, "I procured my specimens of the *Cursorius Coromandelicus* in the neighbourhood of Kurrachee, where it is tolerably plentiful on the arid plains that subtend the fiery rocks so characteristic of Scinde. I have observed it there from May till September, that is, throughout the whole of the hot season, but am unable to say whether it is migratory or not. Towards the end of October it seems to collect and feed in small companies, six or seven being often seen within a short distance of each other. Although its structure is eminently adapted for running, it does not depend upon this power alone for safety, but readily takes flight when closely pursued; and, moreover, being wary in the extreme, you can rarely obtain other than a long shot at it. Its habits are very like those of the Houbara, and it frequents the same ground, being probably attracted by the same kind of food. The stomachs of those I examined contained the remains of grasshoppers and dragonflies, which at the time were very plentiful. The flesh of this bird forms no bad addition to the table."

The following notice of this species occurs among the MS. notes on Indian Birds by Captain Boys:—

"This beautiful bird is found at Sultanpore and Nusserabad, and is often seen on the way from Ferozepore to Sukhur; it has therefore a very wide range. Its flight is remarkably easy, and when disturbed it generally alights again at from fifty to one hundred yards. It is a very nimble runner, and does not stoop or crouch while running as most of the Plovers do. It is a very good bird for the spit."

Mr. Jerdon states that "The *Courier* is very numerous towards the more northern part of the table-land, much less so towards the south. It frequents the open bare plains only, in numerous flocks, running along with great celerity, and picking up various insects, beetles, and small grasshoppers, with their larvæ. It breeds in the more retired spots during the hot weather, laying three eggs of a pale greenish-yellow colour, much blotched and spotted with black, and also with a few olive spots. They are deposited in a slight hollow. In length the bird varies from 8½ to nearly 10 inches. As I have frequently killed birds of different lengths

from the same flock, I fancy that Swainson's supposed new species, *C. Orientalis*, said to differ only in size from the *C. Asiaticus*, must be abandoned."

Colonel Sykes informs us that this species is "numerous in Dukhun; but only on the open stony and grass plains. This bird has the shortness of intestine of the *Bustard* (equal to the length of the body), with a stomach nearly similar; feeding in the same manner on insects and their *larvæ*, and with the same cursorial habits."

Figures of this species occur among the drawings of the late Hon. F. J. Shore, and I find the following in reference to it among his MSS. :—

"I observed several examples about Julisor in the Aligurh district; they all appeared to be alike; their positions and motions when on the ground were very like those of a Plover: their flight resembled that of the Bahtah Goose. The stomachs of those I examined contained the remains of small beetles and other insects: the stomach of a female I examined upon another occasion was filled with large black ants.

"This bird is also common about Jubalpoor."

Mr. Layard states, in his interesting "Notes on the Ornithology of Ceylon," that "it is found occasionally in the Wally plains during the month of April."

The sexes are so nearly alike, that by dissection alone can they with certainty be distinguished. The young, examples of which were collected by Dr. Gould, are very different from the adults, as will be seen on reference to the accompanying Plate.

Forehead and crown reddish chesnut, bounded with deep black on the occiput; lores and a streak behind the eye meeting at the back of the neck black; over each eye a line of white passing backwards and uniting in the midst of the black of the occiput; chin and upper part of the throat buffy white, gradually passing into the light reddish chestnut of the breast and back of the neck; upper surface, scapularies and wing-coverts light olivaceous brown; primaries and secondaries bluish black; tertiaries tipped with white; outer tail-feather on each side white, with a narrow line of black down the apical portion of the shaft; the remainder olivaceous brown, the two central ones with a faint trace of a black band near the tip, the others with a broad band of black near the extremity and tipped with white, the extent of the white increasing as the feathers recede from the centre; upper part of the abdomen rich deep chestnut, gradually blending with the lighter hue of the breast; on the lower part of the abdomen a large patch of black; flanks olivaceous; vent, upper and under tail-coverts white; irides dark brown; bill black; legs and feet creamy white.

The young have the head and all the upper surface mottled with buffy white and dark brown; a faint wash of rufous on the back of the neck and breast; and the tips of the central tail-feathers mottled like the back.

The figures, which are of the size of life, represent a male in the fully adult livery, and two young birds in the variegated costume of their first autumn.

Gould, John. 1856. "Indian Courser, Cursorius coromandelicus [Pl. 65]." *The Birds of Asia* 7(VIII), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323309>.

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