

# PITTA BENGALENSIS.

## Bengal Pitta.

*Pitta bengalensis*, Vieill. Enc. Méth. Orn., 2<sup>e</sup> partie, p. 685.—Jerd. Birds of India, vol. i. p. 503.—Gould, Birds of Asia, pt. 23 (1871).

*Pitta brachyura*, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 394.—Gould, Cent. of Himal. Birds, pl. xxiii.

*Pitta coronata* (P. L. S. Müller), G. R. Gray, Hand-list of Birds, part i. p. 294.—Capt. Legge, Birds of Ceylon, pt. ii. p. 687.

*Pitta triostegus* (Sparrm.), Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 157.

*Corvus brachyurus*, Linn. Syst. Nat. 1766, vol. i. p. 158.

*Turdus triostegus*, Sparrm. Mus. Carls., pl. 84.

[To give all the different names which have been applied to old species would be useless.]

IN Jerdon's 'Birds of India' it is stated that "this prettily plumaged Ground-Thrush is common in the Indian forests, but is also occasionally met with in every part of the country that is tolerably wooded. In the Carnatic it chiefly occurs in the beginning of the hot weather, when the land-winds first begin to blow with violence from the west: and the birds in many instances appear to have been blown by the strong wind from the Eastern Ghats; for, being birds of feeble flight, they are unable to contend against the strength of the wind. At this time they take refuge in huts and houses, or any building that will afford them shelter. The first bird of this kind that I saw had taken refuge in the General Hospital at Madras; and subsequently, at Nellore, I obtained many alive under the same circumstances. Layard states that in Ceylon it is migratory, coming in with the Snipe in the beginning of the cold weather. He further remarks that it is shy and wary, resorting to tangled brakes and ill-kept native gardens. It seldom alights on trees, and is generally found single; but I have seen three or four together; and it feeds chiefly on the ground, on various coleopterous insects. Like others of its family, it progresses by hopping, and is in general a most silent bird, but is said to emit at times a fine loud whistling note. Its Singalese name is said to be derived from its call—*Avitch-i-a*, pronounced slowly and distinctly. Blyth was informed that it uttered a loud screeching note." In the North-west Province of Ceylon, according to Captain Legge, the native name is *Ayittā*; and a correspondent, Mr. Parker, sent him the following explanation:—"It is said that this bird once possessed the Peacock's plumes; but one day, when he was bathing, the Peacock stole his dress; ever since that he has gone about the jungle calling for them, 'Ayittam, ayittam' (my dress, my dress). Another legend is that the Pitta was formerly a prince who was deeply in love with a beautiful princess. His father sent him to travel for some years, as was in olden times the custom with princes here. When he returned, the princess was dead; and the unfortunate prince wandered disconsolately about, continually calling her by name, 'Ayittā, Ayittā.' Out of pity to him, the gods transformed him into this bird." A very good account of the habits of this Pitta will be found in Capt. Legge's 'Birds of Ceylon,' to which island it is a winter visitant. The nest and eggs are described by Mr. Hume in his work entitled 'Nests and Eggs of Indian Birds' (p. 224).

There is no apparent difference in the colouring of the sexes; but specimens frequently occur among the skins sent to England with dark elongated marks down the stem of the feathers of the back and rump, while in others these parts are uniform in colour. Other differences also occasionally present themselves, the superciliary stripe being in some instances brownish buff, while in others it is of a lighter hue and, moreover, marked with green.

A line down the centre of the head from the bill to the nape black, narrow from the forehead to the crown, thence to the nape wide; a narrow black line under the eye, continued in a broader one down the sides of the neck, unites with the black at the nape; upper surface and greater wing-coverts dark grass-green; lesser wing-coverts glossy verditer-blue; rump and upper tail-coverts the same; primaries black, with pale bluish-grey tips, and with a large patch of white about the middle of their length, forming a conspicuous oval mark when the wing is spread; the secondaries are also black, conspicuously tipped with white, and the external ones margined with green; on the apical portion of the black, in those nearer the body, the green gradually increases in breadth till the black is nearly invisible; under surface of the wing black, interrupted by the oval spot of white, faintly tinged with blue; tail black, tipped with blue; chin and sides of the neck creamy white; breast and under surface light cinnamon-brown, brightest on the breast; vent and under tail-coverts bright scarlet; bill black, with a fleshy brown base; irides hazel; legs and feet pinkish flesh-colour.

The Plate represents an adult male and a younger bird, both of the natural size.