OREOCINCIA AUREA.

OREOCINCLA AUREA.

White's Thrush.

- Turdus aureus*, Hollandre, Faun. de la Moselle, p. 60.
—— *varius*, Pall. Zoog. Rosso-Asiat., tom. i. p. 449.
—— *Whitei*, Eyt. Hist. of Rarer Brit. Birds, p. 92, and fig.
—— *varius* seu *Whitei*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., tom. iv. p. 602.
Oreocincla Whitei, Gould, Proc. of Zool. Soc., 1837, p. 45.
Turdus lunulatus, Blas. List of Birds of Eur., Eng. edit., p. 9.
Oreocincla aurea, Bonap. Cat. des Ois. d'Eur., p. 5.
-

THE known members of the genus *Oreocincla*, which are not more than three or four in number, inhabit the forests of most parts of the Old World with the exception of those of Africa. Some of them are found in the extreme south of Tasmania, in Australia, and Java; while others are distributed over India, China, and Japan; and it is from these latter countries that the few individuals of *O. aurea* that have been killed in Europe have probably wandered.

The first recorded instances of the occurrence of the bird in England will be found in Yarrell's 'History of British Birds,' where he states that, by the kind permission of the Earl of Malmesbury, he was enabled to give a figure of the species from an extremely beautiful example shot by his Lordship on his estate at Heron Court, near Christchurch, Hampshire, in January 1828, and, with reference to a second specimen, mentions that he was indebted to Mr. Jesse for an introduction to his friend Mr. Bigge, of Hampton Court, who had allowed him the use of an example said to have been shot in the New Forest, Hampshire, by one of the forest-keepers, who parted with it to a bird-preserver at Southampton, of whom Mr. Bigge bought it for his own collection; the third is stated, in the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History,' vol. xi. p. 78, to have been obtained by R. L. Allman, Esq., in the neighbourhood of Bandon, in the county of Cork, Ireland, about ten days prior to the date of the communication (Dec. 15, 1842), and to be in the possession of G. J. Allman, Esq., Professor of Botany in Trinity College, Dublin. More recently, by a happy chance for ornithologists, a fourth and living example attracted the notice of one of our best naturalists and sportsmen, Mr. Robert F. Tomes, who perseveringly followed up the bird until he obtained the prize, an examination of which led to the production of his admirable paper in 'The Ibis' for 1859, "On the occurrence of White's Thrush (*Oreocincla aurea*) near Stratford-on-Avon, with remarks on the genera *Oreocincla*, *Turdus*, and *Merula*," from which I take the liberty of making some extracts referring to the present species.

"The opportunity of examining a recently killed specimen of this Thrush," says Mr. Tomes, "occurs so rarely, that I thought it desirable to make an examination of it at once, before it had undergone mutilation of any of its parts in the process of preservation. The village of Welford, five miles west of Stratford-on-Avon, where the specimen was obtained, is situated in a bend of the Avon, on a soil of rich alluvium. Its position is highly favourable for the growth of timber and fruit trees; and it is well shrouded in orchards and small enclosures fringed with their hedgerows and ivied elms, affording a favourite haunt for many of the smaller birds—with a good supply of cherries and other fruits in the summer months, and berries through the autumn and winter seasons.

"In a small grass inclosure, immediately adjoining the village, and thickly surrounded by elms, a friend of mine observed a bird rise from a dry leafy ditch, which at the first glance was mistaken for a Woodcock, but soon recognized as one of the Thrush kind. This happened on the 6th of January; and on hearing the account, I stimulated further search, but without effect until the 23rd of that month, when the bird was again flushed from the same inclosure, and, as before, from the bottom of a dry ditch amongst dead leaves. Again on the 26th it rose from the same ditch, and within a few yards of the same spot. On each occasion it was busy in turning over the dead leaves, from beneath which it appears to have taken its food. Although Blackbirds, Thrushes, and Missel-Thrushes were abundant and seen at the same time feeding on the ivy and hawthorn berries, the present bird was always observed to resort only to the trees or hedges when disturbed, and then merely as a place of rest, remaining for some time perched in an upright position in one spot without noticing the berries or the species feeding on them. Its flight, when roused from feeding, was very undulating and low; and it often settled on the ground, only making choice of a tree when it happened to pass under one, into which it rose almost vertically. As far as its habits could be ascertained from these short opportunities of observation, it would appear to be almost entirely a ground-feeder. Mr. Blyth says the allied Indian species, *Oreocincla dauma*, is generally met with amongst bamboos, in which situation the ground would very likely be the attraction rather than the canes.

"I have been particular in the description of the locality in which the bird appeared, on account of the interval which occurred between the first and second appearance; for it must be supposed that it was a suitable one, or it would not have again returned to it after an absence of more than a fortnight."—*Ibis*, 1859, p. 379 *et seq.*

The secluded, shy, and terrestrial habits of the individual observed by Mr. Toms accord fully with those of its Australian ally, as far as I had an opportunity of witnessing them while in that country. I say as far; for although the bird was strictly indigenous, it was so scarce and dotted about in the midst of the forests so sparingly, that I never knew when I should meet with it; and when I did, a transient view only was afforded me. I once found its nest in the midst of a dense brush under Mount Wellington, in Tasmania; unfortunately it was a forsaken one, and contained only a single broken egg. The shape and structure of this nest, as well as the kind of situation in which it was placed, accorded pretty nearly with that of the Black-bird (*Merula vulgaris*); the colouring of the egg, too, was not very dissimilar. These details, it is true, have reference to another species; but I am sure they will be equally applicable to White's Thrush whenever similar opportunities of observing it have been obtained, and for this reason I claim to be excused for inserting them here.

Speaking of this bird, in the fourth volume of his 'Manuel d'Ornithologie,' Temminck states that it "occasionally visits Western Europe, of which five or six examples may be cited—one in England [all that was known to him at the time], two at Hamburg, one on the Rhine, another in Germany, and one near Metz; some other captures are vaguely spoken of. The species is very abundant in Japan and some parts of Asia, whence it comes to us in Europe. I have not been able to find any difference between the Hamburg specimens and others from Japan." One of the two specimens shot on the banks of the Elbe was obtained by me in a fresh state; it formed the subject of plate 81, in the second volume of my 'Birds of Europe,' and is now in the possession of T. B. L. Baker, Esq., of Hardwicke Court, near Gloucester. I may add that this is one of the birds which has made Heligoland so famous for rare ornithological visitors, several examples having, I believe, been killed there.

Of all the *Oreocincla*, the *O. aurea* is the largest in the size of its body; while at the same time it has a disproportionately smaller bill and its plumage more strongly lunated than any of its congeners. In none of them is there any marked difference in the colouring of the sexes; but, as is the case with our common Thrush, the females are a little less stout in their general contour, and comparatively feeble in their structure.

Head, all the upper surface, and upper tail-coverts pale tawny olive; each feather tipped with a crescent of black; lesser wing-coverts dark or blackish brown, with a large, yellowish tawny, irregular-shaped spot just within the tip; greater coverts tawny olive, tipped with yellow; wing-feathers brown, margined externally with tawny, and each having a large oblong spot of white about the middle of the interior web; four central tail-feathers tawny; the remainder brown at the base, becoming tawny at the apical portion, and, except the outer one on each side, tipped with white; axillary feathers nearest the shoulder snow-white for their basal half, and deep black for their apical one; the next or lower series black at the base, and as conspicuously tipped with white; centre of the throat and abdomen, and under tail-coverts, creamy-white; sides of the neck and under surface creamy-white, deepening into pale tawny towards, and with a crescent of brownish black at the tip; "irides very dark brown, almost black; upper mandible uniform dark brown; lower one similar, but yellowish towards and at the base; legs and feet pale yellowish brown; claws the same, but paler" (Toms).

The specific term *Whitei* (superseded by the earlier one of *aurea*) was assigned to the species by T. C. Eyton, Esq., in honour of the celebrated White, of Selborne, a compliment I retain by employing his name as an English appellation.

The figure is of the size of life.

Gould, John. 1873. "White's Thrush, *Oreocincla aurea* [Pl. 39]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323853>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/221554>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323853>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/323853>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

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>.