PASTOR ROSEUS.

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Rose-coloured Pastor.

Turdus roseus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 294.

Sturnus roseus, Scop. Ann. Hist. Nat., tom. i. p. 130.

—— *asiaticus*, Wirs. Vög., tab. i.

—— *Seleucis*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 837.

Merula rosea, Ray, Syn., p. 67.

Pastor roseus, Temm. Man. d'Orn., p. 83.

Psaroides roseus, Vieill.

Acridotheres roseus, Ranz.

Boscis roseus, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 401, tab. 22. fig. 41.

Nomadites roseus, Petaniz.

Thremmaphilus roseus, Macg. Hist. Brit. Birds, vol. i. p. 613, and vol. iii. p. 723.

Gracula rosea, Cuv.

THAT the Rose-coloured Pastors which have from time to time come to our island are rovers from their native country, and not regular migrants, will be admitted by every ornithologist. What impulse directs them to visit us it is not easy to understand, and in all probability will never be ascertained. When they do cross the Channel for Albion's shores, they generally take up their quarters with the Starlings, family affinities leading them to associate with birds having kindred dispositions, habits, and economy. What an assemblage of Starlings think when this richly-coloured species quarters itself among them, it would be interesting to know. Its fine dress may perhaps command the respect, and its lengthened and beautiful crest the admiration, of its less gaily attired relatives; I say relatives, because the similarity in the structure and mode of nesting of the Starling and Pastor, in the colouring of their eggs, and in the plumage of their young clearly proves them to be intimately allied; no birds, in fact, can be more alike than the young of these two species during the first autumn of their existence; and none differ more, not only from this dress, but from each other, when fully adult—the one becoming the beautifully spotted Starling, with its changeable hues of purple and green, and the other the rosy-coloured and silken-crested Pastor.

To Britain, as before stated, it is but a wanderer, nor does it seem to occur, except in this character, in Northern, Central, or Western Europe. In some districts of Southern Russia it is exceedingly numerous; but its precise distribution is not well ascertained. Pallas states that in the Lower Don, on the Irtish, and thence across to the Altaï Mountains, and even to Soongaria, now more generally known as Amoorland, it is most plentiful; while, on the other hand, on the Volga, the Obi, and the Jenessie, as well as in Danuria, though these regions would seem in all respects most suitable for it, it is never seen. But it is in Persia and India that this species seems to occur most commonly; and we have accounts of its being found in the latter, and even so far to the south as Ceylon, in countless myriads.

The following extracts from an account of the migration and breeding of this species in the neighbourhood of Smyrna, by the Marquis Oratio Antinori, will, I doubt not, be regarded with interest. They are taken from Dr. Sclater's translation, in the 'Zoologist,' of the original article which appeared in the 'Naumannia' for 1856:—

"The Rose-coloured Pastors began passing through the neighbourhood of Smyrna on their northern migration about the 15th of May, on which day I observed large flights of young birds of the first or second year. On the 14th of May I saw an immense multitude of old birds, passing at a moderate elevation, near a mineral spring called Ligea, on the left of the Gulf of Smyrna. On the 26th of May, about sunrise, great numbers of these birds were sitting so closely packed upon the trees as to make them look as if they were all covered with red flowers. From the 29th of May to the 5th of June the flights were most numerous; after that time they ceased, and the birds became stationary. The fields and gardens were full of them, and even in the villages they sat on the roofs of the houses. These facts convinced me that the birds were nesting in the hills surrounding the Gulf; but in spite of all our efforts, owing to the dense ignorance of the inhabitants and the unconquerable idleness of the peasantry, we could obtain but very few eggs. The man who brought us some told us that they had been collected upon a hill seven miles off in the interior, and that the Turks, who caught him in the act, had beaten and driven him away.

"The possession of these eggs determined me to undertake at once a search for them; and on the morning of the 30th of June I set out for the village of Bournatut, where I was assured the gardens and surrounding hills were full of Rose-Starlings; and I was well rewarded; for not only on the road to, but even in the streets of the village, upon the moss-grown walls, and on the trees of the courts and gardens, I had ample opportunities for making close observations on these peculiar birds.

"I must here mention that the rather high and rugged hills which hem in the sides of the Gulf of Smyrna and the Valley and Gulf of Bournatut, particularly towards the north, and form the foot of the higher hills, consist of surface beds of limestone, covered with large erratic blocks of granite, of different shapes and sizes. These massive stones, heaped one above another, leave no place for vegetation of any sort, except the *Asphodelus ramosus*. Our way led northwards towards these pathless mountains; and, after a wearisome ascent up the empty bed of a torrent, on whose banks the beautiful *Nerium oleander* and the charming *Agnus castus* grew luxuriantly, we arrived at the foot of the higher range above mentioned. We had hardly begun to mount the hill before we noticed that there was not a stone or block which was not covered with the white excrement of these birds, they resorted there in such multitudes; but how great was our astonishment when we saw, at a distance of about 200 metres above us, the rocks covered with white, as if lime had been spread out for 200 square yards! On arriving there, we found a real camp and battle-field in one; the nests were in thousands, some quite open and uncovered, others so concealed amongst the blocks of stone, that it was necessary to turn these over to find them; some were more than a foot below the surface, and others could not be reached with the arms. They were often so close as to touch one another, and were made with but little care, the birds contenting themselves with a slight hollow in the ground, in which are placed some dead stalks of the *Agnus castus*, and, in a few instances, a lining of grass; in many cases the eggs were lying on the bare earth. This mode of nesting exposed them to the many enemies which were roaming about on all sides; it was for this reason that I remarked that we had found a battle-field as well as an encampment; for, to give you an idea of the number of nestlings destroyed by jackals, martens, wild cats, rats, &c., I may state that in a space of about five square yards I counted fourteen pairs of wings and the remains of three old birds; and who can tell the number of eggs destroyed by snakes? Indeed, it is wonderful how the Rose-Starlings can propagate at all with so many enemies to encounter.

"The eggs, of which we found very few, measure, on the average, 13 lines in length by 9½ lines in breadth. I say, on the average, because we did not find two exactly alike, some being pear-shaped, others elliptical; some are fleshy white, others pearl-white tinged with blue, and some have a few dark specks at the larger end. The shell is very beautiful, strong, and shining.

"The perseverance with which the Rose-Starlings search for grasshoppers seems to be due, not so much for a supply of food, as for an instinctive desire of destruction or antipathy against them. One morning, as I was observing five Rose-Starlings eating the fruit of a white mulberry-tree with great avidity, I saw two or three of them dart down suddenly from the tree to the ground in order to kill some grasshoppers which appeared between the swathes of a mown field of grass, and leave them without eating any of them. The birds are so far from shy, that a person can easily remain within four or five paces without frightening them, and on the trees they will remain with still greater confidence."

"This well-known species," states Mr. Jerdon, "makes its appearance in the peninsula of India about the end of November or beginning of December, associating in vast flocks, and commits great havoc on the grain-fields, especially in those of the *Cholum* or *Jowaree* (*Andropogon Sorghum*). When the grain is cut, it commonly feeds on insects, which it seeks for on the ground; also on various grass-seeds, fruit, and flower-buds. It disappears in March, though straggling parties are met with even in April. The majority of the birds in a flock are in an immature plumage, of dirty fawn-colour, in lieu of the delicate salmon-tint of the adult." Mr. Elliot has the following interesting note on this species:—"It is very voracious and injurious to the crops of the White Jowaree, in the fields of which the farmer is obliged to station numerous watchers, who, with slings and a long rope or thong (which they crack dexterously, making a loud report), endeavour to drive the depredators away. The moment the sun appears above the horizon, they are on the wing, and, at the same instant, shouts, cries, and the cracking of long whips resound from every side. The birds, however, are so active that, if they are able to alight on the stalks for an instant, they can pick out several grains. About 9 or 10 o'clock A.M., the exertions of the watchmen cease, and the birds do not renew their plundering till the evening. After sunset they are seen in flocks of many thousands, retiring to the trees and jungles for the night. They prefer the half-ripe *Jowaree*, whilst the farinaceous matter is still soft and milky."

We learn from Bechstein that, like the Starling, the bird possesses considerable imitative powers, and that a connoisseur in the song of birds, who heard the notes of one in captivity, without seeing the bird, fancied he was listening to two Starlings, two Goldfinches, and perhaps a Siskin, and, when he found that the sounds all emanated from a single bird, could not conceive how so much music could proceed from the same throat.

The Plate represents a male and a female, of the size of life, on the Tulip-tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), which has now become naturalized in England.

PASTOR ROSEUS.

Rose-Coloured Pastor Young.

Walter Imp.

Gould, John. 1873. "Rose-coloured Pastor, Pastor roseus [Pl. 55-56]." *The birds of Great Britain* 3, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323944>.

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