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NOTES

ON

THE ORNITHOLOGY OF MADEIRA.

By EDWARD VERNON HARCOURT, Esq.

To the Editors of the Annals of Natural History.

GENTLEMEN,

SINCE publishing a short notice of the ornithology of Madeira* in the year 1851, I have received a few additional specimens of birds from that island: I am not aware that any other fuller list than the annexed has yet been drawn up; I therefore send it to you, together with a few remarks corrected from my former observations on the subject, in case you may think them of sufficient interest to merit a place in the 'Annals.'

With one exception, Madeira possesses no birds peculiar to its own shores; although the influence of its genial climate exercises such a modifying power over the tints of its feathered denizens as analogy would lead us to expect. For example, the Greater Redpole or Linnæus, which is very abundantly met with in the island, retains its bright carmine plumage through the year; the Herring Gull, also very common, is, according to Dr. Renton, quicker by some months in obtaining its mature garb than with us; and the Black-cap Warbler assumes, in some instances, an intensity of colour, which has led to its being described by Sir W. Jardine as a new species†.

Indeed were it otherwise, it would be a matter of astonishment that birds alone should be exempted from a law of nature by which climate exercises so large a power over those secretions which are the mysterious agents for the production of colour.

The position of Madeira, midway betwixt the temperate and torrid zones, has sometimes given rise to doubts in the minds of geographers as to whether it were most African or European. If considered in relation to its natural productions, its pine-apples, guavas, mangos, shaddocks, and bananas, which ripen a tropical fruitage, would point to a preponderating African affinity; on the other hand, its indigenous birds, with the exception of the Wren, the Chaffinch and the Swift, are all strictly European.

The adaptation of species to the climates they are designed to inhabit can never fail to fill the mind with admiration of the

* Sketch of Madeira. Murray, 1851; and Annals, vol. xii. p. 58.

† Edin. Journ. of Nat. and Geog. Science, Jan. 1850, vol. i. p. 243.

providence of the Creator; and the importance of the study of geographical ornithology has been fully admitted by modern naturalists. Looked upon in this point of view, the smallness of the sphere of observation becomes a matter of secondary consideration compared with its geographical position: accordingly, Madeira, which possesses a range of, at most, thirty-three miles in length by fourteen miles in breadth, rises in interest when we come to view its intermediate situation between the northern and southern hemispheres.

The Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*, Linn.) is here very familiar in its habits, and may be seen perched on the roofs of houses in the very centre of the town of Funchal; it preys upon the common lizard of the country (*Lacerta Dugès*, Edw.), on grasshoppers and mice, and occasionally succeeds in snatching the tame canary-birds from between the bars of their reed cages as they hang exposed at the open windows.

The common Buzzard (*Falco buteo*, Linn.) is plentifully met with in the mountains, and the traveller may sometimes come close upon it as he rounds the corner of a projecting rock.

The Barn Owl (*Strix flammea*, Linn.), which is somewhat darker than English specimens of the same bird, inhabits some of the more sombre ravines of the island, though it is by no means a numerous species.

The Blackbird (*Turdus merula*, Linn.) is common in all the woody districts, and is as wary and difficult of access as with us.

The Redbreast (*Sylvia rubecula*, Lath.) is also very common, and is a great favourite with bird-fanciers in Madeira: it sings and thrives in captivity.

The Black-cap Warbler (*Sylvia atricapilla*, Lath.) bears captivity equally well with the Redbreast, and is to be seen hanging caged at almost every door. The variety of this species, which has been alluded to above, is much prized on account of its less common occurrence. Dr. Heineken, after whom the variety was named by Sir W. Jardine under the title of *Carruca Heineken*, wrote a paper* expressing his conviction that this was not a distinct species. The chief difference consists in the extension of the black colour from the cap to the shoulders, and sometimes even over all the under parts: the dimensions of this bird and of the common Black-cap are precisely the same: in the variety, the under parts are generally much the same as those of the common female Black-cap, and the upper parts as those of the common male. I have repeatedly endeavoured to find a nest set upon or attended by this darker Black-cap, and have also offered rewards to the country folks if they could discover one, but have always failed. The popular belief is, that when the nest of the common Black-cap contains five eggs, one of them will produce a bird of the variety. I have also failed in obtaining a

* Zool. Journ. No. 17. Art. 17.

young bird of the dark variety from the nest. Till this has been done, the matter cannot be finally set at rest.

The Wren (*Regulus Madeirensis*, mihi) is the only feathered inhabitant of Madeira which is absolutely peculiar to the island. It is a true *Regulus*, but differs from the three best-known European species, namely *cristatus*, *ignicapillus*, and *modestus*. The following is an accurate description taken from two specimens in my possession:—It has the beak black, forehead white, which colour extends backwards in the form of a small band; the base of the crest is black, the crest itself bright orange, thus differing from *ignicapillus*, which has the crest fiery red; from the beak to the eye there is a small black band, which does not go beyond the eye, and in that respect also it differs from *ignicapillus*; the upper part of the neck and all the back are olive-green, with a bright marking of orange-yellow on each side of the neck; the great wing-coverts are blackish, tipped with buffy-white, and forming a band; the primaries are brownish-black, with a narrow external edging of green; the secondaries are the same, but having a broad velvet-black mark at the base; the tail-feathers are brownish-black, tinged with greenish-yellow on the outer web; the chin and throat are white, slightly tinged with green; the rest of the under parts of the body are white, slightly tinged with yellowish-green; the under wing-coverts are white; the legs pale brown; the entire length is four inches; from the carpus to the end of the wing two and a quarter inches; the length of the tarsus is three-quarters of an inch; the middle toe and claw half an inch; the fourth, fifth and sixth quill-feathers are of equal length, and the longest in the wing. Believing that a bird of this species can have but a limited range, and not finding it even in the list of birds of the Canary Islands given by Webb and Berthelot, or in any of the lists of African birds with which I am acquainted, I have ventured to call it "*Regulus Madeirensis*." The sex of the two birds in my possession was not noted, but from the brightness of their colours, which surpassed those of the Fire-crested, they were probably males. This bird lives amongst the laurel forests, and principally amongst the *Urze*, or arborescent heath, in the least frequented parts of the island; the Portuguese give it the name of "Abibe."

The Spectacle Warbler (*Certhia conspicillata*, Gould) is very locally distributed. It is found in brakes and bushes, at a somewhat high elevation, and where the solitude is seldom disturbed by man.

The Gray Wagtail (*Motacilla boarula*, Linn.) is very common, frequenting the cisterns which are attached to every house, as well as the streams, or *leçadas*, where the washing is carried on, and from its constant attendance upon the women engaged in those pursuits, it has been admitted into the ranks of the sisterhood, under the local title of "Lavandeira."

The Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*, Bechst.) is plentifully found on the cliffs and fields near the sea, and on the serras. It utters a low note, running along the ground, and never takes a long flight. The natives consider this bird sacred, and have some legend about its having attended the Virgin at the time of the nativity; its local name is "Corre de Caminho."

The Green Canary (*Fringilla batyracea*, Linn.) is the original stock of the bird so well known to us as the Yellow Canary. It has been well described by Dr. Heineken*, who had ample opportunities of observing its habits throughout the year. During the breeding season it is very tame, haunting fearlessly the gardens in the midst of the town; when the breeding season is over, it flocks with linnets and other birds, and it then chiefly frequents the fields and other less populous parts: its song is heard during the greater part of the year. The price of a good singing canary, either in Madeira or the Canary Islands, varies from five to nine shillings, so that, in fact, it may be bought cheaper in London. The reason of this is, the difficulty which is experienced in rearing the wild birds from the nest, and the fact that, although an old bird will often sing soon after it is placed in captivity, it does not long survive its loss of freedom. The cross between the wild and the tame canary seems to produce a bird which is both physically and vocally stronger than its domesticated ancestors.

The Goldfinch (*Fringilla carduelis*, Linn.) is very common, and differs in no respect from our own.

The Ring-Sparrow (*Fringilla petronia*, Linn.) is universally met with in Madeira, on the bleak serras, on trees in the centre of the town, on rocks by the sea, &c.; thus differing in habits, though in nothing else, from the Ring-Sparrow of Europe. It is the only indigenous sparrow in the island.

The "Buff-breasted Chaffinch" (*Fringilla tixtilon*, Webb and Berthelot) is nearly identical with the bird figured by Webb and Berthelot in their work on the Canary Islands. The Portuguese name for it is "Tentilhão." It is very common in Madeira, and its habits are very familiar; it is occasionally seen in cages, although possessed of no singing powers. I have called it the "Buff-breasted Chaffinch," not being aware of its yet having obtained any other English name.

The Greater Redpole, or Linnet (*Fringilla canabissa*, Linn.), is here very abundant: as has been before remarked, it consorts, out of the breeding season, with the Canary, Goldfinch, Buff-breasted Chaffinch, and other birds; its only local peculiarity is that of retaining its bright carmine colouring throughout the year.

The "Lesser Swift" (*Cypselus unicolor*, Jard.) is mentioned in Brewster's Journal by Dr. Heineken under the title of "Black-

* Zool. Jour. No. 17. Art. 17.

chinned Swift:" this peculiarity is, however, by no means universal amongst the species. I have several specimens in my possession with the chin almost as white as that of the common Swift: one of the chief differences between the two is in size, the *unicolor* being much the smallest; I have therefore called it "Lesser Swift," the tail is forked about an inch and a half, and the plumage is darker than that of the common Swift. The habits of the Swifts in Madeira differ from those exhibited by birds of that genus in England, and Dr. Heineken has assigned the true reason for this difference. Dr. Heineken says*, "The Swallow and Snipe are said to be here periodical visitors, and the reason both for the migratory habits of these birds, as well as for the stationary habits of the Swift and Woodcock, is very readily to be found, I suspect, in one common cause, namely food. The Woodcock find its food about spring-heads, the margins of little mountain-rills, &c. These are neither dried up here during our hottest summers, nor frozen in the severest winters. The Swifts prey universally on insects, but throughout the summer on a moth which abounds so on our most parched and sterile serras, that what with the insects and the birds the place seems all alive. The Snipe requires a tolerable quantity of poachy, moist, decomposing soil for the production of its food, and this, even in winter, is both scarce and very local, whilst at other times there is not a square yard in the whole island; and the Swallow requires insects which are found only over streams and something approaching to rivers, which we make but a sorry figure in at the wettest seasons, and are entirely without six months in twelve." The common Swift (*Cypselus niger*, Temm.) is not quite so plentiful as the Lesser Swift. Both species remain in the island throughout the year.

The Ring-dove (*Columba palumbus*, Linn.) is an inhabitant of the forests on the north side of the island, and is generally to be found in the Funchal markets.

The "Long-toed Wood Pigeon" (*Columba trocz*, Hein.) has been described by Dr. Heineken in Brewster's Journal: it answers to the *Columba laurivora* of Webb and Berthelot, as given in their work on the Canary Islands. Dr. Heineken merely adopts the local name of Trocz, by which the bird is known in Madeira; and the name given by Webb and Berthelot has reference to the nature of its food. It is more plentiful in Madeira than the Ring-dove, and its flesh is considered a great delicacy. A remarkable feature which it possesses, and which points to an adaptation for its habitat amongst large forest trees, is the great length of its centre toe, being more than an inch longer than that of the Ring-dove; I have therefore called it "Long-toed Wood Pigeon," in default of any other English name. It has a

* Zool. Journ. No. 17. Art. 17.

silvery ring which goes all round the neck, and is darker in its general plumage than the Ring-dove. It feeds upon water-cresses, grasses, and the acorns of the *Laurus foetens*, *Laurus indica*, and other trees growing in the forests on the north side of the island.

The Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*, Briss.) is plentifully found on the sea cliffs and rocks, and in the ravines, which it inhabits all over the island. There is also a variety here of this bird, which appears to be darker in the colour of its feet and in its general plumage than the common Rock Pigeon. Purchas, in his early remarks upon Madeira, relates that "at first the pigeons suffered themselves to be taken, not knowing, and therefore not fearing, a man."

The Red-legged Partridge (*Perdix rubra*, Briss.) is not uncommon on the wild serras. The running propensities of this bird make it difficult of access to sportsmen even on the flattest ground, and when the pursuit has to be carried on upon the sides of mountains which rise some 6000 feet above the sea, the toil would seem out of all proportion to the reward. The professional *Caçador* is consequently almost the only enemy which the Partridge meets with in Madeira.

The Quail (*Perdix coturnix*, Lath.) is more plentiful here than the Partridge, and approaches nearer to the habitations of man; it pairs, laying sometimes as many as sixteen eggs, and bringing off three or four broods in the year. The shooting this bird amongst the yam-gardens affords excellent sport.

The Woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*, Linn.) is found chiefly on the west side of the island, and on the Pávil da Serra is very plentiful. The native sportsmen generally shoot it in the evening: they wait till it comes to feed at the mountain rills, and often kill several on the ground at one shot.

The Tern (*Sterna hirundo*, Linn.) appears mostly at the Desertas Island, occasionally visiting various parts of the Madeiran coasts.

The Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*, Brunn.) abounds everywhere.

The Cinereous Shearwater (*Puffinus major*, Temm.) breeds plentifully on the Desertas Islands. This bird, as well as the Manks Shearwater with which it is sometimes confounded, is salted by the natives and considered eatable.

The Manks Shearwater (*Puffinus Anglorum*, Ray) is also very common.

The Dusky Petrel (*Puffinus obscurus*, Temm.), another inhabitant of the Desertas, may be easily distinguished from the foregoing species, which it strongly resembles, by its inferior size as well as by the colour of its feet. The *Anglorum* has the feet of a flesh-colour, whereas in *obscurus* they are of a bluish ash-colour. *Anglorum* has likewise all the secretions yellow, but in

the case of *obscurus* they are of a dark green colour. Both *Anglorum* and *obscurus* may be easily tamed, and will live upon almost anything. They run along the ground on their bellies, and use their curiously-shaped bills in climbing up the rocks. Their habits are crepuscular, and in the daytime they hide themselves in any holes or crannies within their reach.

Bulwer's Petrel (*Thalassidroma Bulwerii*, Gould) has been described by Sir W. Jardine*, who says, "it is easily distinguished from any other by having the two centre tail-feathers elongated, as in the genus *Lestrie*, and not even or forked like the other Petrels." This Petrel is identical with that described by Dr. Heineken under the title of *Procellaria aegialis*; and has also been called *Puffinus columbinus* by Webb and Berthelot in their work on the Canary Islands. Dr. Heineken describes it as having no white about the rump or flanks, and as having the tail *slightly forked*. Mr. Yurrell has justly observed, that the squareness or forkedness of the tail in Petrels is an unfair criterion of species, as this property in a very great measure depends upon the age of the individual, and varies accordingly. The plumage of this Petrel is entirely uniform brownish-black, and it is very common on the Desertas Islands.

The Forked-tailed Petrel (*Thalassidroma Leachii*, Temm.) is also found on the Desertas. This bird was described† under the title of *Thalassidroma Castro*‡, from a supposed difference which appeared to exist between the measurements of specimens from Madeira and those from other parts. Specimens from Madeira seemed to exhibit shorter wings and shorter tarsi, though the entire length of the birds was greater. The tails also of the Madeiran birds appeared to be square instead of forked. This latter characteristic, as has before been observed, forms no safe criterion; and Forked-tailed is not quite so distinctive an appellation for the species as might be desired.

I have now come to an end of the list of birds which may be strictly called natives of Madeira. There are, however, many other occasional or accidental visitors to the island, and these come chiefly from the African coasts. The most common of these stragglers are the Sparrow-Hawk, Greenfinch, Hoopoe, Common Heron, Night Heron, Godwit (Black-tailed), Common Curlew, Greenshank, Great Snipe, Gallinule, Coot, Wigeon, and Kittiwake.

The following is a list of the birds of Madeira, which, although it is the fullest I have been able to obtain, is capable doubtless of being much increased by future observers.

* Illustrations of Ornithology, by Jard. & Selb.; and Edinb. Journ. of Nat. and Geog. Science, Jan. 1830, p. 245.

† "Sketch of Madeira," Murray, 1831, p. 123.

‡ Roque de Castro is the local name of this bird.

Shilly layer in wing & not larger -

Those marked thus * are natives of Madeira.

o	<i>Cathartes persimpterus</i> , Temm.	<i>Charadrius phoeniceus</i> , Linn.	—
—	<i>Falco naeus</i> , Linn.	<i>Streptopilus interpres</i> , Leach.	o
—	* <i>subhuteo</i> , Linn.	<i>Circus nigra</i> , Temm.	o
—	* <i>tinamculus</i> , Linn.	<i>Ardea cinerea</i> , Lath.	o
—	* <i>huteo</i> , Linn.	— <i>raloides</i> .	o
?	* <i>Strix flammea</i> , Linn.	— <i>rusata</i> , Wagler.	—
o	<i>Corvus corax</i> , Linn.	— <i>purpurea</i> , Linn.	—
—	— <i>corax</i> , Linn.	— <i>minuta</i> , Linn.	o
—	<i>Oriolus gallula</i> , Linn.	— <i>stellaris</i> , Linn.	—
—	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> , Linn.	— <i>nycticeax</i> , Linn.	—
o	<i>Turdus iliacus</i> , Linn.	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i> .	—
—	— <i>musicus</i> , Linn.	<i>Limosa melanura</i> , Leister.	—
—	* <i>merula</i> , Linn.	<i>Numenius arquata</i> , Lath.	—
o	* <i>Sylvia reberula</i> , Lath.	— <i>phaeopus</i> , Temm.	—
o	— <i>atricapilla</i> , Lath.	<i>Tringa pugnax</i> , Linn.	— female
o	— <i>hertoniis</i> , Lath.	— <i>subargata</i> , Temm.	o
o	* <i>Carruca conspiciatilis</i> , Gould.	— <i>variabilis</i> , Meyer.	—
—	* <i>Regulus Madagrensis</i> , Mikl.	— <i>cinerea</i> , Temm.	o
o	<i>Troglodytes Europaeus</i> , Selb.	<i>Totanus hypoleucos</i> , Temm.	—
o	* <i>Motacilla boarula</i> , Linn.	— <i>glottis</i> , Bechst.	—
o	— <i>albo</i> , Linn.	* <i>Perdix rubra</i> , Brisz.	—
o	<i>Alauda arvensis</i> , Linn.	* <i>coturnix</i> , Lath.	—
o	* <i>Arthus pratensis</i> , Bechst.	* <i>Scelopax rusticola</i> , Linn.	—
o	<i>Fringilla chloris</i> , Linn.	— <i>gallinago</i> , Linn.	—
o	— <i>domestica</i> , Linn.	— <i>major</i> , Temm.	—
—	* <i>butyracea</i> , Linn.	<i>Crex Boissonii</i> , Temm.	—
—	* <i>carduelis</i> , Linn.	— <i>pratensis</i> , Selb.	o
—	* <i>petronia</i> , Linn.	<i>Porphyrio Alleni</i> .	— young
—	* <i>linthill</i> , Wetö & Berthelst.	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i> , Lath.	—
—	* <i>caerules</i> , Linn.	<i>Fulica atra</i> , Linn.	—
o	<i>Caeculus exornatus</i> , Linn.	<i>Anser septem.</i> , Steph.	—
o	<i>Muscophaga Africana</i> , Temm.	<i>Mareca Peacocks</i> , Selb.	o
—	<i>Upupa epops</i> , Linn.	<i>Anas crecca</i> , Linn.	—
—	<i>Moropus apaster</i> , Linn.	* <i>Sterna hirsundo</i> , Linn.	—
—	<i>Alcedo iphida</i> , Linn.	— <i>nigra</i> , Linn.	o
—	* <i>Cypselus unicolor</i> , Jard.	— <i>Dougalli</i> , Most.	o
—	* <i>murarius</i> , Temm.	* <i>Larus argentatus</i> , Brunn.	—
—	<i>Hirundo arctica</i> , Linn.	— <i>tridactylus</i> , Lath.	—
—	— <i>rustica</i> , Linn.	<i>Lestris catarractes</i> , Temm.	—
—	— <i>hiparis</i> , Linn.	<i>Colymbus glacialis</i> , Linn.	— young
o	<i>Caprimulgus Europaeus</i> , Linn.	<i>Sula alba</i> , Temm.	—
—	* <i>Columba trocaz</i> , Heis.	<i>Procellaria mollis</i> , Gould.	—
—	* <i>palumbus</i> , Linn.	— <i>Pacificus</i> , Aud.	o
—	— <i>vin.</i> , Brisz.	* <i>Puffinus major</i> , Temm.	—
—	— <i>ovata</i> , Linn.	* <i>Anglorum</i> , Temm.	—
—	— <i>turtur</i> , Linn.	— <i>obscurus</i> , Temm.	—
—	<i>Cedricanus crepitans</i> , Temm.	* <i>Thalassidroma Bulweri</i> , Jard.	—
o	<i>Calidris arenaria</i> , Ill.	— <i>Leachii</i> , Temm.	—
o	<i>Vanellus cristatus</i> , Meyer.	— <i>pelagicus</i> , Temm.	o
o	<i>Charadrius histicula</i> , Linn.		

I have the honour to remain, Gentlemen,
Your obedient servant,
EDWARD VERNON HARCOURT.

20 Portland Place, London,
May 11, 1856.

I have since received from Madeira the *Fringilla velata* & *Hyphantornis testor* shot by a friend in June/56. and the *Prion brevirostris* of Gould (new to science) & *Formica tree-*

