

Ibis. 1867. Pl. VII



J Wolf lith

M & N Hanhart imp

PASSER MOABITICUS



Of the genera to which these peculiar species belong, one, *Tinnunculus*, is cosmopolitan, and a second, *Turtur*, widely distributed in the Old World. Four, *Palæornis*, *Nectarinia*, *Zosterops*, and *Tchitrea*, are well represented on the African and Indian continents, not to go further, as well as in the Mascarene Islands or Madagascar. *Copsychus* and *Hypsipetes* occur in India and Madagascar, but not in Africa. *Foudia* is found in Africa, Madagascar, and the Mascarene Islands, but not in India, while *Coracopsis* is a genus hitherto thought to be confined to Madagascar and the Comoros. *Erythræna* is the only form peculiar to the Seychelles; but I am much inclined to doubt its claim to generic rank, though not to the extent of Prof. Schlegel (N. T. D. iii. p. 88), who would refer it to *Ptilopus*; and I should place its only representative with *Columba madagascariensis*, Linn., and *C. nitidissima*, Scop., in the genus *Alectraenas*, which Mr. G. R. Gray established to receive the last-named species. In this aspect, then, *Alectraenas* will range with *Coracopsis*.

These few remarks will serve to show the natural affinities of the Ornis of the Seychelles. Its Malagash tendency is evident; for it contains, so far as known, no good genus which is not also found either in Madagascar or the Mascarene Islands. But I forbear from entering into any speculations as to its derivation, in confidence that future investigators will throw more light on this interesting subject.

## XX.—*On the Ornithology of Palestine.*

### Part VI.

By the Rev. H. B. TRISTRAM, M.A., F.L.S., C.M.Z.S.

(Plate VII.)

(Continued from p. 97.)

THE family of the *Muscicapidæ* is barely represented in Palestine, scantily in species, and no less sparsely in individuals. Even the well-known East-European species, *Muscicapa collaris*, Bechs., and *Erythrosterina parva* (Bechs.), escaped our notice,



though we may certainly presume on their presence, extending as they do from Europe to Asia Minor, and thence into Persia, as mentioned by De Filippi ('Viaggio,' p. 346). *Muscicapa luctuosa* is a summer resident, first noticed by us in Galilee on April 23rd; but though remaining to breed, it is a very scarce bird. Our common Flycatcher, *Butalis grisola*, was first obtained on the same day, but continued to arrive for three days in great numbers, remaining to breed in all parts of the country, its favourite nesting-places being in the branches of gnarled old trees overhanging the paths. In my journal of May 11th I noted seeing at Safed, in an olive-yard, what I felt sure was a male *M. collaris*; but I did not obtain it.

Although the mosquitoes enjoy comparative immunity from the attacks of this most useful group of gnat-catchers, the *Hirundinidae* are indefatigable in making up for the deficiency. The Oriental Chimney-Swallow (*Hirundo cahirica*, Licht.) remains the whole year, and is found both on the coast (in the maritime plains) and throughout the length of the Jordan valley. No one can observe this bird in the Holy Land without being satisfied of its distinctness from *H. rustica*. It is true we can give no other diagnosis than the difference of coloration on the lower parts, these being chestnut instead of white or brownish-white; but of the hundreds of swallows of both sexes to be seen throughout the winter, not one of the common sort could be detected. There is neither fading nor intensifying of the chestnut lower plumage at any time of the year. Specimens shot at all seasons are precisely similar. In spring their numbers rapidly increase; and from the middle of March they become distributed over the whole country, the higher as well as the lower grounds, while along with them appear many of our common species. In the higher grounds, these, perhaps, predominate; in the lower certainly the *H. cahirica* is most numerous. I never could detect the two sorts interbreeding, though the nests and eggs are precisely similar. Having no chimneys provided for them, rafters of outhouses, where such can be found, but especially ledges in caves, are the favourite nesting-places; and I took five nests of the *H. cahirica* attached to little projecting stones under the vaulted roof of a well in constant use, about two feet from the



ground, and built in a row. Convenient situations must have been scarce there (it was near Kedesh); for we had to stoop under the roof to draw water, and almost touched the nests with our heads as we withdrew.

Very distinct is that charming bird *H. rufula*, Temm., belonging to a different group containing eight old-world species, which has been separated by Bonaparte into a subgenus *Cecropis*. This bird does not return to Palestine till the end of March. We obtained our first specimens on the 28th. It then scatters itself over the whole country, and in the warmer and more marshy regions is the predominant species. It is a beautiful bird on the wing, showing its chestnut collar and rump to great advantage as it turns continually, flying much more slowly than the common Swallow, and beating repeatedly over a more limited extent of ground. Though feeding in flocks, I never knew this swallow to breed in company; and very rarely were two nests to be found in one cave. The nest is a beautiful structure, composed of the same materials as that of the House-Martin, but is invariably attached to the flat surface of the underside of the roof of a cave or vault. It is of the shape of a retort, with a bulb of the size of a Thrush's nest, large and roomy, the neck or passage for entrance being sometimes a foot or more in length. The inside of the clay chamber is warmly lined with feathers. Laborious as must be the construction of this elaborate edifice, the little architects are very fastidious, and frequently desert two or three half-finished nests in succession, commencing a new one in the same cavern. But after all they are sadly bullied. So tempting a domicile invites unscrupulous vagrants; the Galilean Swift (*Cypselus affinis*) assumes the rights and wrongs of the compound householder and exercises the franchise of the nest, leaving the Swallow to pay the rates. The Swift contracts the entrance by a casement of feathers and gelatinous secretion, and then bids defiance to the original landlord. Mr. Simpson found the Syrian Nuthatch indulging in similar acts of lawlessness in Greece. When so treated the Swallow does not leave the cave, but humbly sets to work to construct a new nest not far off. A favourite breeding-place of *H. rufula* is under the arches of the corridors of the Monastery on Mount Carmel. The eggs are



four in number, pure white, considerably larger than those of the House Martin, and flatter at the small end.

Strange confusion has occurred in the nomenclature of *H. rufula*. Some English writers, among whom is Mr. Newman, appear to identify it with *H. cahirica*, and talk of the dark rufous or chestnut of its lower parts ! Dr. Bree has erroneously blended it with *H. daurica*, an Eastern representative species ; while Temminck and Degland have each helped to make confusion worse confounded. An examination of specimens is all that is required to clear up these repeated blunders, which one author has copied from another.

Of the genus *Cotyle* three species occur in Palestine. *C. riparia*, our Sand-Martin, though it swarms in Egypt all winter and breeds on the Nile in February, only returns to the Holy Land at the end of March, and then in small colonies, there being very few localities suited to its habits.

*C. rupestris*, the well-known Rock-Martin of Southern Europe, resides in all the glens of Palestine throughout the year, not often in large numbers, though in the Jordan valley it is numerous enough to be decidedly gregarious, as it is also in the gorge of the Litany River. It appears indifferent to climate and season. It is a singularly sombre-looking bird on the wing, its sooty uniform being only occasionally relieved by the display of the white spots on some of the inner rectrices. It breeds early in March, in inaccessible clefts, and its eggs are spotted like those of the House-Swallow, thus differing from the whole group with which it is classed, excepting the next species.

*Cotyle palustris*, hitherto supposed to belong to Abyssinia and the Upper Nile, we found throughout the year in the Jordan valley, consorting, to the north of the Dead Sea, with the last species, while round its shores it holds undisputed possession. The two birds breed in the same locality, in the clefts of Mount Quarantania, near Jericho. In appearance and form it exactly resembles *C. rupestris*, only being of a much lighter hue, a very pale ashen-grey, and one-third less ; so that they can be instantly discriminated on the wing. They have the same note and flight ; but, while the other bird confines itself to the gorges, this may often be seen skimming the surface of the wide salt-



flats and sand-spits of the Dead Sea. It particularly affects the neighbourhood of Jebel Usdum, the salt-mountain, where it breeds. I possess only one egg, marked exactly like, but considerably smaller than that of the common Swallow.

The House-Martin, *Chelidon urbica*, is the last of the Swallow tribe to return to Palestine. It reappears in small numbers about April 5th, and breeds in colonies on the sheltered faces of cliffs in the valleys of Northern Galilee.

The Golden Oriole, *Oriolus galbula*, is rather a bird of passage than a summer resident. Numbers of these splendid birds were to be seen for a fortnight from the middle of May; but they rapidly disappeared, nor did I ever meet with the nest, though twice in June I found pairs of Orioles evidently settled down in their breeding-habitat.

The Shrikes are amongst the most conspicuous and abundant genera in the country; in fact they soon become a perfect nuisance to the collector, whether in the way of skins or eggs. The most common species is our own *Lanius excubitor*, which resides all the year in every part of the country, and omits no opportunity of exhibiting both himself and his nest. His favourite perch in winter is the outermost bough of some bare prickly shrub; and when approached he simply flits to the outside of the next bush. He builds his great nest, well defended by thorns from the attacks of Hawks, in the middle of a jujube-tree, long before the leaves are out. I have taken eggs incubated in the middle of March. While the female is sitting, her mate chooses the most conspicuous perch close by, and by his manner invites a scrutiny. But he is bold and daring; and I have seen him beat off the Green Lizard, that pest of small nestlings. Generally, however, the prickly bush is sufficient to turn even a Lizard. So tame will the Grey Shrike become that after a few days a pair of them regularly frequented our camp for the sake of the morsels thrown outside the tent during the occupation of skinning, and in securing their dainties they behaved with all the coolness of London Sparrows. The Southern Shrike, *L. meridionalis*, can be discriminated at a glance by its dark back. It does not reside in the country, but early returns from its migration, breeding exactly in the same way as the former, but about a month or a fortnight later. It is comparatively scarce,



and confined to the southern parts of the country. Both species appear frequently to have a second brood. Curiously enough, the Rosy Shrike, *L. minor*, which I obtained in the Plain of Sharon in 1858, and which has been mentioned by several writers among the birds of the country, did not come under our observation on our recent visit. Nor did we detect *Telephonus tschagra*, so common in Algeria and Tunis.

Of the other Shrikes, the Redbacked *Enneoctonus collurio* is most abundant on the high grounds of Hermon and Lebanon, where it supplants all the other species, but only in summer, as it returns in May; and we obtained the eggs as late as June 20th. On the 16th May Mr. Bartlett and I took ten nests of eggs in one forenoon near Lake Phiala on Hermon.

*Lanius rufus*, the Woodchat, is also a migrant, returning the last week in March, and after that time to be seen on every bush up to an altitude of 4000 feet. Above this it does not ascend, its place being taken by the Red-backed Shrike. But it also breeds as plentifully in the seething glens of the Dead Sea as on the bleak hills of Samaria. Its nest, though much neater and more compact, is not less conspicuous than that of the Grey Shrike. It is lined with some uniform material, generally the soft flower-tufts of some composite plant. Once I found one near a village, lined entirely with the cotton threads of a piece of stocking evidently pulled to pieces by the bird itself. It appears never to employ wool or hair in Palestine. The eggs are subject to the same variations as those of *E. collurio*, though they run less brilliant and more greenish.

The most attractive of the Palestine Shrikes is the little *L. nubicus*, Licht., another migrant, returning about the 20th March. Compared with its congeners it is a shy, retiring bird, preferring the inside of the bushes to the bare exposed twigs for its perch, and generally concealing itself in the leafy thickets. It is very quiet, and seldom seen on the wing; but in flight the contrast of its white and black plumage and rufous under parts has a brilliant effect. The nest is remarkably neat, like that of the Chaffinch, but of course wider and shallower, placed on a branch or fork, lined with fine roots and fibres. The eggs, four or five in number, though Shrike-like, have a distinct character, the



ground being generally olive, and the spots always arranged more or less in a zone near the broad end. They can scarcely be mistaken for those of any other bird. The Masked Shrike is confined to the upper and wooded portions of the country.

In commencing this series of papers with an account of the peculiar denizens of the basin of the Dead Sea, I omitted one of the most remarkable of the whole, the Grackle of the glens, *Amydrus tristrami*, Sclater, well known to travellers as the Blackbird of Marsaba, where many pairs are retained in a state of semidomestication by the monks. Though so circumscribed in its habitat, it is a bird of great power of wing, closely resembling the Starling in its flight, and extremely wary and wild. But in its power of voice it is unsurpassed by any bird I ever heard, and, from descriptions, seems to rival that of the Bell-bird. has no varied notes, but a rich musical roll of two or three notes of amazing power and sweetness, which makes the cliffs ring again with its music. It lives in the most desolate ravines, in small bands of from four or five to a dozen, feeding at dawn and sunset. We frequently saw birds passing and repassing from their nests, which were in inaccessible chinks many hundred feet up the cliffs, and hopeless of access. At length, in the gorge of the Kedron, one of our Arabs found a nest accessible, but the cleft was so narrow, and the nest so many feet in, that the discovery was useless. I afterwards found a nest in a softer and shallower hole, near Ain Feshkhah; but the brood was fledged, leaving only the fragments of some pale blue eggs, like those of the Indian Grackles. The glossy black of the plumage of the male is resplendent in the sunlight, while the russet wings shine like burnished copper. The female, though similar in markings, is without this metallic lustre. This bird is peculiarly interesting as belonging to a distinctly Ethiopian type, but is quite a peculiar species; and, unlike the other peculiar species of the district, there are no geographical links to be traced in Egypt or elsewhere to unite it with its South-African relations. We have, however, no lists of the birds of Petra or of Sinai, by which we might trace its southward range. It has been admirably figured by Mr. Gould in his 'Birds of Asia.'

The Starling is only a winter migrant, visiting the Plain of



Sharon in tens of thousands, with a few of the Sardinian Starling (*Sturnus unicolor*) intermingled. This latter does not, as in Algeria, remain behind to breed. The Starlings all depart at the end of February.

The Rose-coloured Pastor is not even a winter visitant, but occasionally appears in vast flocks. It is well known to the natives as the Locust-bird, from its habit of preying on that destructive creature, whose flights it generally follows. We found it in 1858, but not in 1864. It has been known to breed in large colonies in Palestine, but not for many years past. So at Smyrna numbers of nests were taken in 1858, while since that year it has rarely been seen there. The behaviour of the Pastor in Syria reminds us of that of the Wax-wing further north, an erratic rather than a migratory bird.

The Buntings are fully represented in Palestine. *Emberiza miliaria* is as common as the Skylark in England on all the corn-plains throughout the year. The lovely little *E. striolata* confines itself throughout the year to the nooks by the Dead Sea, and to the southward, where its hitherto unknown egg remains to be discovered by some future adventurous collector. The Yellow-Ammer, though found at Constantinople, does not extend so far south, nor *Emberiza cirrus* so far east. We looked out in vain for *Emberiza cinerea*, Strickl. *E. aureola* I once saw, and do not think I could be mistaken, as I watched the bird for some time, but had no gun with me. An Italian gentleman also showed me a specimen he had shot north of the Lebanon. The Ortolan, *E. hortulana*, is very abundant in the upper country in spring, returning to breed about the first or second week in April. But a fortnight earlier comes the *Emberiza cæsia*, Cretschm., which takes the place of the Yellow-Ammer in Palestine. Its return is sudden and universal, and it peoples every part of the country from the banks of the Jordan to the high parts of Lebanon. It builds either on the ground under a tuft, or in a low bush. Its note is low but cheery; often repeated, like the Ortolan's, from the top of a bush or low tree. The nest is very neat and compact, lined with fibres and horsehair; and the eggs, four in number, are sufficiently characteristic to render them distinguishable from those of any other Bunting. They are



russet- or reddish-brown in their ground, covered with spots and blotches rather than with streaks, after the fashion of those of the Ortolan. While the Ortolan prefers the olive-yards and gardens, *E. casia* confines itself to the bare hill-sides and the scrub, or to the rocky wadys.

*Emberiza cia*, certainly not a *Meadow-Bunting* in Palestine, we found only on the tops of the hills and in the highest parts of Lebanon, both in summer and winter. Unlike the others, it does not seem to migrate. We several times found its nest among rocks in Lebanon towards the end of June. The eggs are clay-coloured, covered with fine lines chiefly round the broad end, very distinct from any other Bunting's I ever saw, and certainly different from the varieties of the Yellow-Ammer's, which do duty for the eggs of this bird in most collections. Its note is very like that of the Yellow-Ammer, but more lugubrious and long-drawn, uttered generally from the top of a flat rock, its favourite perch.

The so-called Black-headed Bunting, *Euspiza melanocephala*, has nothing in its habits and appearance to recal the true *Emberizinae*. It is a very common and conspicuous bird in spring and summer. I was in error in stating (P. Z. S. 1864, p. 446) that it returns in April. On reference to my note-book I find I did not observe it before the first week in May; and its plumage is too brilliant for it easily to escape notice. Its note is varied and powerful, more like a Linnet's than a Bunting's; and it resorts both to scrub, forests, and cultivated ground, affecting particularly olive-yards and, in the north, apricot-orchards, where it sits pouring forth its varied song from the topmost twig of some tall tree. The nest is placed either on the ground in a tuft, or in a low bush, sometimes in the clump at the root of a shrub. The nest is more compact than that of most Buntings, lined with fibres of roots and hair; and the eggs, often six in number, are of a pale blue, powdered all over their surface, sometimes thickly, sometimes sparsely, with brown spots. It is strange to find Brehm quoted as stating its egg to be like those of other Buntings. We may observe that its American congener, *Euspiza americana*, lays a plain blue egg. Everything I have observed in *E. melanocephala* disposes me to believe that Bonaparte is



right in removing *Euspiza* from the Buntings and classing it with the subfamily *Spizinae*.

We now come to the Finches, represented in Palestine by eighteen species, two if not three of these peculiar to the country. The common Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes vulgaris*) was only once noticed by us, and that in Gilead, the woods and glades of which are admirably adapted for its habits. The Chaffinch, *Fringilla cælebs*, is very common in winter on the maritime plains and among the southern hills, congregating in flocks, the sexes apart, the male flocks appearing greatly to exceed the female in number. Early in spring they all disappear, and return to the highest parts of Lebanon, where they breed abundantly in May and June, among the mulberry-groves of Hazrun and Ehden. We found them very plentiful as high as the Cedars, and in the trees of the famous grove we took several nests. The Chaffinch of Syria is identical with our own, and shows no modification of plumage whatever; nor does it at all approach the Algerian Chaffinch, *Fringilla spodiogena*. The common Chaffinch also extends to Persia, according to De Filippi. Thus the modifications of the form are all westward and southward, not eastward.

The Sparrow of the Syrian cities is our own *Passer domesticus*, which in his westward migrations has acquired neither additional impudence, assurance, nor voracity. All these qualities are possessed in their pristine perfection by the Syrian, which has also the same ash-coloured head. But in the interior, in certain wooded and country districts, not in the cities, he has adopted a chestnut turban, and become *P. cisalpinus*; and who shall say that this is not a good specific difference in a land where Jew, Turk, and Christian, are always discriminated by the colour of their head-dresses? May not the chestnut-headed Sparrows be the relics of aboriginal orthodoxy expelled to nooks and corners? I am, however, sceptic enough to doubt this plausible argument, and I hope in some future number of 'The Ibis' to give my reasons for uniting these Sparrows, or ascribing a dash of impure blood to the Cisalpine variety.

I have no such doubts about *Passer salicarius*, a bird clearly distinct in its habits, as well as in the invariable chestnut head and spotted flanks. The Marsh-Sparrow is in Palestine con-



fined chiefly to the Ghor, or Jordan valley, where it congregates at all times of the year in countless myriads, breeding in colonies so crowded that I have seen the jujube-trees absolutely broken down under the weight of their nests; while their noise is so deafening that it is impossible to carry on conversation in their "rookeries." I have known their eggs brought in by thousands, but I never saw any variety approaching the dark varieties of the egg of the Common Sparrow. This bird, like the Doves, feeds largely on the leaves of leguminous plants. It is also found in moist wooded districts in other parts of the country, though not in such vast numbers as in the Ghor; but it never becomes a denizen of the towns.

The most interesting species of the genus is the *Passer moabiticus*, Tristr. (P. Z. S. 1864, p. 169), a bird very restricted in its habitat. We never met with it at the north end of the Dead Sea, not even in the oasis of Jericho, nor in the rich plains of Shittim on the eastern side. We first discovered it at the west side of the Dead Sea, at Ain Terabeh, among the reeds which in a dense mass overhang the sea and the many brackish springs which there flow into it. We caught a glimpse of a few at the south-western end of the sea, among the reeds of Wady um Bagkek; and again on the east side, in the Ghor es Safieh, it was plentiful. It is exceedingly shy and wary, and was most difficult either to see, or, when shot, to retrieve. It lives in small flocks, and is extremely restless, feeding on the seeds of the great feathery *Donax*. The chirp was like that of the common Sparrow; and till we saw it, we took it for *P. salicarius*, which also inhabits the same spot. Its bright chestnut back, diminutive size (one-third less than that of the Tree-Sparrow), and the bright yellow on each shoulder at once marked it as distinct. Yet it bears no resemblance to the *Passer flavicollis* of India except in size. The yellow spots, though pale, are conspicuous in the female also, which in other respects is dressed in the sombre garb of the female of the common House-Sparrow. It is interesting to note that while the *P. flavicollis* of India shows a parallelism to the *Petronia stulta* in the yellow spot on the breast, *P. moabiticus* has the spot on each shoulder; and the nearest congener of *P. stulta*, *P. brachydactyla*, has no spot at all.



For convenience of reference I append from the 'Proceedings' the description of this species\*, and avail myself of Mr. Wolf's pencil to present the readers with figures of it (Plate VII.).

## XXI.—Recent Ornithological Publications.

### I. ENGLISH.

THE Eighteenth Part of Mr. Gould's 'Birds of Asia,' published 1st April 1866, contains figures of the following species:—

Sypheotides auritus. India.	Phlogænas crinigera. Sooloo Isl.
Actinodura egertoni. India.	Henicurus maculatus. W. Himalaya.
— nipalensis. India.	— guttatus (sp.n.). E. Himalaya.
Spizixus canifrons. Sylhet (?).	— sinensis (sp.n.). China.
— semitorques. China.	— scouleri. Himalaya.
Thaumalea picta. North China.	Hirundo filifera. India.
— amherstiae. Cochin China (?); Thibet.	Rhodophila melanoleuca. India.
Phlogænas cruenta. Philippine Isl.	Pratineola leucura. India.

Only six specimens of the beautiful *Thaumalia amherstiae* are, according to Mr. Gould, known. Of these, two are in the British Museum, two at Paris, one in the Derby Museum at Liverpool, and the remaining one belongs to the family of the late Lady Amherst. The female has never been recognized. *Phlogænas crinigera* is the species which was some time since described as *P. bartletti* (P. Z. S. 1863, p. 377, and 1864, pp. 238–240). Mr. Gould, we must observe, spells the name of the genus *Henicurus*, without the aspirate, *Enicurus*, following indeed the example of its founder Temminck, but one that seems to us "more honoured in the breach than in the observance." The two species above indicated as new were first described in the Zoological 'Proceedings' for 1865 (pp. 664, 665); but Mr. Gould alters the specific name of the second from *sinensis*, under

\* "Ex cinereo isabellinus, tectricibus alarum læte castaneis: superciliis et dorso medio cum remigum et rectricum marginibus rufescenti-isabellinis: dorso medio nigro striato: gutture medio cum cervice nigris: macula suboculari et gutturi vitta utrinque laterali albis: macula cervicali utrinque flava: ventre albo, crisso rufescente: rostro superiore plumbeo, inferiore cum pedibus flavis.

"Long. tota 3·8, alæ 2·3, caudæ 1·8 poll. Angl."—P. Z. S. 1864, pp. 169–170.