

## PSAROPHOLUS ARDENS, Swinh.

### Red Oriole.

*Psaropholus ardens*, Swinh. in Ibis, 1862, p. 363, pl. xiii.; 1863, p. 293; and 1866, pp. 297 and 398.

var. *nigellicauda*, Swinh. in Ibis, 1870, p. 342.

*Analcipus ardens*, G. R. Gray, Hand-list of Birds, part i. p. 290.

I DEEM this lovely bird one of the most interesting of Mr. Swinhoe's many important discoveries, since it is still more beautiful than its Himalayan ally, the *Psaropholus Trailli*. Its native habitat is the island of Formosa and (if the bird he has named *Psaropholus ardens*, var. *nigellicauda*, is merely a local variety, as it is now supposed to be) the island of Hainan. If there is any difference in the size of the three, the Himalayan *P. Trailli* is the largest, the Formosan *P. ardens* somewhat smaller than that bird, and the supposed variety from Hainan still a little less in all its admeasurements.

These red-coloured birds from Formosa and Hainan are intensely bright when compared with the maroon-hued species from the Himalayas, and are thereby distinguishable from it at a glance; while in every other respect they are very similar.

The following notes respecting the Red Oriole are extracted from Mr. Swinhoe's "Notes on the Birds of the Islands of Formosa and Hainan":—

"This bird is an inhabitant of the mountain-ranges of Formosa, where it frequents the jungly bush of the exalted valleys, and displays its gaudy tints among the gigantic leafy boughs of the far-famed *Laurus camphora*, which towers at intervals among its entangled fellows of the wood. In summer it resorts to the highest ranges, some of which are perennially covered with snow. In winter it returns to the more accessible mountains bounding the Chinese territory, merely changing its residence from a lower to a higher elevation, and *vice versâ*, according to the season. In habits, the Red Oriole nearly approaches its allies of the Yellow group, and feeds, like them, on berries, chiefly those of figs. Its notes are loud and harsh.

"In a trip to the Formosan mountains I put up at a village, and at an early hour strolled up the hill to a clump of fine trees; on the bare branches of a large *Bombax malabaricum* I noticed a *Psaropholus ardens*, its bright crimson plumage making a lovely contrast with the dull-red flowers of the tree, and the light-green bursting leaves. I rushed back for a gun, and shot him. He showed still the whitish underparts and streaks of immaturity; but the great question was solved. I had accepted hearsay evidence that its iris was red; I now found that it is white, like that of its congener *P. Trailli*. The white is encircled near the eyelids with a black rim; the eyelids are lead-colour; the bill bright French-blue; tongue yellowish, with a broad bifid black tip. The stomach was full of small figs, either of the banyan or some allied species. When picked up, the wounded bird screeched just as Yellow Orioles do.

"All my specimens were procured near Tamsuy in March and April 1862."

Respecting the bird found in Hainan, and which Mr. Swinhoe named provisionally *nigellicauda*, he says:—

"On the 20th of February, 1868, at Taipingsze, in Central Hainan, I spied a solitary male Red Oriole, and, after much chasing from one wood to another, at last secured it. On taking it into my hand, I thought, from the black hue of its tail, that I had got a new species. Its iris was yellowish cream-colour. A few days later, on my return to the same place, I was attracted by a bird singing to himself, in loud broken notes, hidden in the forked branch of a high tree. I watched till I could see him, and brought down a young male. I saw a second red male in the jungle at Yulinkan, in South Hainan.

"These specimens are shorter in the wing and longer in the tail than the Formosan *Psaropholus ardens*; and in the full-plumaged example the black of the neck appears to extend less far down."

"*Male*.—Head, neck, wings, and tibial feathers black; remainder of the plumage of a fine cochineal-red, paler on the tail; bill light cobalt-blue; skin round the eye violet-grey; iris white; legs leaden grey; soles and claws dingy.

"The female has the head, sides, and back of the neck black; wings very dark brown; back reddish cinnamon, deepening into scarlet on the upper tail-coverts; the under tail-coverts are also scarlet; two central tail-feathers brown, the remainder brown on their outer webs and scarlet on the inner ones; under surface broadly striated with black and dull white; bill, legs, and feet as in the male, but not so vivid."

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