

## SITTA FORMOSA, *Blyth*.

### Beautiful Nuthatch.

*Sitta formosa*, Blyth in Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xii. pp. 938, 1007.—Ib. Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 189.—Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 148, *Sitta*, sp. 13.

GREAT as have been the discoveries in our Indian possessions during the last twenty years in every department of science, few can have exceeded in interest the beautiful Nuthatch figured in the accompanying Plate; I (and doubtless other ornithologists) was quite unprepared to find a species pertaining to this little group of creeping birds, so gorgeously attired, and consequently so conspicuously different from its near allies as seemingly to warrant its separation from them; on examination, however, we find that its gay colouring is unaccompanied by any structural difference of sufficient importance to justify such a division. For the discovery of this new bird I am unable to say whether we are indebted to a Hodgson, a Charleton, or a Grace, all of whose collections were sent nearly simultaneously to this country, and all of which contained examples. Mr. Blyth of Calcutta appears to be the only person who has assigned to it a specific name, and he has judiciously selected that of *formosa* as indicative of its rich and beautiful colouring. All the specimens I have seen do not amount to half a dozen in number, and these are distributed far and wide; one in the British Museum, which is probably a female, as it differs in being of a somewhat greener hue, and in having the crescentic white markings somewhat less distinct; another in the collection of the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Derby; a third in Dr. Wilson's celebrated collection at Philadelphia; and a fourth, from which my figures were taken, in the fine collection of Indian Birds at Apperley Castle, Salop; and here I must not fail to record the kindness of Mrs. Charleton, who permitted the bird to be removed from the case and forwarded to me in London, for the purpose of figuring in the present work. All the specimens alluded to formed part of collections made in Nepaul, Sikim, or Bhotan, and the local name of Darjeeling was attached to one or more of them.

In Mr. Blyth's Monthly Report to the Asiatic Society at Bengal for December 1842, he says, "This very beautiful bird appears to present no sufficient distinction upon which it could be separated from the ordinary Nuthatches, though the style of colouring of its upper parts is peculiar, and its size also is comparatively large.

"Colour of the upper parts black, beautifully variegated with different shades of ultramarine blue; the scapularies and rump verdigris; and the wing-coverts and tertiaries elegantly margined with white at their tips; under parts bright rusty-fulvous, somewhat paler on the breast and inclining to whitish on the throat; the frontal feathers are tipped with white, and around the eye also is whitish continued backward as an ill-defined supercilium tinged with fulvous posterior to the eye; crown and back deep black, each feather tipped with brilliant ultramarine, forming large and pointed triangular spots; on the back these incline more to verdigris, and are dilute and whitish over the shoulder; wing-coverts black, with strongly contrasting terminal white margins, and more or less laterally edged, as are also the large alars, with bright lavender-blue, which likewise appears within the white margin of the tertiaries, and tips their inner webs; middle tail-feathers lavender-blue, with black mesial line, the rest black, edged externally with blue and tipped with duller blue, the outermost having a large white spot at the extremity of its inner web; and the next a smaller terminal spot of the same. 'Irides dark; bill blackish, the lower mandible pale underneath; and legs greenish horny, with yellow soles.'"

The figures are of the natural size.