UPUPA EPOPS, Linn.

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Hoopoe.

Upupa Epops, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 37.

—— *vulgaris*, Pall. Zoog. Ross.-Asiat., tom. i. p. 432.

—— *macrorhyncha*, Landb. Syst. Aufz. der Vög. Würtemb.

—— *bifasciata*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 215, tab. 15. fig. 2.

THE Hoopoe, a bird of great beauty, stands alone in our avifauna, unallied to any other in structure, habits, or economy. Its distribution is very general, it being found in Europe, Africa, India, and China. England is therefore not its true home, although it is frequently seen here; France, Southern Germany, and the countries bordering the Mediterranean, however, are within the limits of its range.

At Constantinople it is a bird of the market shambles, being eaten by the Turks; and it is also one of the commonest of the birds of Egypt. Those which resort to Europe in summer are probably migrants from Morocco and North-eastern Africa, seeking a more invigorating climate in which to breed and rear their young; and the few that visit England are individuals that have extended their search beyond their natural area. The Hoopoe generally comes to us singly, seldom in pairs, and still more rarely in greater numbers. The period of arrival is uncertain, but it is usually between April and September. We should naturally suppose that this visitor from a warm climate would not proceed very far into the high northern latitudes; yet such is the case; for many examples have occurred in Scotland, and Mr. H. E. Dresser informs me that, according to Pastor Sommerfeldt, it has been killed in Finland, within the arctic circle; in Cunningham's 'Ladakh,' it is stated that a Hoopoe was seen on the western side of the Lánák pass, at an elevation of about 16,500 feet. The occurrence of the bird in these widely distant localities shows how far it sometimes wanders from its native home. In India, China, and most eastern countries the Hoopoe is as common as in Egypt.

Doubtless many of my readers would like to know where in England they could get a glimpse of this extraordinary bird, whether it is to be looked for in the open fields, in the hedgerow, or in the shrubberies; this however I cannot tell them. Were it one of our regular migrants, it would follow the laws which govern the movements of such birds, and its arrival in any given district might be relied upon with certainty; as it is, the lady who takes an airing in her carriage may see it by the roadside, the farmer may raise it in his clover-ley, the beachman may be startled by its appearance on the denes by the seaside, or the game-keeper may observe it during his daily rounds; wherever it may appear, it is unexpected; and a person may pass a long life without ever seeing one. There are counties, it is true, where it occurs more frequently than in others; these are Kent, Sussex, Suffolk, and Norfolk, and usually in the month of May. In some seasons it appears in tolerable abundance, in others not at all. In disposition it is as tame and fearless as in appearance it is showy and attractive. In the hedgerow, or on the wooden fence, it stands out in bold relief, conspicuously different from all surrounding birds. On the ground it moves about with ease and much gracefulness, erecting its beautiful crest on the least excitement, prying here and there for insects and their larvæ, and probing with its long forceps-like mandibles into the soft earth for a worm or a beetle. If disturbed, it merely tops the nearest hedge, with a flight more like that of a large butterfly than a bird, and settles again in the next field. Its appearance, unhappily, is only the forerunner of its death; for probably every Hoopoe that visits our islands is shot; and in many instances its stuffed skin is handed down from father to son as a trophy obtained in former years.

To enumerate all the recorded instances of its occurrence in our island would answer no useful end; but I may mention two of its appearances near the metropolis, which came under my own cognizance. L. Sullivan, Esq., shot one in the pleasure-garden of his residence, Broom House, Fulham; and my late excellent friend J. Meadows Rendel informed me that on looking out of his dressing-room window at his house in Kensington Palace Gardens one spring morning, he saw a Hoopoe running about the grass-plot, continually raising and depressing its crest, and that it continued to do so while he was dressing; it must have been an interesting sight to one so capable of appreciating it. Disturbed by a cat or some other cause, the bird took flight to a neighbouring garden; and Mr. Rendel did not see it again.

My good friend Admiral Mitford writes from Hunmanby Hall, near Scarborough, under the date of May 14, 1859, "We have lots of Hoopoes; as many as nine were seen together."

Mr. Stevenson has given a list of the examples that have come under his notice in Norfolk and Suffolk during the last fourteen years, amounting to sixty-five in number; of these thirty-four occurred in April, twenty-five in May, one in August, and five in September.

Instances are on record of the Hoopoe having been killed in several other of the English counties, particularly Cornwall, in North and South Wales, many parts of Scotland (from its most southern point to the Orkneys); and Thompson tells us that it occasionally appears in all parts of Ireland.

As our opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of the habits of the bird in this country are but few, I shall now give some extracts from the writings of those who have seen the bird in India and China.

"The Hoopoe," says Mr. Jerdon, "is found in the Himalayas, in Northern India, in Lower Bengal, and in various parts of India as far as the Neilgherries. It extends to Nepaul, Assam, and perhaps to Upper Burmah. Mussulmen venerate the Hoopoe on account of their supposing it to have been a favourite bird of Solomon, who is said to have employed one as a messenger. It nestles in holes of walls, trees, &c., and lays several greenish-blue or bluish-white eggs. Pallas states that he once found a nest within the exposed and barely decomposed thorax of a human body, with seven young birds just ready to fly, which defended themselves with a most fetid fluid. Its voice is a pretty loud double or treble *hoop*, whence its name in most languages."

The breeding-habits of the Hoopoe are nearly identical with those of the Hornbills, the female never quitting her eggs, and being regularly fed by the male until her task is done.

Dr. David Scott, in a letter to Mr. Blyth, says:—"In 1865, two pairs of Hoopoes bred in my verandah; after the hens began to sit, I never saw them outside the nest, but observed that the two males fed them regularly inside it. These birds were so tame and used to seeing me sitting in the verandah that my presence never disturbed them in the least; I was therefore quite familiar with them, and can assert most positively that for a number of days I never saw the female of either pair out. I did not pay any attention to the circumstance of there being only two flying about until I observed both males going up to the nests with gnats in their bills, giving a call and then putting their heads inside for the hens to take the food. The feeding-times were about seven or eight o'clock in the morning and about four in the afternoon. I have seen the males getting the gnats &c. close under the very steps I was sitting on, and almost within two yards of my chair, then flying up, giving a call, and coming down again directly the food was taken."—*Ibis*, 1866, p. 222.

"The flight of the Hoopoe," says the late Captain Boys, "resembles that of a Woodpecker, being performed in long undulating sweeps of five or six yards in extent. Its note resembles the syllables *hoot, hoot, hoot*, pronounced quickly. When searching on the ground for food the head is moved upwards and downwards in a very rapid manner, much like the tapping of a Woodpecker, and this action is continued till the entire bill is plunged in the earth to its base. Although its principal food is insects, I have occasionally found the crop filled with grain and seeds. On the 13th of March, 1842, I discovered at Kullianpore, in the hollow of a tree, a nest composed of two and three nearly fledged young."

Mr. Swinhoe informs us that the Hoopoe is "a resident bird throughout China, from Canton to Talién Bay. Builds in holes of walls and exposed Chinese coffins. The younglings call for food with a hissing noise. The male during the breeding-season utters its song of love, 'Hoo-hoo-hoo.' To produce these notes the bird draws the air into its trachea, which puffs out on either side of the neck, taps the bill perpendicularly against a stone or the trunk of a tree, forces the breath down the tubular bill, and produces the sound. Feeds on worms, for which it stamps the ground with its feet, clutching them by the head with its bill. It bruises the worm by beating it against the ground, and then, throwing up its head, jerks it down to its small mouth, and finally swallows it."—*Proc. Zool. Soc.*, 1863, p. 264.

"Few birds," says the Rev. H. B. Tristram, "have had more absurd fables attached to them than the Hoopoe. The Arabs have a superstitious reverence for it, and, believing it to possess marvellous medicinal qualities, they call it the 'Doctor bird.' Its head is an indispensable ingredient in all their charms and in the practice of witchcraft. They also believe that it listens to whispers and betrays secrets, and, what is far more important, that it has the power of detecting water and of pointing out hidden wells and springs. These attributes have doubtless been suggested by the quaint and grotesque movements of its head and tall crest, which it erects in walking, and then with a solemn portentous look it bends its head down till the bill touches the ground. The Greeks and Romans had equally absurd superstitions respecting the Hoopoe. It is considered a filthy feeder, chiefly from its habit of resorting to dunghills, which it probes assiduously with its long delicate bill in search of small insects. It was probably from its filthy habits and resorts, as well as from the superstitious reverence in which it was held by the Egyptians, that it was especially enumerated among the unclean animals in the Mosaic Law."—*Natural History of the Bible*.

I have somewhere met with the statement that if the Hoopoe be overshadowed by a Hawk or Falcon, it squats close to the ground, with its great wings and tail expanded to the utmost, and that the markings of the wings then assume the form of a series of black and white rings, in the midst of which the bill stands upright.

I must not close this account without recording my obligations to E. W. Vernon-Harcourt, Esq., for two very fine specimens of this bird, killed by himself in the Island of Madeira.

The Plate represents a male, a female, and a brood of young, of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Hoopoe, *Upupa epops* [Pl. 12]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323827>.

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