

ALCEDO GRANDIS, *Blyth.*

Great Alcedo.

Alcedo grandis, Blyth, Journ. of Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xiv. p. 190.—Id. Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calc., p. 49.—Id. Ibis, 1865, pp. 30, 31; 1866, pp. 348, 363.—Gray, Hand-list of Birds, vol. i. p. 96.—Sharpe, Mon. of Alced., vol. . pl.

THE recent discovery and examination of a second specimen of this extremely rare and fine species of *Alcedo*, of which only a single example was previously known, enables us to fully confirm Mr. Blyth's accuracy in characterizing it as distinct from all its congeners; indeed it now seems surprising that it could ever have been thought identical with any one of them, and the only reason that can have given rise to such an opinion must be that the type specimen, in the Museum of the Asiatic Society at Calcutta, is very imperfect. On reference to the accompanying Plate it will be seen that the *Alcedo grandis* fully merits the specific appellation assigned to it, inasmuch as it is not only the largest member of the genus to which it pertains, but fully equals, if it does not excel, any of its generic allies in the brilliancy of its plumage. Its native country is, undoubtedly, the little-trodden parts of the Nepaulese Terai, and probably, as believed by Mr. Blyth, those portions of Sikhim and Bhootan that are of a similar character.

Of course it would be a mere surmise to say that the sexes are alike in colour; yet it is probable, nay, almost certain, that they are so. Now that a second specimen has been obtained, and the country of which the bird is a native has been ascertained, examples will doubtless ere long find their way into our collections, and an account of its habits and economy be recorded by some one or more of the enterprising naturalists who are now scouring the Asiatic continent for novelties. At this early period of our acquaintance with the species my readers must excuse my copying what has been written respecting it by others, particularly by Mr. Sharpe, the publication of whose Plate and description just precedes my own.

"This truly magnificent species," says the last-mentioned author, "has as yet only been met with in the neighbourhood of Darjeeling. It was first described by Mr. Blyth in 1845, and the type specimen is still in the Calcutta Museum. Mr. Jerdon has certainly made a mistake in considering it to be the young of *A. euryzona*, which was, moreover, described as a distinct species by Mr. Blyth, under the name of *A. nigricans*. It was hardly possible, therefore, that so acute an observer should have separated *A. grandis*, and not have united it to *A. nigricans*, if they had both been the young of *A. euryzona*. Mr. Blyth has, however, himself written in defence of the species, and I can only state my full concurrence in his views.

"The type specimen came from Darjeeling, and the one from which the figure and description are now taken was also shot in the Darjeeling Terai, by a Shikaree in the employ of Dr. John Anderson, the well-known Curator of the Calcutta Museum, to whom I beg to tender my most hearty thanks for his great kindness in allowing this extremely valuable specimen (the only perfect one known) to be sent to England for the enhancement of my work."

The remarks by Mr. Blyth, alluded to above, are to the following effect:—" *Alcedo grandis*, nobis, from Sikhim, has been erroneously assigned to *A. euryzona*, Temm., of which *A. nigricans*, nobis, from Malacca, is the young. *A. euryzona* has white under-parts, crossed by a broad dark-green pectoral band (whence the name, which is quite inapplicable to the other), much as in the small *A. beryllina* (v. *biru*); whereas *A. grandis* is like *A. ispida* and *A. bengalensis*, but much larger, with the coronal spots of a paler and different blue, and no rufous on the ear-coverts." ('Ibis,' 1865, p. 30.)

I would here remark that Mr. Sharpe is himself in error when he states that Mr. Jerdon considered the *A. grandis* to be the young of *A. euryzona*; for, upon turning to the 'Birds of India,' vol. i. p. 231, I find that he regarded it as an *adult* of that species, an error which he corrected, on the authority of Mr. Blyth, in the appendix to the same work, vol. ii. pt. ii. p. 870.

Head and nape bluish black, crossed by a series of narrow interrupted bands of pale greenish cobalt, each with a small streak of silvery white in the centre; ear-coverts and stripe from the angle of the mouth down each side of the neck bluish black, striated with a pale tint of dark blue; on each side the neck a patch, which is yellow on its upper edge, and orange-buff on the remainder; back and upper tail-coverts glaucous or turquoise blue; wing-coverts greenish black, with a small spot of greenish blue at the tip of each; primaries and secondaries black, edged externally with dark greenish blue, and with rufous on the inner webs of the secondaries; tail dark indigo-blue above, black beneath; throat buffy white; the remainder of the under surface rich chestnut-red; bill black, inclining to horny at the tip; feet orange.

The figure, which is of the natural size, was taken from the perfect example above mentioned.