COLUMBA INTERMEDIA, Strickl.

Indian Rock-Pigeon.

Columba intermedia, Strickl. Ann. & Mag. Nat. Hist. xii. p. 39 (1844).—Kelaart, Prodromus, Cat. p. 130 (1852).—Layard, Ann. & Mag. Nat. Hist. xiv. p. 59 (1854).—Reichenb. Vollst. Naturg. Tauben, p. 57, pl. cxxxi. fig. 1249.—Gray, List Columbæ Brit. Mus. p. 29 (1856).—Bp. Consp. ii. p. 48 (1857).— Jerd. B. Ind. iii. p. 469 (1864).—Schomb. Ibis, 1864, p. 250.—Blyth, Ibis, 1867, p. 149.—Gray, Hand-l. B. ii. p. 232 (1870).—Swinh. Proc. Zool. Soc. 1871, p. 396.—Holdsw. Proc. Zool. Soc. 1872, p. 46.— Hayes-Lloyd, Ibis, 1873, p. 414.—Hume, Stray Feathers, 1873, p. 217.—Ball, op. cit. 1874, p. 425.— id. 1875, p. 208.—Hume, Nests & Eggs Ind. Birds, p. 499 (1875).—Legge, Ibis, 1875, p. 400.—Butler, Str. Feathers, 1876, p. 3.—Fairb. tom. cit. p. 262.—Dresser, Ibis, 1876, p. 321.—David & Oustalet, Ois. de la Chine, p. 384 (1877).—Hume, Str. Feathers, 1878, pp. 16, 419.—Davison & Wenden, Str. F., 1878, p. 86.—Ball. tom. cit. p. 224.—Cripps, tom. cit. p. 296.—Legge, Birds of Ceylon, p. 698 (1879). Columba livia, var., Blyth, Cat. B. Mus. As. Soc. p. 233 (1849).—Schlegel, Mus. Pays-Bas, Columbæ, p. 63 (1873).

Columba ænas, Burgess, Proc. Zool. Soc. 1855, p. 234. Columba livia, Adams (nec Linn.), Proc. Zool. Soc. 1859, p. 187.

It is doubtful whether the present species ought to be considered any thing more than a race of the ordinary European Rock-Pigeon (Columba livia); for it appears certain that intermediate forms are often met with. The great difference between the European and the Indian bird consists in the absence of any white on the rump of the latter. The Indian Rock-Pigeon seems to be widely distributed over the whole of the Indian peninsula and Ceylon, extending into Scinde on the north-west, and as far east as Siam.

Dr. Jerdon writes:—"The Blue Pigeon of India is one of the most common and abundant birds throughout the country, congregating in large flocks, and breeding wherever they can find suitable spots. They are most partial to large buildings, such as churches, pagodas, mosques, tombs, and the like, frequently entering verandahs of inhabited houses and building in the cornices. Holes in walls of cities or towns, too, are favourite places; and in some parts of the country they prefer holes in wells, especially, I think, in the west of India, the Deccan, &c. In default of such spots they will breed in crevices and cavities of rocks, caverns, and sea-side cliffs; and I have often noticed that they are particularly partial to rocky cliffs by waterfalls. The celebrated falls of Gaisoppa are tenanted by thousands of Blue Pigeons, which here associate with the large Alpine Swift—It is more rare in forest countries generally than in the open country. It extends from Ceylon throughout India to the Himalayas, and also to Assam, Sylhet, and Burmah. It is doubtful if it occurs in Afghanistan, or in other parts of Central Asia. These Pigeons are held in favour by most natives, and almost venerated by some; and if they build in the house of a native, he considers it a most fortunate omen. They are, however, very destructive to grain, assembling in vast flocks in the cold weather; and, in general, the natives do not object to their being shot. They are undoubtedly the origin of most of the domestic Pigeons of India."

Mr. Hume says that the breeding-season in India lasts from Christmas until May day, and observes as follows:—"The nest is chiefly composed of thin sticks and twigs, but is often more or less lined with leaves of the tamarisk, feathers, &c. When undisturbed, they will breed in incredible multitudes. At the grand old fort of Deig, in Bhurtpoor, where, as in most parts of Rajpootana, they are sacred and even a European who molested them would risk his life, several hundred thousand pairs must live and breed; a gun fired on the moat towards evening raises a dense cloud, obscuring utterly the waning day, and deafening one with the mighty rushing round of countless strong and rapidly-plied pinions."

Captain Legge, who has given a very full account of the distribution and habits of this species in his 'Birds of Ceylon,' publishes the following note:—" In Ceylon the Blue Rock-Pigeon is essentially an inhabitant of out-of-the-way, wild, and little-frequented spots; the country does not, like India, abound in inland walled towns, temples, and pagodas, which there, are the natural resort of this species; and it is consequently driven to such rocky localities as I have alluded to above, and is not, therefore, nearly such a well-known bird as in India. The eastern and northern divisions of the island, however, teem with so many remarkable rocky masses, towering far above the circumjacent forests, such as the Friar's Hood, 'Westminster Abbey,' the Elephant rock, the 'Gunner's Coin,' Sigiri and Dambulla rocks, Rittagalla, Mahintale, and a host more of nature's mighty castles, the very resorts of all others for the 'Blue Rock,' that it has always been a wonder to me that the species is not far more numerous than it is, the only solution of the problem being that these natural strongholds are situated too much in forest-country; besides