TETRAGALLUS TASPIS.

Illustrated by W. Woodcock.

From the collection of the British Museum.

TETRAOGALLUS CASPIUS.

Caspian Snow Partridge.

- Tetrao Caspius*, Gmel. Edit. of Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 762.—S. G. Gmel. It., tom. iv. p. 67. tab. 10.
Perdix Caspia, Lath. Ind. Orn., tom. ii. p. 655.
Tetrao Caucasica, Pall. Zoog. Ross. Asiat., tom. ii. p. 76. pl.
Perdix (Megaloperdix) Caucasica, Brandt, Bull. Sci. de l'Acad. Imp. de St. Pétersb., vol. viii. p. 190.
Lophophorus Nigelli, Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. ii. pl. 76.
Caspian Partridge, Lath. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 283.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. viii. p. 290.
Keph-e-derra, or Royal Partridge of Persia.
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VALUABLE and interesting as are the Gallinaceous birds of India, both as objects of beauty and as supplying the human race with a great store of nutritious food, there is a group, the *Tetraogalli* or Snow Partridges, which, if I mistake not, is destined to play as important a part in the latter respect as any of the Gallinacæ previously known. The great plateau of Asia, particularly the country of Tibet, is yearly becoming more and more accessible, and surely the time is not far distant when the introduction of some of the species into the British Islands will be attended with success. I cannot conceive localities better adapted to the habits of any one of them than the Highlands of Scotland and the hilly districts of Northumberland, and other northern counties of England; as an evidence that they will exist in far more unfavourable situations, I may mention that two individuals lived for several years in the Menagerie of the Zoological Society of London in the Regent's Park. Those who visited these Gardens during the years 1852 and 1853 cannot have failed to notice the fine bird from which the figure in the accompanying Plate was drawn. This noble specimen, the *Keph-e-derra*, or Royal Partridge of Persia, was presented to the Society by R. Stevens, Esq., H.B.M. Consul at Tabreez: on its arrival at the Gardens it was in a bad state, both of health and plumage, but it speedily recovered, and after the succeeding moult we had an opportunity of seeing the bird in as fine a state of plumage as if we were viewing it in its native wilds. A female had been previously presented to the Society (in 1842) by E. W. Bonham, Esq.; this also was from Persia. I regret to say both these interesting birds are dead; and I need scarcely add how highly a further donation of living examples from any one favourably situated for procuring them would be esteemed by the Society, or how important in an economic point of view would be the introduction of a sufficient number to ensure their naturalization.

There is but little doubt that the present bird is the oldest known species of the genus, for although Linnæus appears to have been unacquainted with it, it was described as long back as 1788–93 by Gmelin in the 13th edition of the “Systema Naturæ,” under the name of *Tetrao Caspius*. By Latham, who states it inhabits Astrabad, Ghilan and other parts of Persia, it was placed among the true Partridges, genus *Perdix*; by Pallas it was associated with the Grouse under the name of *Tetrao Caucasicus*; Messrs. Jardine and Selby placed it in the genus *Lophophorus*, and lastly Mr. J. E. Gray instituted for it the separate generic title of *Tetraogallus*. Messrs. Jardine and Selby state, that for their knowledge of the species they were indebted to James Wilson, Esq., so well known for his “Illustrations of Zoology,” to whom it had been transmitted from Persia by Dr. Macneil, the enlightened physician to the English Embassy at that Court, after whom it was named *Nigelli*, and who informed Mr. Wilson that “it inhabits the more secluded and mountainous parts of Persia, where it is esteemed rare even by experienced sportsmen, and is known by the name of *Keph-i-derree*, or *Mountain Partridge*.”

I am indebted to J. H. Gurney, Esq. for having called my attention to the following passage in Mr. Layard's “Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon,” which doubtless refers to this species:—“A covey of large birds sailed with a rapid swoop, and with the whistling sound peculiar to the Partridge kind, from an opposite height, and alighted within a few yards of me. They were the *Kakk-i-dered*, or the *Our-kak-lik*, as they are called by the Turks; a gigantic Partridge, almost the size of a small Turkey, only found in the highest regions of Armenia and Kurdistan.”

The following note has been forwarded to me by Mr. G. R. Gray, which he states is an extract from one of the St. Petersburg Transactions:—

“This species builds on the highest summits of the rocky mountains of the *Caucasus*; it prefers altogether the regions of snow, which it never quits; thus, when we desire to acclimatize the young chickens of this partridge in the plains of Kahetia, they have not survived the spring. It runs on the rocks and the ledges of precipices with great agility, and rises with a great cry at the least danger, so that the most

skilful sportsman cannot approach within shot but under cover of mists. It lives in societies of from six to ten individuals, becoming the inseparable companion to the Goat, on the excrement of which it feeds during the winter months. In autumn it grows very fat, and its flesh resembles that of the common Partridge. In the crop of this gallinaceous bird I have found a great quantity of sand and of small stones, mixed with all kinds of seeds of alpine plants."

Prince Charles Bonaparte informed me, that there is some reason for believing that this bird occurs within the confines of Europe; he did not, however, mention the locality in which it has been observed. I had also been told some years ago by an officer of one of Her Majesty's surveying ships employed in the Mediterranean, whose name I cannot recollect, that he had himself observed a bird of this form among the mountains in the island of Candia, where it was excessively rare, and only to be seen on the very peaks of the hills: as this is a point of some interest in the history of the birds of this genus, I would beg to direct the attention of travellers to the subject.

M. Brandt considers the *Chourka alpina* of Motchoulski to be synonymous with this species; but as I have seen in the Museum of the Jardin des Plants at Paris a bird which I believe to be distinct, not only from the present species, but also from *T. Himalayensis*, *T. Altaicus* and *T. Tibetanus*, and which nearly accords with M. Motchoulski's description, I have omitted it from the list of synonyms until I have had further opportunities of investigating the subject.

Crown of the head, neck and the upper surface generally slaty brown, minutely freckled with dark brown; chest nearly uniform blue-grey in the male, variegated with zigzag markings of buff and brown in the female; wing-coverts and scapularies slaty brown freckled with black, margined narrowly on the inner side and broadly on the outer with buff, along which latter mark, on the greater feathers, is a streak of chestnut; primaries and secondaries white, largely tipped with blackish brown; tail dark brown freckled with black, stained in the centre and tipped with brownish red; feathers of the under surface greyish buff, with a double streak of buff and reddish brown along each margin, forming a series of stripes along the body; under tail-coverts white; cheeks and sides of the neck white, separated from the buff-coloured throat by a broad stripe of brown freckled with black; streak over the eye brownish buff; irides hazel; bill horn-colour; legs and feet orange-yellow.

The figures in the accompanying Plate, taken from life by Mr. Wolf, represent an adult male and a female about three-fourths of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1853. "Caspian Snow-Partridge, *Tetraogallus caspius* [Pl. 29]." *The Birds of Asia* 7(VI), -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323483>.

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