GALLOPERDIX ZEYLONENSIS.

Ceylon Spur-Fowl.

Tetrao Zeylonensis, Gmel. Edit. Linn. Syst. Nat. tom. i. par. ii. p. 759.

Perdix bicalcaratus, Forst. Ind. Zool. p. 25. pl. 14.—Penn. Ind. Zool. p. 40. pl. 7.—Penn. Hind. vol. i. p. 212.

—— *zeylonensis*, Bonnat. et Vieill. Ency. Méth. Orn. vol. i. p. 210. pl. 93. fig. 3.—Temm. Hist. Nat. des Gall. tom. iii. pp. 311 & 718.

Francolinus ceylanensis, Less. Traité d'Orn. p. 504.

Ceylon Partridge, Lath. Gen. Syn. vol. iv. p. 758.—Ib. Gen. Hist. vol. viii. p. 268.

Chitty-gong Partridge, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp. p. 222.—Ib. Supp. vol. ii. p. 278.

Galloperdix zeylonensis, Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 241.

As the above list of synonyms will show, this bird has been long known to writers on natural history, yet how few collections there are which contain examples ! I do not, in fact, know an Asiatic species of the Gallinacea which is more seldom seen in our museums. Mr. Edgar L. Layard, who has lately returned to England, after a residence of eight years in Ceylon, has, however, partially supplied this want by bringing with him numerous examples. Few persons write more agreeably on subjects of natural history than this gentleman, and no one has contributed so largely to our knowledge of the ornithology of Ceylon ; so valuable, in fact, are his notes, that it is to be hoped that if his future years are to be spent in foreign countries, they may be passed in some interesting locality, where his leisure hours may be as usefully employed as they were in Ceylon.

I do not find on record any information whatever respecting the singular and prettily-marked bird forming the subject of the accompanying Plate ; the following notes from the pen of Mr. Layard, which I have great pleasure in giving in his own words, will therefore be read with interest :—

“ This species, known to Europeans under the various denominations of ‘ Spur-Fowl,’ ‘ Double-spurred Partridge,’ and ‘ Kandy Partridge,’ is an inhabitant of the central, southern, and south-western provinces.

“ It delights in deep tangled brakes and thick masses of canes on the sides of gentle declivities ; these it finds abundantly in the localities above cited, while, in the northern and eastern provinces, the sandy soil and open jungles which prevail offer no congenial home to a bird of its shy and retiring habits. Even in localities where it does occur, it is more often heard than seen, for so extreme is its wariness that it rarely falls before the gun even of the native hunter, who creeps about unclad and as noiselessly as the denizens of the forest. It is trapped therefore by means of nooses and other snares placed in its path, for its flesh is highly valued by the natives. I think it decidedly superior in flavour to any other game which I tasted in Ceylon ; it ate and looked much like grouse.

“ It is most active during the mornings and evenings, roaming in small parties amid the open glades or bare towering trunks of the ‘ Mookalane ’ or high tree-jungle, but on the least alarm seeking safety in the most impenetrable underwood. After remaining concealed some time, and if nothing occurs to excite their fears, a cock-bird, bolder than the rest, will utter a few low notes, not unlike the plaintive call of a turkey-poult ; if this is answered from a distance, or the birds are reassured, the call is changed for a loud piping whistle, of which the following stave gives the nearest representation which I can devise,—

and the birds once more sally out from their concealment. I am convinced that, like the Virginian Quail, these birds possess the power of ventriloquizing in an eminent degree. I have often listened to those in my aviary, and could have declared that the calls proceeded from every part of the garden save that in which the performers were located.

“ They do not thrive well in confinement, but exhibit the same wild and suspicious demeanour, always hiding behind their feeding-troughs or herding in corners ; if any object approaches too closely and alarms them suddenly, they rise from the ground with a spring, and unless the roof is placed at a considerable altitude, dash their heads against it and fall lifeless to the ground.

“ They fly with great rapidity, but prefer to seek safety in concealment rather than maintain a lengthened flight. One which escaped from a basket in my house flew up to the roof and through the ventilating holes, but instead of continuing on the wing at the elevation it had attained, it instantly dropped into a

small copse, out of which it was with much difficulty hunted, when it darted through an open door into the kitchen and concealed itself behind a box.

"The males are very pugnacious, and in their manner of fighting remind me of the game-cock, depressing and elevating the head, imitating each other's actions, &c. &c.

"Of its nidification nothing is known.

"Native name, *Aban-cuccula*. *Cucculo* is the general name for all fowls, male birds; *cuccula* is female; and *kikili* is plural."

The male has the feathers of the head black, with a fine line of white down the centre of each, becoming almost obsolete on the centre of the crown; feathers of the back of the neck black, with a line of white down the centre of each, commencing in a fine point at the base of the feather, gradually but slightly increasing in breadth towards and ending near the apex; feathers of the shoulders and scapularies deep chestnut, freckled with black, and having a broad oblong mark of black down the centre, within which is a lengthened white line as on the neck; lower part of the back deep chestnut, minutely freckled with black at the tip of each feather; lesser wing-coverts black, bordered with chestnut at the base and a small drop-like spot of buffy white near the tip; primaries brown; remainder of the wing deep chestnut, freckled with black, and at the tips of the greater coverts a pear-shaped mark of black, within which is a similar mark of white; upper and under tail-coverts black; tail rich purplish black; feathers of the throat, breast and abdomen black, with a pear-shaped mark of white near the tip, which mark becomes more elongated as the feathers proceed downwards, until on the flanks they assume a similar but bolder form than the lines on the back of the neck; on the lower part of the abdomen and thighs they again become of a more rounded form, but are much less conspicuous; bill and orbits beautiful red; irides dark brown; legs and feet red.

The female has the entire plumage deep chestnut, paler on the under surface and minutely freckled with brown, especially on the secondaries and upper tail-coverts; tail purplish black; bill, orbits, eyes, legs and feet as in the male, but not quite so rich in colour.

The figures in the accompanying Plate are of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1854. "Ceylon Spur-Fowl, *Galloperdix zeylonicus* [Pl. 67]." *The Birds of Asia* 6(VI), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323336>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/122488>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323336>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/323336>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries

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>.