POLYPLECTRON CHINQUIS.

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Water. 1840.

POLYPLECTRON CHINQUIS.

Assam Peacock-Pheasant.

- Pavo tibetanus*, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 294, pl. xxviii. A. fig. 2?—Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 26. no. 2 β ?—Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 731?—Bonn. and Vieill. Ency. Méth., Orn., part i. p. 179, pl. 83. fig. 3.—Cuv. Règn. Anim., 1829, tom. i. p. 474.
- Le Chinquis*, Buff. Hist. Nat. des Ois., tom. ii. p. 365; Pl. Enl., 492, 493.
- Thibet Peacock*, Lath. Gen. Syn., vol. iv. p. 675.—Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 441.—Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. viii. p. 120.
- Polyplectron chinquis*, Temm. Hist. Nat. des Pigeons et des Gall., tom. ii. p. 363, tom. iii. p. 675.—Id. Pl. Col., 539.
- Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 241.—Sclat. in Proc. of Zool. Soc., 1863, p. 124.
- Swinh. *ibid.*, p. 307.
- thibetanus*, Bonap. Compt. Rend. de l'Acad. Sci., 1856, p. 878.—Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 495.
- albo-ocellatum*, Cuv.
- lineatum*, Gray and Hardw. Ill. Ind. Zool., pl. 38.—Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 495.
- cyclospilum*, *P. atelospilum*, et *P. enicospilum*, G. R. Gray, List of Spec. of Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., part v. *Galline*, pp. 23, 24?
- thibetanum*, Elliot, Mon. of Phas., pl. .
- Diplectron bicalcaratus*, Vieill. Gal. des Ois., tom. ii. pl. 203.

On reference to my account of the *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*, it will be seen that I regard the synonymy of that species and of the bird here represented as being in a state of inextricable confusion, and believe it impossible to determine with certainty to which of the two best-known species of this form the descriptions and even the names given by the older authors are referable—and that I there stated my intention to retain the above name for the bird from Malasia, or the Malayan Peacock-Pheasant, and to employ Temminck's term of *chinquis* for the Assam and Sylhet species (*i. e.* the one here figured), which may or may not be the *Pavo tibetanus* of Brisson, Linnaeus, and Gmelin; but I quite agree with Mr. Sclater that, if it be, the name ought not to be retained, since, as might be supposed, the bird is not an inhabitant of that cold northern region.

Few and slight indeed are the notices on record of this species; by far the most interesting is comprised in the following extract from Ornithognomon's "Game-Birds of India," published in 'The Field' newspaper:—

"This bird inhabits the great southern branch of the Himalaya, which passes through Burma, where the range is called the Yomadoun, or Backbone mountains, through Tenasserim. Blyth, in his 'Catalogue of the Birds in the Asiatic Society's Museum,' gives Sylhet, in Eastern Bengal, as a habitat; and it is said to be found in all the mountainous parts of Assam. It is also met with in the eastern parts of Chittagong, and in all the inland hills of Arakan.

"I have never shot this bird, and, indeed, only once came upon it, in a narrow path leading along a ridge about 3000 feet above the sea, in the mountains on the British side of the Thoungyen river, which separates Tenasserim from Yahan in Siam. It started so suddenly, having apparently been dusting itself in the path, and shot so rapidly through the jungle down the kud, that, had it not left two or three of its feathers behind, I should not have known what bird I had flushed. I am not aware of any English sportsman having ever bagged one of these birds; and, indeed, it frequents such inaccessible places as effectually to defy approach. These mountains in the tropics rise to a height of six or eight thousand feet above the sea, and from six thousand feet downwards are clothed with such a dense mass of trees, thickets, underwood, bamboos, and thorny rattans, all bound together by creepers and tangle, that it would be an hour's labour to cut one's way through a hundred yards of such stuff. Add to this, there is not a square foot of level ground anywhere off the pathway, and the sides of these hills are so steep that walking along them is most difficult. The feet slide down the greasy soil, ever moist with the drippings of the trees and decayed vegetation, and the explorer finds himself brought up in a mass of thorny tangle, or, while plunging knee-deep through a slough of rotting leaves, trips headlong over one of the thousands of prostrate logs and trunks which, buried under fallen foliage, lie concealed from the eye of the most vigilant." The writer then gives a vivid description of the many other dangers to which the explorer is exposed from venomous insects of various kinds and the deadly miasma engendered in such localities, and proceeds to say that, "if, undeterred by all these obstacles, the sportsman forces his way down the steep incline, the lower he descends the more oppressive grows the atmosphere; and the heat at the bottom, if he can reach so far, is almost stifling. The air, which, keen and

fresh, waves the lofty branches of the colossal Thengan on the giddy height far above, here scarce circulates. A stony stillness, an oppressive weight, broods over the deep abyss; and perpetual shade engenders a chilling deadly damp, in which broods the most fatal miasma. However, such are the spots where the Polyplectron, the Kallij, the Fireback, and other species of hill-Pheasants dwell in the heat of the day, or seek refuge when disturbed from above.

"I have kept these Peacock Pheasants in captivity, which they appear to bear tolerably well, but never become thoroughly tame. They were incessantly uttering a soft low cluck, but emitted at times a cry or crow being the same clucks loudly and rapidly repeated. It devours grain of all kinds and insects with equal eagerness."

Dr. Jerdon informs Mr. Elliot that a living specimen, presented to him and now in the Zoological Gardens, "is a timid bird, and does not care for leaves, but is very fond of insects, and will eat greedily of small fish, frogs, lizards, and raw meat. It has a peculiarly fine rich whistling call, which it utters daily about sunrise and occasionally at other times."

In Mr. Sclater's "List of the Species of Phasianidæ, with remarks on their Geographical Distribution," published in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London' for 1863, he says:—"We received two males of this species in 1857, presented to us by the Babu Rajendra Mullick, which are still living in good health in the Gardens. The same gentleman has again sent us a pair this year; but the female unfortunately died before reaching England. There is, however, no doubt that this fine bird would do well in captivity."

Subsequently (in July 1864), the Babu sent another female, which has several times bred in the Society's Gardens, and by this means we have become acquainted with several particulars in the bird's economy, which are doubtless equally characteristic of those of the other species of the genus: thus we now know that two or three broods in a year are frequently produced by the same pair, that the young follow closely behind the female and are often covered by her tail, that the normal number of the eggs is two, and that they are peculiarly delicate in form and colour, assimilate very closely to those of the Golden Pheasant (*Thaumalea picta*), and are of a cream- or buffy white, nearly two inches in length by one inch and seven sixteenths in breadth.

Mr. Elliot, states, in his 'Monograph of the Phasianidæ,' that the Superintendent of the Zoological Society's Gardens, Mr. A. D. Bartlett, informed him "that, the first time the young of this species were hatched in their gardens, a Bantam hen was employed for a foster-mother, and that the chicks would follow close behind her, never coming in front to take food, so that in scratching the ground she frequently struck them with her feet. The reason for the young keeping in her rear was not understood until, on a subsequent occasion, two chicks were reared by a hen *P. chinquis*, when it was observed that they always kept in the same manner close behind the mother, who held her tail widely spread, thus completely covering them; and there they continually remained out of sight, only running forward when called by the hen to pick up some food she had found, and then immediately retreating to their shelter. It was thus rendered evident that the young in following the Bantam hen were simply obeying the instincts of their nature, although the upright tail of their foster-mother failed to afford them the protection which they would have found had they been reared by a female of their own species."

The accurate representation of these fine birds, taken from the living examples in the Gardens of the Zoological Society, renders any verbal description quite unnecessary, except to remark that the spots on the back are of a rich metallic purple in all lights, while those on the tail are green.

The figures represent the two sexes, about nine-tenths the size of life.

Gould, John. 1871. "Assam Peacock Pheasant, *Polyplectron chinquis* [Pl. 50]." *The Birds of Asia* 7(XXIII), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323453>.

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