

ARTAMUS MAXIMUS, Meyer.

Meyer's Wood-Swallow.

Artamus maximus, Meyer, Sitz. k. Akad. Wien, lxi. part 1, p. 203.—Beccari, Ann. Mus. Civic. Genov. vii. p. 710 (1875).—Sclater, Ibis, 1876, p. 248.

THE genus *Artamus* is one of those peculiar forms of bird life which do not seem to have any immediate allies in the natural system; and for many years it has puzzled ornithologists where these Wood-Swallows should be placed. I can hardly subscribe to the opinion of Mr. Wallace, who places them near the Starlings from their wing-structure; for at the same time their habits are not those of Sturnine birds. But I must reject the arrangement of the late Mr. Gray, who places several Shrikes, such as *Leptopterus* and *Cyanolanius*, in the genus *Artamus*. Whether the curious African genus *Pseudochelidon* is really allied to *Artamus* I cannot determine; but I should think it more probably a Shrike-like form, in which case we should have *Artamus* as a genus inhabiting only the Indian and Australian regions. As we proceed southwards towards New Guinea we find the species increasing in number, until we meet with the metropolis of the genus in Australia, whence it extends to New Caledonia, and even to the Fiji Islands.

When Dr. Meyer described the present species, and bestowed upon it the name of *maximus*, he was scarcely justified in doing so. That it is one of the largest Wood-Swallows discovered, is true; and it will be seen by a comparison of the measurements that it exceeds slightly the newly discovered *Artamus insignis*, which is very nearly its equal in size; but *A. monachus* of Celebes is quite as long as *A. maximus*, and has even a stronger bill. In addition to the large dimensions, the black coloration of Meyer's Wood-Swallow makes it a very characteristic species.

We know very little about the habits of the present bird. Dr. Beccari, in his interesting letter on the ornithology of New Guinea, gives the following note:—" *Artamus maximus* is very common from 3000 to 5000 feet, and has the same habits as *A. papuensis*. It is enough to say that it flies like a Swallow, and sits on the branches of dead trees, especially in the middle of plantations. I have only got one or two specimens, because, through some fatality, I missed all the shots I fired." The above seems to comprise all that has been published respecting this fine Wood-Swallow, which doubtless does not differ in its economy from the other *Artami*.

In a specimen of this bird from Atam, recently lent to me by Mr. A. Boucard, I notice that the bill is almost white, whereas in the typical example it is blue. I fancy that this variation in colour is due to the fading of the bill after death. The following description is taken from the type specimen lent me by Dr. Meyer:—

General colour above black, including the wings and tail, the two latter with a slight slaty gloss; all the feathers slaty grey at base; rump and upper tail-coverts white; sides of face, sides of neck, throat, and fore neck black, like the back; remainder of under surface of body pure white; under wing-coverts and axillaries white, the small coverts along the outer edge of the wing black; quills greyish below. Total length 7·5 inches, culmen 0·8, wing 6·3, tail 2·8, tarsus 0·75.

The principal figure in the Plate represents the species of the size of life, and is drawn from the type specimen kindly lent me by Dr. Meyer.