PETROCOSSYPHUS CYANUS.

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Blue Rock-Thrush.

Turdus cyanus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 296.

——— *solitarius*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. i. p. 345.

Monticola cyanus, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 552.

Sylvia solitaria, Savi, Orn. Tosc., p. 217.

Petrocossyphus cyaneus, Boie, Isis, 1828, p. 319.

Petrocincla cyana, Keys. et Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 50.

Turdus azureus, Crespon, Faun. Mérid., p. 179.

Petrocincla longirostris, Blyth, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xvi. p. 150.

——— *cyanea*, Degl. et Gerbe, Orn. Eur., tom. i. p. 448.

——— *Pandoo*, Sykes, in Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., pt. ii. p. 87?

THE propriety of adding this species to the British fauna, and to the list of Irish birds, rests on the authority of A. G. More, Esq., who, in a letter addressed to Mr. R. B. Sharpe, from the Natural History Department of the Royal Dublin Society, says:—"The Blue Thrush, *T. cyanus*, was, I believe, certainly killed in Ireland. The specimen came to us through a member of this Society, who saw it in the hands of Mr. Glennon, a bird-stuffer in Dublin, who told him that it had been shot associated with some Starlings in the county of Meath, and had been sent to him by a Mr. Brassington, on the 17th of November, 1866. The bird was, I hear, seen in the flesh by several naturalists, and has every appearance of being a wild specimen, the plumage being not at all frayed or worn. Like many other of the rarer visitors to Ireland, the bird seems to have arrived late in the autumn, when I have noticed that many birds migrate from east to west on the Continent; I therefore think its occurrence by no means surprising. I dare say your attention may have been drawn to this unusual line of migration, as mine was, by the occurrence of the Black Redstart in winter in England. I wrote a few remarks on the subject in the 'Zoologist' for 1859." Quite recently, indeed since my Plate of the species for the present work was drawn, Messrs. Sharpe and Dresser have thrown some doubt upon the accuracy of the above statement: thus in the account of the bird in their 'Birds of Europe' they say, "Through the kindness of Dr. Carte we have been able to examine a specimen of the Blue Rock-Thrush, said to have been killed in Ireland . . . Without commenting on the unfortunate circumstances which must have induced an example of this species to wander so far away from its natural habitat, and to occur in Ireland in the winter; we may state our opinion, based on an examination of the stuffed bird itself, that it has not been mounted when fresh killed, but from a previously prepared skin. On the other hand both Dr. Carte and Mr. A. G. More believe that the occurrence of the bird was genuine; and we therefore record the fact as being of interest, and exhibiting the highest northern range of the species in Europe." While the specimen was in London I also availed myself of the opportunity to examine it, when I found it to be an adult male in rather a bad state of preservation, and, if I recollect rightly, with one of the legs burst by the wire employed in mounting—a circumstance which frequently occurs when a specimen is mounted from a dried skin, and which may probably have given rise to the doubt in Messrs. Sharpe and Dresser's minds as to its being a genuine Irish specimen. I may here remark that there is no more improbability of the bird having been killed in Ireland than there is of the spotted Cuckoo occurring there, or of the Black Redstart in autumn in England. That sooner or later the bird would be included in the list of our accidental visitors there can be but little doubt, since it is dispersed over countries close at hand (France, Portugal, and Spain), while in those lying further to the south and east (even in India) the bird is a common denizen.

In many respects the Blue Rock-Thrush is a bird of great interest. Its habits are peculiar, its colouring is unusual; and the associations connected with it are of a pleasing character, inasmuch as by most recent writers it is supposed to be the "sparrow which sitteth alone on the house-top" of the Holy Scriptures; and from what I saw of it in Malta, where it was frequently to be seen perched solitary on the front walls of the flat-roofed houses, I think the supposition is probably correct. During my visit to the islands composing the Maltese group I never saw two together on the same wall, while sparrows (*Passer hispaniolensis*) were abundant; and it must be borne in mind that one of the earliest specific designations assigned to it, that of *solitarius*, had reference to this peculiarity in its habits.

I have stated that the Blue Rock-Thrush is found in France, Portugal, and Spain; it also occurs in the south of Germany, in Savoy, Egypt, Algeria, Northern Africa, and Palestine. Mr. Moggeridge states that

it remains all the year round at Mentone, whence my son, Dr. Franklin Gould, brought me fine examples of both sexes killed by himself in winter. "In Italy," says Mr. Taylor, "I have noticed it to be particularly abundant about Susa, and in a less degree about Rome. In the south of Italy and in Sicily I have often seen it kept as a cage-bird. Speaking of the bird in the neighbourhood of Pisa, Dr. Henry Giglioli says it generally frequents old towers and church-steeple, and pours forth its glowing melody even from the top of the Verruca, a ruined mediæval fortress which crowns one of the highest summits of the Pisan range."

"Generally distributed through Southern Spain," says Mr. Howard Saunders in 'The Ibis' for 1871, "no matter how wild the locality, the Blue Rock-Thrush will always be your companion; and though very shy during the breeding-season, it is by no means so at other times. I could often have shot specimens; but this I could never bring myself to do; and it would appear that the bird exercises some influence over the usually unimpressionable natives; for I never saw one amongst the bunches of Thrushes &c. either in Spain or Italy. The eggs are difficult to obtain, both from the situation of the nest and from the habit the bird has of making several nests before finally deciding which it means to occupy. The young are prized for the cage, but not to the same extent as in Italy, Malta, and Greece, where fabulous prices are sometimes given for a good songster."

Mr. Wright informs us that the "Blue Thrush becomes strongly attached to the locality in which it has been brought up, and seldom quits it. This affection is also shown in a state of captivity; and the bird rarely long survives removal to a new and strange place. Almost fabulous prices are sometimes given for a good songster. An instance is fresh in my memory of a noble lady who considered herself fortunate in securing one for £7 10s.; and two or three pounds is not an unusual price. The male nestlings may easily be distinguished from the females at a very early age by their blue wing-coverts."

"The well-known Blue Thrush," says Mr. Tristram, "is to be found in Palestine all the year round wherever stones crop above the surface, whether by the shore or on the hills, and especially among ruins, but always solitary. Rarely ever were a male and female to be seen together. I scarcely expected to find it (as I did) along with the Black-and-white Kingfisher on the coast, sitting among the surf-beaten rocks, and feeding on sand-lice and shrimps. On two occasions I killed it from the shore, and had to wade into the sea to secure my specimens. Unsociable as it is, it yet frequents the dwelling of man, a taste for stonework evidently overcoming all other prejudices; but nowhere is it more thoroughly at home than among the ruins of a deserted and untrodden Roman city, like Gerash, Rabbah, or Gadara. The 'vomitoria' of the amphitheatres are exactly to its liking; and in the recesses of these it has its nest, the male meanwhile perched on the top of an old column and uttering his dolorous ditty. Mr. Cochrane and I took a nest with four fresh eggs on April 2nd, in one of the robbers' caves in the Wady Hamam, near the Sea of Galilee. The nest was conveniently placed on a shelf far in, without any attempt at concealment, and was like the nest of our Blackbird, with mud mingled with the straw, instead of a shell of cow-dung. The young birds are fledged at the beginning of May. The eggs are very pale blue, smaller than those of the Thrush."

The figures represent what I consider to be male and female, drawn from Mentone specimens, of the size of life.

Gould, John. 1873. "Blue Rock-Thrush, *Petrocossyphus cyanus* [Pl. 43]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323857>.

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