

NYCTIORNIS ATHERTONI.

Blue-throated Nyctiornis.

Merops Athertoni, Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. ii. pl. 58.

Nyctiornis cæruleus, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 333.

——— *Amherstiana*, Royle, Ill. Him. Bot., vol. i. p. lxxvii.

Bucia Nipalensis, Hodgs., Journ. Asiat. Soc., vol. v. p. 360.

Alcemerops paleazureus, Less.

Merops ? cyanogularis, Jerd. in Madras Journ. Lit. and Sc., vol. ii. p. 229.

——— *Assamensis*, McClell.

Nyctiornis Athertoni, McClell. in Proc. Zool. Soc., Part VII. p. 155.—Ann. Nat. Hist., vol. vi. p. 450.—Gray and

Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 87.—Cat. of Spec. and Draw. of Birds presented to Brit. Mus. by

B. H. Hodgson, Esq., p. 58.

Alcemerops Athertonii, Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 52.

Bucia Athertoni, Blyth in Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. x. p. 922.

Napophila Athertoni, Blyth in Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xi. p. 104.

THE fine bird forming the subject of the present memoir was first described and figured in the "Ornithological Illustrations" of Messrs. Jardine and Selby, who assigned to it the specific appellation of *Athertoni*, as a tribute justly due to the memory of the late Lieut. J. Atherton, of the 13th Light Dragoons, for his exertions in the cause of Ornithological science. According to the Notes of this gentleman, it inhabits the interior of India, and feeds by night, at which time it is very noisy, frequently repeating the short cry of *curr-curr*. These nocturnal habits are, however, somewhat problematical, as neither Mr. Hodgson, Capt. Boys, nor any other observer with whose notes I am acquainted, make mention of them. The parts of Asia most frequented by the *Nyctiornis Athertoni*, are the warmer and temperate portions of Northern India, the countries of Deyra Doon, Nepaul, Assam and Aracan: Mr. Blyth states that it is also found in Tenasserim and Southern India, from which latter country, however, I have never seen examples. Every account states that it inhabits the dense jungles, and justifies the conclusion that it is very solitary in its habits, which, moreover, appear to be very similar to those of the Trogons. Mr. Hodgson, in his Notes on this species in the "Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal," speaking of the bird in the plural, says they "are of rare occurrence, and are solitary woodlanders;" they "are found in the lower and central regions of Nepaul, but seldom or never in the northern. The Nepaulese call them *Bukay-chera*; *chera* being merely a corruption of *chiria*, or bird.

"These birds feed principally on bees and their congeners, but they likewise consume great quantities of scarabæi and their like. They are of dull staid manners, and never quit the deepest recesses of the forest.

"In the Raja's shooting excursions, they are frequently taken alive by the clamorous multitude of sportsmen, some two or more of whom single out a bird and presently make him captive, disconcerted as he is by the noise."

"This beautiful bird," says Capt. Boys, "has a peculiarly wild note, and is very difficult of approach. I never obtained but one specimen, and that was procured at considerable risk, as the khud up which I followed it was a resort for wild animals of all kinds; indeed, while engaged in its pursuit, a leopard set up his hideous snarling from the opposite side of the khud; my servant quietly walked off unperceived, and it was not until I had brought down the bird that I was conscious of being alone: having no desire to meet the leopard, who had been roused by the firing, I walked away as quietly but as quickly as possible. The khud is an awkward one, N.W. of Bumourie, with a small stream running through it. Many species of Woodpecker abound in the neighbourhood."

The sexes, when they have attained their fully adult plumage, are so similar that they can only be distinguished by the smaller size of the female; the youthful dress, on the contrary, is characterized by a uniformity of tint on the upper surface, and by the absence of the blue gular plumes, which renders their immaturity very conspicuous.

Crown of the head verditer blue; cheeks, sides of the neck, all the upper surface, wings and tail sap green; down the centre of the throat and neck a number of long pendent feathers, of which those on the throat are verditer blue, and those on the breast deep bluish green margined with verditer blue; under surface of the wings and tail deep buff; under surface buff streaked with dull green; irides reddish brown; bill blue-grey; legs pale green in front, light brown behind.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size, on the *Dictamnus Himalayanus*.