OXYLOPHUS GLANDARIUS.

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Great Spotted Cuckoo.

- Cuculus glandarius*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 169.
——— *pisanus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 416.
——— *Andalusia*, Briss. Orn., tom. iv. p. 126.
——— *macrourus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 153.
——— *gracilis*, Brehm, ib., p. 154.
Coccyzus pisanus, Vieill. Ency. Méth., Orn., part iii. p. 1349.
Coccyzus glandarius, Savi, Orn. Tosc., tom. i. p. 154.
Oxylophus glandarius, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 40.
Coccystes glandarius, Keys. et Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 34.
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It may seem an act of supererogation to include a figure and account of this curious Cuckoo in a work on the Birds of Great Britain, since its native country is Africa, whence it migrates to a limited extent in spring to Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Syria, and, after reproducing its kind (somewhat, but not precisely, after the manner of the Common Cuckoo), departs southward again to winter in a warmer climate; but, anxious to render this work as perfect as possible up to the time of its completion, I have followed the example of my late friends Thompson and Yarrell, and given it a place herein on the ground of an undoubted wild example having been captured in Ireland, and because I think it probable that others may have from time to time visited that country and even England, but have so far escaped detection, and that more may yet favour us with their presence during some unusual wandering.

The following, with one or two verbal alterations, is Mr. Yarrell's account of the above-mentioned example:—The Great Spotted Cuckoo was taken near Clifden, in the county of Galway, about Christmas 1843, and is now in the Museum of Trinity College, Dublin. It was taken by two persons walking on the Island of Omagh, where, pursued by Hawks, it flew for refuge into a hole in a stone fence or wall, was captured alive, and lived for four days (attempts being made to feed it on potatoes). The inhabitants had never seen any bird like it before. When chased by the Hawks, it appeared fatigued, weak, and emaciated, as though it had taken a long flight—as Woodcocks and other birds of passage do on their first arrival.

This fine bird has especially attracted the notice of every ornithological traveller who has visited the southern countries of Europe, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, and Palestine, many of whom have published interesting notices respecting its peculiar habits and manners; and of these, not having myself had the advantage of observing the bird in a state of nature, I shall make a selection of the more important, with due acknowledgment.

The first correct account of the reproduction of this Cuckoo was inserted by Dr. A. E. Brehm, in Cabanis's 'Journal für Ornithologie,' of which a translation by P. L. Sclater, Esq., appeared in the 'Zoologist' for 1853, from which the following is an extract:—"It is well known to have hitherto been undecided whether *Cuculus glandarius* sits upon its own eggs or not. Even I, notwithstanding my somewhat lengthened sojourn in Africa, could for a long time learn nothing certain on the subject. I was well acquainted with the bird, its laughing Magpie-like cry and all its habits; and I knew that it usually dwelt among the thick low mimosa-woods, in which it is to be seen, generally in battle with another of its own species, as it flies quick as an arrow through the thickest bushes. On the 5th of March, 1850, seven examples were collected near Siut, in Upper Egypt. Among them was a female with a fully developed egg in the oviduct. Unfortunately this was destroyed by the shot; the broken fragments were bright green, with darker brown spots. On the 2nd of March, two years later, I attentively watched the motions of a Great Spotted Cuckoo in a garden near Thebes, and at last saw it slip into a large nest placed upon a rather low *Salicaria* tree. After rather more than a quarter of an hour, out it flew again and departed from the garden; I climbed up to the nest and found it to belong to *Corvus cornix*, and containing altogether six eggs. Among them I found two smaller ones belonging to some other bird, but nearly resembling those of the Crow in size and colour." Having on comparison found these eggs to agree with the fragments of the one taken from the oviduct of the female above mentioned, Dr. Brehm says:—"This discovery would have been quite sufficient to settle the question; but on the 12th of March it was still further confirmed. In one of the village gardens, thickly planted with trees, my attention was attracted by the clear-sounding but harmonious cry of an old Cuckoo, 'kiek-kiek-kiek-kiek,' when I obtained two old birds, and soon after found a young one also, which was being fed and provided for by Hooded Crows."

"In Herr Bäderer's work on the Eggs of European Birds, it is stated that Dr. A. Brehm has received from two naturalists in Spain, MM. Villanova and Graells, information corroborating the above account. In Spain the Common Magpie (*Pica caudata*) has generally the doubtful honour of being chosen to act as foster-mother to the infant Cuckoos" (Ibis, 1862, p. 294). But Lord Lilford found an egg in a Raven's nest in a high pine tree about a mile from Aranjuez.

"The wooded hills on the south side of Lake Djendeli," says Mr. Salvin, "and the neighbourhood of Madracen, both which districts lie a little to the eastward of the high road between Constantine and Batna, may be regarded as favourite breeding-localities of *Oxylophus glandarius*."

"The most interesting of the scansorial birds of Palestine," says Mr. Tristram, "is the Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Oxylophus glandarius*). There it is by no means rare in spring and summer, and has a wide range, visiting alike the forests of Gilead and the olive-yards of the western country; but we never saw it in the Ghor, and probably it does not visit those districts where neither the Jay nor the Hooded Crow is found. It is a migrant, returning early in March; we first met with it in the plain of Gennesareth on the 4th of March, on which day I shot three specimens, one male and two females. They were then evidently on passage; and we never afterwards found them, excepting in wood on the higher ground. They were exceedingly noisy, keeping up a continuous chatter in the *Zizyphus*-bushes, and occasionally darting off in pursuit of a locust, with which they would return and devour it leisurely on their perch. A few remained there for a couple of days; but on our two subsequent visits we never observed them on the plains, although the Common Cuckoo was frequently heard and seen. In the open oak-glades of Bashan, at the end of March, we found *Oxylophus glandarius* generally distributed, but never in great numbers. The small birds were apparently suspicious of its habits; for the Spanish Sparrows pursued it in flocks with a deafening din, till even a Cuckoo's life ought to have been a burden to him. Whether the Sparrows had discovered that he had the appearance of a Raptor without his powers, and therefore enjoyed the luxury of bullying him with impunity, or whether a high moral sense of the iniquity of any evasion of parental bird-duties impelled them, I know not; but their persecution was unrelenting, and a most unquiet time the 'Longtails' must have had of it. Their only revenge seemed to be to keep up as incessant a chatter themselves. When at peace, they were often to be seen hopping clumsily about in the open places with an ungainly attitude, as though their tails were rather too long, or at least as if they were not mounted high enough on their legs.

"It was not till the 2nd of May that we obtained the Spotted Cuckoo's egg, when four were brought to us with three Hooded Crow's eggs from the same nest in a gorge near Mount Gilead. One of the Cuckoo's eggs was fresh, two others ready to hatch, and the fourth addled, while the Crow's eggs had been for some time incubated. Thus it was evident that there must have been long intervals between the deposition of the Cuckoo's eggs; and it is very possible that the Cuckoo may have laid an egg before any of the Crow's were laid. This is exactly in accordance with Lord Lilford's experience in Spain, where he took the eggs of *Oxylophus* from a nest of the Common Magpie containing no other eggs—and with the experience of our party in the Atlas, where we repeatedly found several Cuckoo's eggs and none others in the nest, and were thus led to believe that it incubated its own. Of its parasitic habits there can now be no doubt. We did not find its eggs in any other nests in Palestine. At the time of its arrival the Jackdaw's had hatched, and the Jays had not generally begun to breed; and, in accordance with the observations of Messrs. Allen and Cochrane in Egypt, it prefers the nest of *Corvus cornix* when it can be had.

"*O. glandarius* has three notes:—a call-note somewhat like that of *Cuculus canorus*, probably used by the male; its cry of alarm, something between that of the Jay and the Roller; and its third note, 'Wurree Wurree,' from which it doubtless derives its Arab name, just as the Common Cuckoo is called by them 'Jookook.'"

According to Mr. Stafford Allen, "the food of the Great Spotted Cuckoo consists chiefly of caterpillars and different kinds of insects, as many as twenty-four of the former having been found in one bird. It seems, however, occasionally to indulge in eggs (another habit of its English congener), as an egg-shell, apparently that of the Common Fowl, was found in the stomach of one on dissection."

I find no notice in any writer as to the meaning of the rufous primaries which are found in dark-coloured specimens. I presume they are characteristic of immaturity, because I find this feature very conspicuous in a young male kindly lent to me by Howard Saunders, Esq., to whom my thanks are due for this and many other acts of attention. Want of space precludes my adding to the above account the observations made by this gentleman on the bird as seen by him in Spain; they will, however, be found in 'The Ibis,' 1869, p. 401.

The figure represents a male of the size of life. The female has the primaries tinged with brown; in other respects she is very similar.

Gould, John. 1873. "Great Spotted Cuckoo, *Oxylophus glandarius* [Pl. 69]." *The birds of Great Britain* 3, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323955>.

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