

PITTA MAXIMA, Müll. & Schl.

Great Pitta.

- Pitta maxima*, Müll. & Schl. Verh. Nat. Gesch. Ned. Ind. Zool. p. 14.—Westerm. Bijdr. Dierk. p. 45, *Pitta*, pl. 1.—Gray, Gen. B. i. p. 213.—Wallace, Ibis, 1859, p. 112, 1860, p. 197.—Schl. Vog. Nederl. Ind. *Pitta*, p. 30.—Gray, Hand-l. B. i. p. 296.
- Brachyurus maximus*, Bp. Consp. i. p. 253.—Elliot, Monogr. Pittidæ, pl. 12.
- Gigantipitta maxima*, Bp. Consp. Vol. Anisod, p. 7.
- Pitta gigas*, Wallace, Malay Arch. ii. p. 3.

THERE are several species of Ant-Thrushes which are nearly, if not quite, equal to the present bird in size; so that the specific name of *maxima* would be by no means justified, if naturalists were content to class all these birds under the heading of genus *Pitta*. By many writers, however, the large Ant-Thrushes of Malaisia and the eastern Himalayas are generically separated as *Hydornis*; and Mr. George Robert Gray was inclined to range the present bird under the same heading. In this I cannot agree; I think that it should be kept along with the true *Pittæ*, of course in the short-tailed group. Whether the latter section should be regarded as constituting a separate genus is quite another matter; I consider this much more feasible. Throughout the present work, however, I have retained these particoloured Ant-Thrushes under the genus *Pitta* in preference to *Brachyurus*, and therefore adhere to it in the present instance.

The habitat of this beautiful bird is the Moluccan island of Gilolo. Very little has been recorded of its habits. Mr. Wallace, in his 'Malay Archipelago,' writes that during his stay in the above-mentioned island his boy Ali shot "a pair of one of the most beautiful birds of the east—*Pitta gigas*, a large Ground-Thrush, whose plumage of velvety black above is relieved by a breast of pure white, shoulders of azure blue, and belly of vivid crimson. It has very long and strong legs, and hops about with such activity, in the dense tangled forest bristling with rocks, as to make it very difficult to shoot." From the above short note of Mr. Wallace's we can imagine what a beautiful sight it must be to see this finely plumaged bird in its native forests; and even in a tropical island like Gilolo, where brilliantly coloured birds abound, there can be few to compete with the subject of our present article.

No description of the bird is necessary, as it stands alone among the Pittidæ, and has no near allies. The Plate gives a correct idea of the plumage; and the principal figure is full-sized.