



ACCENTOR ALPINUS.

ACCENTOR ALPINUS.

Alpine Accentor.

Motacilla alpina, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 957.

Sturnus moritanus, Gmel. *ibid.*, p. 804.

—— *collaris*, Gmel. *ibid.*, p. 805.

Accentor alpinus, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iii. p. 700.

THOSE persons who have done me the honour to consult my work on the 'Birds of Asia' will have observed that all the species of this form contained therein are figured under the generic term *Accentor*; but I may here remark that Professor Kaup has divided the birds hitherto placed in that genus into three genera, reserving *Accentor* for the present species, with which its near allies *A. nipalensis* and *A. altaicus* must be associated, proposing the term *Tharrhaleus* for the common Hedge-Accentor of Europe, *A. modularis*, with which must be placed *A. immaculatus*, *A. rubeculoides*, *A. strophiatatus*, and the Japanese *A. rubidus*,—and *Spermolegus* for the *A. atrogularis* vel *montanellus*. Now, although I have not adopted these divisions, I admit that the German *savant* has sufficient reasons for separating the Accentorine birds into two genera; but I strongly object to the generic separation of the *A. atrogularis* from *Tharrhaleus*, since, in my opinion, it is identical in form. The species, then, of Professor Kaup's restricted genus *Accentor*, of which the bird here represented is the type, are three in number, namely *A. alpinus*, *A. nipalensis*, and *A. altaicus*; all are inhabitants of mountainous districts. Compared with the members of the genus *Tharrhaleus*, of which *T. modularis* is the type, these Alpine birds have longer wings, and more robust forms, and the marking of their plumage is of a different character. They are said to be even more tame in disposition than our well-known Hedgesparrow; at least it is so reported of *A. alpinus*. The birds of this latter form also affect very different localities, rocky mountains being the situations wherein they love to dwell, rather than among the lowlands. They and the Wild Rhododendrons live together—the European species with the *Rhododendron ferrugineum*, on the Alps, while the others creep about among the plants of the same family in the Himalayas, the discovery of so many species of which has made Dr. Hooker's name so famous among botanists. The European *A. alpinus* keeps true to its locality; for it seldom leaves the Alps, and never intrudes upon the haunts of those inhabiting the great Himalayan ranges, which, in like manner are constant to their natural abodes. The Accentors constitute a well-defined group of birds, the members of which are confined to the Old World, and, as far as we yet know, to its northern regions. What claim, it may be asked, has the *Accentor alpinus* to a place in the avifauna of Great Britain? If we look into the works of Macgillivray, Yarrell, or Thompson, we shall find it recorded that a pair were seen in the garden of King's College, Cambridge, and one being shot, on the 22nd of November 1822, it was submitted to the inspection of the ornithologists living at the time, accompanied by a scrap of information bearing out their rock-loving disposition; for it was noticed that when not on the ground they frequented the buttresses of the surrounding buildings. The second example was supposed to have fallen a victim to a cat. In Loudon's Magazine for 1832 is another record of the occurrence of this bird.

"I am indebted," says Mr. Yarrell, "to the Rev. Dr. Goodenough, the Dean of Wells, for the knowledge of the occurrence of a third example of this rare bird, which was shot in the garden of the Deanery, in Somersetshire, in 1833. . . . The same character was noticed in the specimens both at Cambridge and Wells, the birds allowing observers to approach unusually close to them, and, when at length obliged to move, making very short flights and always settling on some part of the nearest building. The resemblance of the steeple-crowned edifices of Cambridge and at the Deanery of Wells to the pointed and elevated rocks of their own peculiar haunts was supposed to have been the attraction in both the localities referred to." Still more recently Mr. Gatcombe has submitted to my inspection a very fine pair shot by himself in Devonshire, respecting which he has favoured me with the following note:—

"On the 20th of December, 1858, while walking on the coast in the neighbourhood of Plymouth, after some heavy gales from the south-west, I was much surprised and interested by seeing a pair of Alpine Accentors hopping about among the grass on the top of the cliffs. Having watched them for some time I returned home for my gun; but when I came back they had disappeared, and, although I sedulously searched the whole of the coast, I did not see them again until the 10th of the following month, January 1859, when I had the good fortune to shoot them. Their actions closely resembled those of the common Hedge-Accentor; and they were tolerably tame, but, on being alarmed, immediately flew down among the rocks, uttering a note which resembled the words *tree, tree, tree*, quickly repeated, reminding me much of the noise made by some kinds of small birds when fighting. They kept close together, and appeared when feeding to

select grassy spots. I have never seen or heard of but *one* other Devonshire specimen; and that was sent from Teignmouth with some Redstarts to Plymouth to be preserved." Were it necessary, I could doubtless find other notices of its occurrence in our island; but sufficient has been said to establish its claim to be considered a British Bird.

Temminck, in his 'Manuel,' says "*Habite*: sur les Alpes, le long des rochers; dans la belle saison il gagne les plus grandes élévations des montagnes, et descend dans les régions moyennes à l'approche de l'hiver; très-commun sur le Saint-Bernard, dans les environs de l'hospice; également abondant dans quelques parties montagneuses de l'Allemagne et de la France.

"*Nourriture*: petits hannetons et autres insectes; en hiver uniquement des semences et des plantes alpestres.

"*Propagation*: niche dans les fentes des rochers, quelquefois aussi sous les toits des maisons et dans les villages situés sur les montagnes; pond cinq œufs verdâtres."

"This bird," says Bailly "is common during the breeding-season in all the Maurienne Alps, Mount Cenis, and Chamounix; it is even met with as high as the region of perpetual snow, and also inhabits, but in lesser numbers, the rocky portions of the Tarentaise Alps, more especially the vicinity of the glaciers of the Allues, and similar situations. It builds in the hollows or crevices of inaccessible rocks, in the mouths of the funnels, as they are called, or small cavities formed in the chalky part of the rocks by the dripping of water, sometimes on the ground amidst heaps of stones, among the rubbish fallen from the neighbouring heights, and occasionally in the cavities of old pines or firs growing on the summits of the rocks close to the glaciers, and sometimes under the roofs of chalets. Both sexes assist in the collection of the materials for the nest, which is outwardly composed of mosses, dry grasses, and the roots of plants, the interior lining being formed of hay and the down of flowering plants; when complete, it is nearly as large as that of the Rock-Thrush, which it much resembles. I have also found nests composed almost entirely of the straw of oats, rye, and wheat—an anomaly which is thus accounted for: those who collect ice in the glaciers frequently let fall pieces of the straw in which it is wrapped for transport; and of these the birds immediately avail themselves. About the middle of May the female deposits four or five eggs, of a glossy greenish blue without spots, and towards the end of June or the beginning of July makes a second laying of three or four, always at a greater elevation than that at which the first were placed."

The sexes, like those of the other members of the genus, differ so little in their colour and markings that it is impossible to say for certain, from external appearance, which are males and which are females.

The male has the feathers of the head, neck, and ear-coverts brownish-grey, darkest in the centre; on the throat a large gorget of greyish white, with a small spot of slaty black at the tip of each feather; feathers of the back blackish brown, broadly margined with light reddish brown; rump greyish brown; greater and lesser wing-coverts light brown at the base, black towards the extremity, and with a spot of white at the tip, forming two bands across that part of the wing; spurious wing light brown, tipped first with a narrow line of white, and then with black; primaries brown, with lighter edges, the remainder of the wing-feathers blackish brown, margined on both webs with reddish brown, and slightly tipped with dull white; upper surface of the tail-feathers dark brown, tipped with light buff; chest, reddish grey; flank-feathers rufous, margined with greyish; under tail-coverts dark brown, margined with reddish brown at the base, and tipped obliquely on each side with greyish white; irides hazel; bill yellow at the base, black at the tip; legs and toes orange-brown, claws black.

The figures in the accompanying Plate are of the size of life. The red-flowering plant is the *Rhododendron ferrugineum*, and the blue one *Gentiana verna*.



Gould, John. 1873. "Alpine Accentor, *Accentor alpinus* [Pl. 54]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323868>.

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

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323868>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/323868>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

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>.