PETROCINCLA SAXATILIS.

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Rock-Thrush.

Lanius infaustus, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 310.

Turdus saxatilis, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 833.

Saxicola montana, Koch, Baier. Zool., tom. i. p. 185.

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

Petrocincla saxatilis, Vig. Zool. Journ., vol. ii. p. 396.

Petrocossyphus saxatilis, Boie, Isis, 1826, p. 972.

———— *Goureyi*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 370.

———— *polyglottus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 370.

Petrocichla saxatilis, Keys. und Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 50.

Sylvia saxatilis, Savi, Orn. Tosc., tom. i. p. 219.

A MERE glance at the accompanying Plate will be sufficient to show that the bird it represents does not strictly pertain to our avifauna ; yet it is included in all the recent lists of our native birds. That it has a claim to a place therein, rests upon the capture of the one or two specimens recorded in the Supplement to Yarrell's 'History of British Birds,' all the other accounts of its being shot not bearing the test of investigation, however positive the assertions made respecting them. This may appear a very sweeping remark ; but, in my opinion, it is mainly true ; and the following account, extracted from Mr. Yarrell's work above referred to, gives, I believe, the only instances of the occurrence of the bird in our islands to be depended upon.

"A beautiful specimen of the Rock-Thrush was obtained, on the 19th of May, 1843, by Mr. Joseph Trigg, who shot it at Therfield, near Royston, in Hertfordshire, while it was sitting on an ash-tree, on the evening of the day mentioned. I saw the specimen before it was skinned for preservation by Mr. John Norman, of Royston, and received the first notice of the occurrence from my friend Thomas Wrotham, Esq., whose influence with Mr. Trigg obtained me the loan of the bird for my use in this work ; and I beg to return my best thanks to all the parties for the opportunity thus afforded me of figuring and describing the first example of the Rock-Thrush that has been known to occur in this country. I have very recently heard of another specimen having been shot by a gamekeeper, who, unaware of the interest attached to the bird, saved only the head and neck, which being shown to a gentleman conversant with ornithology, the species, from its peculiar colouring, was identified without difficulty." The first specimen above mentioned has since passed from the possession of Mr. Trigg into that of J. H. Gurney, Esq.

If the Rock-Thrush has but slender claims to a place in our avifauna, we need only cross the Channel to find ourselves in a country of which it is strictly a native ; for in certain parts of France, particularly those of a rocky or alpine character, it is very plentiful. It is, in fact, a bird of the hills, a tenant of the Alps, the Apennines, and the numerous spurs jutting out from those great ranges ; it is also a common denizen of many parts of Spain, Italy, and the Tyrol ; but in all parts of Europe it is strictly a migrant, coming and going with the seasons, like our own Ring-Ousel. It winters in the Atlas and other mountain-ranges of Northern Africa, and is to be found in every district of that country of a similar character. Many of the skins of the bird on sale in Paris are made in Tangiers, and others in Algiers, Tunis, and Egypt. The specimens from Tangiers are shorter in the body, and, moreover, have shorter bills, than those from the Nile ; these differences, however, can only be regarded as local variations, for in colouring and markings the Nile and Morocco birds are very similar.

Mr. Wright, who has given us a List of the Birds observed by him in Malta and Gozo, states that it arrives there about the middle of March, generally in pairs, and may be seen till May, and that it reappears in September, on its voyage southward.

The Rev. H. B. Tristram, in his remarks "On the Ornithology of Palestine," says :—" *Petrocincla saxatilis*, whose red tail and Redstart-like habits link it most closely with the *Ruticillinae*, is, in most parts of Palestine, merely a passing traveller, and tarries but a night. On the 8th of April the whole of Mount Gerizim was covered by a restless flock of these birds, which, at a distance, we took for Black Redstarts, so exactly did they resemble that bird in their actions. They hopped restlessly from rock to rock, never taking a flight of more than a few yards ; and in this fashion, in loose order, ranging for perhaps a mile in breadth, they appeared to be steadily proceeding northwards. When the foremost line had reached the valley, they took a flight across to the foot of Mount Ebal, over the gardens, and then more leisurely mounted the hill. Afterwards we occasionally met with this bird in the Upper Lebanon, in the month of June, where, no doubt, it was breeding."

Lord Lilford informs us that in May, 1857, it was common "among the Acroceraunian mountains," where he "found its nests among the débris carried down by the melting of the snows on Ischika, one of the highest points of that range." He also "once or twice observed it in the island of Corfu, where it is highly prized as a singing bird."

When speaking of the birds observed round Pisa in 1864, Dr. Henry Giglioli says:—"In April the two Rock-Thrushes make their appearance; and the *Petrocincla saxatilis* may then be seen perched on the detached masses of limestone which adorn the flanks of the Monte Pisano."

"The Rock-Thrush," says Bailly, in his 'Ornithologie de la Savoie,' "is not uncommon in the summer among the rocks and the more stony parts of our Alpine regions; it is also found on the lower rocks, on hillocks on the plains, and on hills such as those of Charmettes, from the former habitation of J. J. Rousseau, to the confines of Montagnole, situations naturally of a rocky character, and which border the lake of Bourget, in the proximity of the Abbey of Hautecombe. The rocks which coast the principal route of Mont-du-Chat, as well as the quarries of Lemenc, near Chambéry, are also regularly frequented by a few pairs, which remain and breed. The males, nearly always, arrive alone from the 12th to the 20th of April, according as the spring may be early or late. The females, which also arrive alone, seldom appear until four, five, or six days later. They then pair. The males on the very day they arrive survey the district and its neighbourhood, apparently for convenient sites for the purpose. When in repose, and especially in the morning, they are to be seen on the tops of rocks or isolated stones, and sometimes on the top of a tree, whence they commence a song, which resembles at intervals that of the Blue Thrush, and in the flexibility, softness, and variety of its notes that of the Orpheus Warbler and the Blackcap. They often rise perpendicularly in the air, and descend again, with wings extended and still singing, to the spot whence they rose. Sometimes they flutter along the rocks in a series of undulations, all the while uttering their song; but they never sing with so much grace and cheerfulness as when they again see their females; they immediately mount in the air for a considerable distance, descend again, nearly vertically, and pour forth, with volubility, all the harmony their voice is capable of expressing. As soon as paired, the male and female hasten to seek, in the clefts and holes of the rocks, in ruins situated on some high point, in stony declivities interspersed with shrubs, and more rarely in the holes of abandoned logs, a suitable site for the construction of the nest, which being found, they immediately commence transporting the necessary materials, consisting of small roots, moss, and straw, for the formation of the exterior, and fine herbs, the fibres of plants, and soft roots to line the interior. The female lays four or five eggs, of a bluish green; sometimes they are without spots, at others they are almost imperceptibly spotted with brown at the larger end. If the parents, when bringing food to their young, perceive an intruder, they wait on the top of a rock or shrub till he is gone; indeed they appear never to go direct to the nest, but descend at some distance from it, and run along the paths or rocks until an opportunity offers of feeding their young in safety and secrecy. The adults migrate about the end of August, and the young about the 8th of September."

From the localities above mentioned, the range of the Rock-Thrush would seem to extend as far north as Heligoland, since examples have been killed in that island.

Considerable difference occurs in the colouring of the sexes, and a certain amount of variation in that of the males—those that are newly moulted having the feathers of the breast and undersurface tipped with crescents of light grey, which gradually disappear, until the bird assumes a uniform colour.

The male has the head, neck, and upper part of the back blue grey, passing into brown on the scapularies; centre of the back white; upper tail-coverts dark bluish brown, slightly tipped with greyish white; lesser wing-coverts dark brown, almost black, tipped with white; greater coverts and remainder of the wings brown, the secondaries faintly edged at the tip with white; breast, and all the under surface light chestnut brown, with, in most specimens, a crescent of grey at the tip; tail deep rusty red, with a wash of brown on the two central feathers; bill black; irides dark hazel; legs and toes dark reddish brown.

The female has the whole of the upper surface of a dull brown; on the lower part of the back an indication of the white mark seen in the male; throat and sides of the throat tawny; under surface the same colour but deeper, each feather bordered with transverse markings of brown at the tip; tail and other parts of the plumage as in the male.

The Plate represents an adult male, drawn from life, in the Gardens of the Zoological Society, and a reduced figure of the female in the distance. The three plants are *Rhododendron ferrugineum*, *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, and a species of *Cassula*?, taken from the sketch-book of Mr. Wolf, who made the drawings in the Alps.

Gould, John. 1873. "Rock-Thrush, *Petrocincla saxatilis* [Pl. 44]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323858>.

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