

## SAXICOLA CAPISTRATA, *Gould.*

### Grey-capped Stone-Chat.

*Saxicola leucomela*, Jerdon, Birds of India, vol. i. part ii. p. 131 (nec Pallas).

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UNTIL very recently the group of birds known by the trivial names of Stone-Chats and Wheatears had not received that close attention which had been paid to many others ; the knowledge, however, which has recently been gained respecting them renders it evident that there are many more species than was formerly supposed. I have stated elsewhere that the Indian members of this form are all, or nearly all, specifically distinct from those which inhabit Europe, North Africa, and Nubia. Without, doubtless, having had the opportunity of instituting a careful comparison between the present bird and the *Saxicola leucomela* of Pallas, Mr. Jerdon has treated them as identical, whereas they are quite distinct, not only from each other, but from a third nearly allied species, the *S. lugens* of Algeria.

Having said thus much with regard to the distinctness of the Indian bird, I would fain have given some information respecting its habits and economy ; but of this little or nothing is known. Mr. Jerdon merely says that it "has been found in the Upper Provinces of Hindostan during the cold weather only, and is common in Afghanistan."

The *Saxicola capistrata* is a very well-marked species, and is readily distinguishable from *S. leucomela* in being somewhat larger in size, in having a grey cap, the under tail-coverts buff, and a broader band of black on the tips of the lateral tail-feathers ; the spurious feather on the under surface of the edge of the wing, moreover, is much broader and longer.

I am unable to say if there be any difference in the outward appearance of the sexes ; but Mr. Jerdon states that young birds have the cap more or less tinged with dusky brown, in lieu of the greyish white of the adult.

Among the MS. notes on Indian birds by the late Captain Boys, I find the following in reference to the present species :—

"Shot several specimens on the road to Sukkur, at a place called Mhuta-jeedo, and met with others at nearly every stage lower down towards Sukkur. The bird affects old walls, sits upon the top of any raised place, and pounces on the flying insects as they pass ; frequently a pair were seen on the ridges formed to retain the water in irrigated grounds."

The male may thus be described :—Line across the forehead, lores, a line above the eye, chin, throat, sides of the neck, back, wings, under wing-coverts, axillaries, two central tail-feathers, and a broad band at the tips of the lateral tail-feathers black ; crown of the head and nape ashy grey, margined on the sides with white, and with a faint streak of dark grey down the centre of each feather ; lower part of the back, upper tail-coverts, and basal portions of the lateral tail-feathers white ; breast and abdomen greyish white ; under tail-coverts buffy white ; irides dark brown ; bill and legs black.

Total length  $6\frac{1}{4}$  inches ; bill  $\frac{1\frac{1}{2}}{16}$  ; wing  $3\frac{3}{4}$  ; tail  $2\frac{7}{8}$  ; tarsi 1.

The figures are of the natural size.