STURNUS PURPURASCENS, Gould.

Persian Starling.

Sturnus purpurascens, Gould, in Proc. of Zool. Soc., 1868, p. 219.

Some ornithologists may question the existence of more than two species of true Sturnus, viz. S. vulgaris and S. unicolor, and others consider that the genus, even as now restricted, comprises at least two more. Whatever may be the correct view of the case, those who regard the S. indicus as different from S. vulgaris, must admit that the present bird has still greater claims to a separate specific appellation; and, at all events, every ornithologist who closely examines these three birds will at least allow that the distinctions pointed out by those who have written respecting them are correct. No naturalist, I imagine, is unaware that some one or more species of every natural genus of birds is very widely distributed, while the remainder are confined to a limited area: such a law appears to govern the Starlings; for the S. vulgaris, so widely distributed over Europe, also occurs, like many more of our common birds, in China. Mr. Swinhoe speaks of a specimen in the British Museum which had been sent direct from that country; and I possess another from Fokien, which does not differ, so far as I can see, from British-killed examples. Of S. purpurascens I have three fine specimens, all of which were collected at Erzeroum; but I am still ignorant of the extent of the range of the bird over Persia; in like manner, we are unacquainted with the range of the S. indicus over India, all that is known on the subject being comprised in the following note by Mr. Blyth:—

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"Starlings occur sufficiently near to Calcutta to be sold by the bird-dealers as no rarity, along with Rose Ousels and other birds taken in the neighbourhood. I have been assured they occur commonly so near as at Ránigánge. The Indian Starling differs very slightly from S. vulgaris, but has a longer and more acuminate bill. A third race, which Mr. Gould has from Erzeroum, is identical with the Starling of Afghanistan, and more brilliantly coloured than the others. When series of each are seen together, the difference is sufficiently recognizable. The Starling of North-eastern Asia may perhaps constitute a fourth of these closely allied races." ('Ibis,' 1867, p. 38.)

The following remarks accompanied my characterization of this new species in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London' for 1868, as above referred to:—

"I have had in my collection for many years three skins of a very beautiful Starling, all collected in Erzeroum, two of which are adult and one a yearling bird. Compared with Sturnus vulgaris on the one hand and S. indicus on the other, this bird will be found to differ in a remarkable manner from both. In size it is considerably larger than either, while in colouring it is sufficiently different to constitute it a new species. Beautiful as is our own Starling, the Erzeroum bird far exceeds it even in its finest nuptial and breeding-dress, the entire back being of a lovely purple, while green is the prevailing tint of that part of S. vulgaris; the resplendent bluish green of the wings of the European bird is replaced in the new species by shining coppery red, the lengthened plumes of the chest are bluish green instead of coppery, and the breast is coppery instead of the green or bluish green seen in S. vulgaris. The two birds, in fact, present a singular transposition of colouring; and the Erzeroum bird, for which I propose the name of S. purpurascens, is, as above stated, by far the finest of the two. The adults, as in S. vulgaris, are more or less speckled with white at the tips of the feathers of the back, according to age; and the young of the year presents all the characters of the adult, so far as regards the purple colouring of the back and the bronzy red of the wings, but, as is the case with a specimen of our own Starling of the same age, has the entire plumage very distinctly guttated with white, while the bill, as is usually the case, is of a dark hue."

"Face, head, throat, and neck deep bronze, passing into green on the upper part of the back and breast; lower portion of the back and upper tail-coverts purplish blue; abdomen dusky brown, with a bronzy lustre; wing-coverts deep coppery or bronzy red; wings greyish brown, each feather bordered by a velvet-like line of black, showing very conspicuously on the tips of the secondaries; tail similar, but the velvet edging not so well defined; under tail-coverts black, tipped with white. A few of the feathers on the upper part of the back and on the upper tail-coverts with a spot of white at the tip; bill yellow; feet reddish brown.

"Total length $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches, bill $1\frac{1}{4}$, wing $5\frac{3}{4}$, tail 3, tarsi $1\frac{1}{8}$."

The Plate represents a male and a female in their full breeding-dress, and a young bird of the first autumn, all of the natural size.