

TANYSIPTERA NIGRICEPS, *Sclater*.

Black-headed Tanysiptera.

Tanysiptera nigriceps, Sclater, P. Z. S. 1877, p. 105.—Salvadori, Ann. Mus. Civic. Genov. x. p. 303.

WRITING in 1871, the late Mr. Blyth insisted strongly on the fact that the Cape-York Peninsula of Australia ought to be united in a zoo-geographical sense to the Papuan subregion as we now understand it. The main reason was, of course, the presence of a Cassowary in the above-named peninsula; but, in addition to this, there are also some very remarkable forms of birds which are of a Papuan type and were known to occur only in New Guinea and in the north-eastern peninsula of Australia, such, for instance, as *Pitta mackloti* and *Tanysiptera sylvia*. It is more particularly of the latter that I would now speak.

The last-named beautiful Kingfisher, which I had the pleasure of describing as long ago as 1850, differed at once from all the other *Tanysipterae* in its fawn-coloured under surface; and for many years it was a very rare bird in European museums. More recently, however, numerous specimens have been collected in the Cape-York Peninsula, and forwarded to this country; but its occurrence in New Guinea was until lately somewhat conjectural. All doubt on this point has now been set at rest by the researches of Signor D'Albertis, who procured two specimens in Hall Bay, in South-eastern New Guinea; for, although Count Salvadori mentioned to me certain differences of plumage observable in the New-Guinea birds, I believe that these are not any of specific importance, and that they are indications of immaturity in the examples examined by him.

Now, as most of my readers are aware, there lie to the eastward of New Guinea certain large and important islands (New Britain, New Ireland, and the Solomon Islands); and the more we know of the zoology of these islands the more do we see that their fauna is Papuan in its character, having little in common with Australia or with Oceania. Of New Britain and New Ireland we know very little ornithologically; but our knowledge has been increased during the past twelve months by the very interesting investigations of Mr. George Brown, C.M.Z.S., who sent a collection of birds from the above-named localities and from Duke-of-York Island to Dr. Sclater, by whom an account of the collection has been published in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society' for 1877. The specimens themselves have now become the property of the Marquis of Tweeddale, to whom I am indebted for the opportunity of figuring some of the most interesting novelties. Most of the species sent by Mr. Brown are either Papuan or at least are closely allied to New-Guinea species; and it was highly interesting to find in the Kingfisher here figured a representative, not of the brilliant blue-and-white forms, such as *Tanysiptera galatea*, *T. nais*, &c., but of *T. sylvia*, the Cape-York species. Like the latter, it wants the great racket or spatule at the end of the long tail-feathers, such a pronounced feature in most of the *Tanysipterae*, and it has the same tendency to cross these two long rectrices; in fact it is very closely allied to *T. sylvia*, but is at once recognizable by its black head.

The following is a description of the type specimen:—

Head, neck, mantle, and scapulars jet-black, as also the lores, sides of face, and ear-coverts; in the centre of the back a large dorsal patch of white; rump also white; upper tail-coverts particoloured, white on the inner web, black on the outer one; lateral tail-feathers black, washed with blue on the outer web; the two long centre feathers white, with slightly dilated ends, the shafts white, the outer edges blue; the next feather on each side black, the shafts black, white for the greater part of the inner web, washed with blue on the outer; wings blue, more brilliant on the least coverts adjoining the back, the quills black on the inner webs; cheeks and under surface of body light cinnamon; the under tail-coverts whitish; flank-feathers somewhat varied with black edgings, as also the thigh-feathers; sides of the lower back black, bordering the white rump; under wing-coverts cinnamon-colour, like the breast, some of the outermost and greater series edged with blackish; quills dusky below, whitish along the base of the inner web; bill coral-red.

Total length 11·7 inches, culmen 1·5, wing 3·65, tail 7·0, tarsus 0·6.

The figure in the Plate is drawn from the typical example, and represents the species of about the natural size.