## PLUVIANUS ÆGYPTIUS.

## Zic-zac.

Charadrius Ægyptius, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 254.—Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 744.—Id. Gen. Syn., vol. v. p. 204, 9 A.

Alexandrinus, var. β. Ægyptius, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 684.

— melanocephalus, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 692.

- Africanus, Sav. Desc. de l'Egypte, Ois., tab. 6. fig. 4.

niger, Bodd. Kittl. Kupf. Vög., t. 4. fig. 2.

Pluvianus chlorocephalus, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxvii. p. 130.

Cursor charadrioides, Wagl. Syst. Av. Cursor, sp. 6.

Ammoptila charadrioides, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 364.

The story of the old Greek writer Herodotus about the Trochilos entering the mouth of the Crocodile is well known to every classical scholar, and hence any remark on the subject is unnecessary; but I may state that ornithologists are divided in opinion as to whether the bird intended was the present one or the Spurwinged Plover (Hoplopterus spinosus), which is equally common on the banks of the Nile. The point is, however, of little moment, since, in all probability, the story is not founded on truth, and, if it were, one bird is just as likely to perform the office of teeth-cleaner to the Crocodile as the other. Recent research having ascertained that the Pluvianus Ægyptius is found within the western boundary of the Asiatic continent, I embrace the opportunity of inserting in the present work a drawing which was intended as an illustration of "an oft-told tale."

The true habitat of the *P. Ægyptius* is Africa, over the fluviatile portions of which it is dispersed from Egypt and Algeria southwards to Angola. As I know nothing of the bird from personal observation, I shall here transcribe the few meagre passages which have been published respecting it.

I commence with the following extract from Herodotus, which was sent to me by W. White Cooper, Esq., with the view of calling my attention to the subject.

"Crocodile and Trochilos.—All other birds and beasts avoid him; but he is at peace with the Trochilos, because he receives benefit from that bird. For when the Crocodile gets out of the water on land and then opens its jaws, which it does most commonly towards the west, the Trochilos enters its mouth and swallows the leeches: the Crocodile is so well pleased with this service that it never hurts the Trochilos."—Herodotus, Euterpe, chap. 68.

"To this species," says Dr. Leith Adams, "as well as to the spur-winged Lapwing, the name of Zic-zac is applied by the natives, who in bird-nomenclature, as in other subjects, evince no great accuracy or perception. It is not easy to see the reason why they should apply the above name to the Black-headed Plover, unless that it frequents the same situations, and is consequently mistaken for the other, as this handsome bird has neither in plumage nor voice any similarity to the Spurwing. The Black-headed Plover is usually seen in pairs, and breeds about March; its flight is rapid, and call loud and piping, One series of notes, when alarmed, it utters on wing, as it wheels past your boat and settles on the bank, resemble the words chip-chip-hoit. It is not common above the First Cataract, owing to the absence of sand-banks and islands." Speaking of the Hoplopterus spinosus, Dr. Adams says, "There appears to me better reason for considering this species the Trochilos of Herodotus than the Pluvianus Ægyptius, inasmuch as the wellknown narrative of the Greek historian is still current among the Egyptians, and with reference to this bird, which they state, in its capacity of leech-catcher to the Crocodile, is sometimes shut up within the jaws of the animal when the latter falls asleep on a sand-bank. On such occasions the Zic-zac (so named from its call) applies his spurs to the Crocodile's mouth, by way of refreshing the memory of the latter that his faithful henchman is within, when the monster's jaws reopen immediately, as if his reptilian majesty was sorry for his obliviousness. This addition to the old story was given to me on good authority, as being very

generally believed among the Nile boatmen."—'Ibis,' 1864, p. 29.

"In reply to your inquiry," writes Mr. F. H. Wenham, "I may state that I believe the story of the Zic-zac feeding in the Crocodile's mouth, and picking his teeth, to be a fable. I have seen upwards of a hundred from the Crocodile's nestling under him, but never once in his jaws; and, moreover, the fare obtained from the Crocodile's mouth would be exceedingly meagre, for, upon dissecting one of the fare obtained from the Crocodile's mouth would be exceedingly meagre, to his palate, teeth, or jaws; all several I must plead guilty to having shot, I could find nothing adhering to his palate, teeth, or jaws; all

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