ARGUSIANUS ARGUS.

Great Argus Pheasant.

Argus Pheasant, Lath. Syn. iv. p. 710 (1783).—id. Gen. Hist. B. viii. p. 203 (1823). Phasianus argus, Linn. Syst. Nat. i. p. 272 (1766).

Argus pavonius, Vieill. Gal. Ois. pl. 203 (1834).—id. Encycl. Méth. pl. 87. fig. 3.

—— pavoninus, Less. Traité d'Orn. p. 488, & Atlas, pl. 84 (1831).

— giganteus, Temm. Hist. Pigeons et Gall. iii. p. 678.—Jard. & Selby, Ill. Orn. pls. 14, 15.—Blyth, Cat. B. Mus. As. Soc. 1849, p. 242.—Sclater, Proc. Zool. Soc. 1863, pp. 124-222.—Wallace, Malay Archip. i. p. 32.—Elliot, Monogr. Phas. pl. 11 (1872).—Hume, Str. F. 1878, p. 427.—Id. 1879, pp. 68–110.—Id. & Marsh. Game Birds of India, i. p. 99.

Argusianus giganteus, Gray, Gen. B. iii. p. 103 (1845).—Jerd. B. Ind. iii. p. 509 (1864).—Gray, List Gall. Brit. Mus. p. 25 (1867).—Blyth, B. Burm. p. 148 (1875).

- argus, Salvad. Ann. Mus. Civ. Genov. xiv. p. 85 (1879).—Oates, B. Brit. Burm. ii. p. 313 (1883). Argusa giganteus, Kelham, Ibis, 1881, p. 530.

This splendid Pheasant is chiefly known as an inhabitant of the Malayan peninsula, whence it ranges northwards into the dense forests in the neighbourhood of the Pakchan river in Tenasserim, and it also extends into the island of Sumatra. In Borneo its place is taken by the allied species Argusianus grayi; but the common Argus is said to reach to Siam, where it was obtained by the late M. Mouhot. In Cochin-China it would appear to be replaced by the lately described Reinhardius ocellatus, two specimens of which now grace the galleries of the Paris Museum. Several descriptions have been written of the habits of the Argus, most of which are too lengthy to be reproduced here, especially as they will be known to the majority of my readers from Mr. Wallace's 'Malay Archipelago,' Messrs. Hume and Marshall's 'Game Birds of India,' Mr. Elliot's 'Monograph of the Pheasants,' and Mr. Tegetmeier's work on Pheasants. One of the best accounts, however, of the present bird is that given by Mr. Davison in the sixth volume of 'Stray Feathers.' This gentleman resided for several months in the neighbourhood of Malewoon, in Tenasserim. He gives full information as to the mode in which these Pheasants are trapped by the Malays; and I make the following extract from his account of the habits of the birds, especially as the abovementioned paper is less likely to be known to my readers:—

"They live quite solitarily, both males and females; every male has his own drawing-room, of which he is excessively proud, and which he keeps scrupulously clean. They haunt exclusively the depths of the evergreen forests, and each male chooses some open level spot, sometimes down in a dark gloomy ravine, entirely surrounded and shut in by dense cane-brakes and rank vegetation, sometimes on the top of a hill when the jungle is comparatively open, from which he clears all the dead leaves and weeds for a space of six or eight yards square, until nothing but the bare clean earth remains; and thereafter he keeps the place scrupulously clean, removing carefully every dead leaf or twig that may happen to fall on it from the trees above. These clear spaces are undoubtedly used as dancing-grounds; but personally I have never seen a bird dancing in them, but have always found the proprietor either seated quietly in or moving backwards and forwards slowly about them, calling at short intervals. Except in the morning and evening, when they roam about to feed and drink, the males are always to be found at home, and they roost at night on some tree quite close by.

"They are the most difficult birds I know of to approach: a male is heard calling, and you gradually follow up the sound, taking care not to make the slightest noise, till at last the bird calls within a few yards of you, and is only hidden by the denseness of the intervening foliage; you creep forward, hardly daring to breathe, and suddenly emerge on the open space; but the space is empty, the bird has either caught sight of or heard or smelt you, and has run off quietly. They will never rise, even when pursued by a dog, if they can possibly avoid it, but run very swiftly away, always choosing the densest and most impenetrable part of the forest to retreat through. When once the cleared space is discovered, it is merely a work of a little patience to secure the bird by trapping it."

[R. B. S.]

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