

SAXICOLA ATROGULARIS, *Blyth.*

Black-throated Stone-Chat.

Saxicola atrogularis, Blyth, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xvi. pp. 130, 131.—Id. Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 167.—Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. App. p. 8, app. to p. 179.—Horsf. and Moore, Cat. of Birds in Mus. East-Ind. Comp., vol. i. p. 287.—Adams in Proc. Zool. Soc., part xxvii. 1859, p. 180.

——— *atrigularis*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom. i. p. 304, *Saxicola*, sp. 18.

——— *deserti*, Jerd. Birds of India, vol. ii. pt. 1, p. 132.

THE numerous species of *Saxicola* are so very nearly allied that I deem it an impossibility for any ornithologist to distinguish one from the other by written descriptions or even by comparison with the most carefully made delineations; to effect this satisfactorily it will be essential that an extensive series of specimens from every part of the world in which they are found should be before him at one and the same time; he would then be enabled to perceive the minute characters by which each bird is distinguished, and which are usually constant in the examples from any given locality. All those who have paid attention to the birds of Europe are aware that the only difference between the *Saxicola aurita* and *S. Stapazina* consists in the throat of the one being black, and the other white; while the Nubian species of the genus *Dromolæa*, which are precisely alike in their admeasurements and general colouring, have the crown of the head white in one, and black in the other. After a careful examination of most of the known species of the genera *Saxicola* and *Dromolæa*, I have come to the conclusion that, although most nearly allied, all the Indian and African ones are really distinct from each other; were we otherwise to regard them, the species of both must be greatly curtailed. Mr. Jerdon considers the *S. atrogularis* of Blyth and the *S. deserti* of Rüppell to be identical; but while I find them to be very similarly coloured, I do not fail to observe that the specimens of *S. deserti*, in my collection at least, have rather longer tarsi, somewhat shorter wings, and smaller bills than the *S. atrogularis*, that a great difference exists in the colouring of the under surface of their shoulders, that part being nearly white in the former and jet-black in the latter, and that this black colouring of the under shoulder is the best character by which the Indian bird may be distinguished from its African ally.

Of the habits of *S. atrogularis*, I regret to say, but little has been recorded. Mr. Jerdon states that it "is common at Mhow in the cold weather, frequenting stones and bushes in the open plains. It is also tolerably common in the Upper Provinces of India, in Sindh, the Punjab, and Afghanistan," "frequenting," says Dr. Adams, "the arid plains of those countries; and not uncommon in the Valley of Cashmere. Its favourite food is a sort of wire-worm, abundant in dry sandy places." Captain Boys, who procured examples at Sultanpore in December 1839, and Futtehpoore in March 1842, merely remarks, "affects sandy plains, and seldom flies to any great distance."

The male has a line which crosses the forehead, passes over each eye, and extends down the sides of the neck white; head, back, and scapularies cinnamon, deepest on the back; lores, chin, throat, and ear-coverts jet-black; wings black; the lesser coverts slightly, and the greater conspicuously tipped with white; primaries slightly edged with greyish white; secondaries margined with pale cinnamon; under surface of the shoulder and axillaries deep black; inner webs of the primaries and secondaries greyish white for the greater part of their length from the base, showing conspicuously on the under surface; breast, abdomen, vent, and under tail-coverts pale cinnamon, darkest on the breast; upper tail-coverts white, tinged with cinnamon; basal half of the tail white, apical half black; bill and legs black; irides brown.

The female differs in having the general plumage dull cinnamon-brown, no black on the throat, and the wing-feathers margined with cinnamon instead of white.

The Plate represents the two sexes, of the size of life.