CINCLUS MELANOGASTER, Brehm.

Stouffer & McCracken, Ltd. et al.

Walter, Imp.

CINCLUS MELANOGASTER, Temm.

Black-bellied Water-Ouzel.

Cinclus melanogaster, Temm. Man. d'Orn., tom. iii. p. 106, tom. iv. p. 609.

NATURALISTS have always been and doubtless ever will be divided in opinion as to the definition of a species: for instance, some incline to the belief that the Magpies of Europe, Asia, and America, to which the generic term of *Pica* is now restricted, have a common origin, but that circumstances unknown to us have caused differences in their size and colour which, having become permanent, are by others regarded as specific distinctions. As mentioned in one or other of my previous writings, I believe it will be desirable not to speculate upon how such differences have arisen, but to treat of them as they are found to exist. Now the case of the Water-Ouzels is precisely similar to that of the Magpies, the true Jays, and many other groups; that is to say, there are several species of each which are very similar in their markings, but which the scientific ornithologist has no difficulty in distinguishing, or in separating into species or races, whichever they may be considered: for my own part, I should prefer to retain each under a distinct specific appellation.

The Water-Ouzel, to which the term *melanogaster* has been assigned, is a native of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and other parts of Scandinavia, and, so far as I have myself seen, has always a black belly and a large extent of white on the breast; while the bird of the same form frequenting the mountain-streams of Switzerland, and probably those of the whole of the Alps and Apennines, has a light grey back, a less amount of white on the breast, and a chestnut-red belly, being in fact very like the species so generally dispersed over the mountainous districts of the British Islands; consequently in Southern Europe and in Britain we find one, if not two, Water-Ouzels differing from that inhabiting Scandinavia, the difference principally consisting in the colouring of the belly.

When we consider the mountainous character of the countries to which all the species of the genus resort both in the Old and in the New World, we cannot but be amazed at now and then meeting with solitary Dippers among the waters of the flat, fenny, and marshy county of Norfolk, a locality which must be ill adapted to the habits and economy of a bird of this peculiar form. How is it that they are found there? It is evident that they are not individuals which have strayed across the country from Cumberland, Wales, or Derbyshire; for they are all differently coloured from the birds there found: the chances are that they are wanderers from Scandinavia—restless, erratic individuals, whose instincts have deserted them, and, like many other European birds, they have wandered seawards, and ultimately landed on the coast of Norfolk, the most prominent, and consequently nearest point of the British Islands. Mr. Stevenson's notes on the Norfolk-killed birds will, I think, bear out this supposition; and I have little doubt that, the attention of collectors having been directed to the subject, some interesting information respecting these wanderers will be the result.

Some recent writers have advanced the opinion that this is the true *Sturnus cinclus* of Linnæus; and I should have supposed that this view was correct, since it is the species with which he must have been surrounded; but upon turning to the 'Fauna Suecica' (Retzius's edition) I find it stated "*Abdomen in adultæ æve ferrugineum*," which is characteristic of our British bird. Could Linnæus have taken his description from an English example?

Mr. Stevenson says:—"Whether or not the Black-breasted Water-Ouzel (*Cinclus melanogaster*) be specifically distinct from the ordinary British form with a chestnut band across the abdomen, or merely a climatal variety, undoubtedly our Norfolk specimens belong to the former type. I have at different times examined six or seven examples, all killed in this county, which, with one exception to be hereafter mentioned, exhibited no trace of chestnut on the under parts, but were identical with a Lapland specimen in the Norwich Museum, collected in that country by the late Mr. Wolley. We may naturally infer, therefore, from this circumstance and the season at which our few Norfolk specimens invariably appear (between the months of November and February), that they are chance stragglers from the Scandinavian peninsula; and this opinion is also entertained by Mr. Gould. The Messrs. Paget refer to one example of this bird, in the collection of Mr. Youell, of Yarmouth, as having been killed at Burgh in November 1816; and Mr. Hunt in his 'List' mentions Costessy and Taverham as places where the Dipper had occurred to his knowledge. Mr. Stephen Miller and the Rev. Mr. Penrice, of Plumstead, had also each a specimen in their collections, both of which I have no doubt were obtained in this county. The specimen in the Norwich

Museum is the one mentioned by Mr. Lubbock in 1845 as 'lately' shot at Hellesdon Mills; and two others are stated by the same author to have been seen at different times by trustworthy observers at Marlingford and Saxthorpe. Of more recent occurrence I may mention a male in my own collection, which was brought to me in the flesh, having been shot in November 1855, whilst hovering over the river between the Foundry bridge and the ferry. It is not a little singular that a bird so accustomed to the clear running streams of the north, and the quiet haunts of the 'silent angler,' should be found, as in this case, almost within the walls of the city, sporting over a river turbid and discoloured from the neighbouring factories, and with the busy noise of traffic on every side. About the same time that this bird appeared near the city, three others were observed on more than one occasion on the Earlham river by Mr. Fountaine, of Easton, who is well acquainted with our British birds; but these suddenly disappeared, and were not seen again. Mr. Cremer, of Beeston, has one which was killed in that neighbourhood on the 25th of December, 1860; another, in the possession of Mr. Hubbard, a bird-stuffer in Norwich, was also procured in that year; and a third, in my own collection, on the 29th of January, 1861. All these birds were shown to me in the flesh, and had black breasts, like my first specimen, and were in good plumage and condition. There is also a similar example in the late Mr. L'Estrange's collection at Hunstanton Hall, amongst the birds said to have been killed in Norfolk; and it was most probably obtained on that part of the coast. From the winter of 1861 I know of no others seen or procured in Norfolk until the 24th of November, 1864, when a male bird was shot at Buxton by Mr. J. Gambling, who very kindly presented it to the Norwich Museum. This specimen, which was brought to me in the flesh, is the one before alluded to as slightly exceptional in plumage, as, when fresh killed, there was a decidedly reddish tinge below the white on the breast, but by no means so bright or so extended as in two Scotch skins in my possession. This tinge, however, has much faded since the bird was preserved; and therefore I do not think that my previously expressed opinion respecting our Norfolk specimens is thereby upset. Mr. Alfred Newton, to whom I referred this point, is of the same opinion, and remarks, 'All birds vary, and they vary so as to resemble allied races or species. Therefore this may yet be a Scandinavian example; and if so, it would only go to prove that in the Scandinavian form the black belly is not a constant feature.' On dissecting this last I found the stomach filled with the remains of insects, nothing else—consisting of the elytra and legs of a little water-beetle, and of some small *Notonecta*. It is also particularly worthy of notice that in almost every instance in which this bird has been obtained in Norfolk, away from the coast, it has been found in the vicinity of the water-mills upon our inland streams, attracted no doubt by the noise and splash of the tumbling flushes, the nearest approach to its native waterfalls."

Mr. Salvin has published a valuable monograph of the genus *Cinclus* in 'The Ibis' for the year 1867, to which I refer those of my readers who may desire to make themselves acquainted with a group of birds so remarkable for the situations they affect and for their singular habits and economy.

The sexes are so nearly alike in size and colour as to be scarcely distinguishable.

The figures are of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Black-bellied Water-Ouzel, *Cinclus melanogaster* [Pl. 42]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323856>.

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

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323856>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/323856>

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>.