PHASIANUS CHRYSOMELAS, Severtz.

Oxus Pheasant.

Phasianus chrysomelas, Severtz., Ibis, 1875, p. 493; Elliot, Ibis, 1876, p. 131.

Dr. Severtzoff, the celebrated Russian traveller, discovered this fine species of true Pheasant during his travels in Central Asia, under the circumstances narrated by him in detail below. Mr. Elliot, who has made a special study of the Pheasants, states in a letter to 'The Ibis' (l. c.) that the title of P. chrysomelas must sink into a synonym of his P. insignis, founded on an imperfect specimen from Yarkand. Whether, if this eventually turned out to be the case, Mr. Elliot's name, founded on an admittedly mutilated skin and incorrectly figured in his 'Monograph,' would be allowed to take precedence over the more exact description of Dr. Severtzoff's, I leave to other ornithologists to determine; but if the conclusions of Mr. Scully, published in 'Stray Feathers,' are correct, then P. insignis is not distinct from P. Shawi, which is said to be the only Pheasant in Yarkand. I cannot bring myself to believe that P. chrysomelas, at any rate, can be a stage of P. Shawi; but perhaps the careful figures now published will enable Mr. Hume and other Indian naturalists to make further comparisons and determine this interesting point.

The following very full account of the species I owe to the kindness of Dr. Severtzoff:—"I found P. chrysomelas on the river Amoo (Oxus), and on the lower parts of the same river, from the end of the Karakol, its most eastern arm, along the sandy country up to our new fort Petroalexandrowsk, on the right bank of the stream opposite Khiva,—also on the branches of the delta, as for instance Keghili, Koowanshdjerma, Lake Sarg-kul, &c. I possess also information that it is common upon all the branches of the Oxus delta without exception, including the most western, Taldyk: here it is very abundant near Kungrad, and is precisely similar to those found near Petroalexandrowsk. It also occurs on the left bank of the Oxus, and the great channels of Khiva, in fact everywhere where it finds sufficiently large jungles undestroyed by cultivation; these, however, are rare to the south-west of the Oxus delta. I do not know its limit above that river; but I think it not improbable that this beautiful bird will still be found in the jungles of Balsk and Kundooz.

"It lives only in dense thorny jungle near the water, and is therefore confined to the valley and delta of the Oxus. Its range is bounded on the north-east by the sand-waste of Kysilkoom, which separates its habitat from that of *P. mongolicus*, and to the south-west by the Turcoman desert, which separates it from *P. persicus*.

"My observations on the habits of this Pheasant extend from the month of July to the middle of October. In July they come out from the jungle every morning and evening for the purpose of feeding, and both at sunrise and after sunset their screams may be heard in the bushes; but day by day towards the end of that month they are seen less and less, and remain more concealed in the thickets. The males are now fast moulting, and the females also, but in a less degree, the latter being then occupied with their chickens. At this time neither males nor females sit on the trees as they do later on, but remain always on the ground; and, from the foot-prints in the mud, I opine that at this season of the year the moulting Pheasants are actively pursued by the marsh-cat (Felis chaus). During the night, however, the birds retreat to such thickets as render the noiseless approach of their enemy impossible.

"The chicks of this Pheasant, like those of other Gallinaceous birds, are continually moulting until they are fully grown. I have no specimens newly hatched; but from analogy with *P. mongolicus*, I think that they must have quills when still in down. When they have attained the size of a Quail, their first feathers are already nearly full-grown, though some have still blooded roots; such specimens I have obtained at the end of July and in August, whence I opine that the female still has eggs in May and the early part of June. If so, she is a late breeder, like *P. mongolicus*.

"The birds, as soon as the moult is ended, gather in small flocks, consisting of males, females, and young; some old males, however, remain single. This association begins with the first days of October, but is not very strictly kept up. During the day, numbers of them often disperse amongst the bushes, a flock of from ten to fifteen specimens occupying a space of as many acres; and on being disturbed they fly up one at a time. They keep more together when feeding in open places, as, for instance, on the stubble-land. They eat the seeds of *Eleagnus*, *Halimodendron*, and *Alhagi*. Near the open spaces covered with the last-named thorny grass they conceal themselves amongst the Tamarisk bushes, in which they find shelter, but no food. Besides these wild seeds, they eat in autumn every kind of cultivated corn, particularly *Panicum miliaceum*,