

By far the most interesting account of the bird and its habits is from the pen of Mr. Swinhoe; and I take the liberty of transcribing it from the pages of 'The Ibis' for 1861 and 1863, where he says:—"This is the sacred bird of the great Honam Temple, Canton, in the courtyard in front of which are some venerable banyans and a few towering cotton-trees (*Bombax malabaricum*). On the higher branches of the former the small flat wicker nests of the Night-Heron may be seen in all directions, some only a foot or so from others; and the croaking and flapping and fighting that goes on overhead bears some distant resemblance to the crowded deck of an emigrant steamer on first encountering a turbid sea. The granite slabs that form the pavement beneath these trees are so bedaubed with the droppings of old and young, that permission to scrape them clean daily might prove a fine speculation for the guano-collector. The birds, from the protection afforded them, are remarkably tame, and we could stand beneath the trees and watch them without their evincing the slightest fear. This was in April. Some might be seen sitting on their nests, with their long legs bent under them, the weight of their bodies resting for the most part on the tarsal joint—others standing on a single leg close by, with shortened neck, the beak and head occasionally moving partially round as on a pivot—others flapping to and fro, ruffling up their head-gear and occasionally sparring together. In their various movements the dark-green black of the head and back, with the thin white occipital streamers flowing and quivering over it, gave a quaint though not ungainly look to the birds. From some of the nests we heard a subdued chattering, like the cry of young; and it was to feed these hungry mouths that the parents were constantly leaving the trees to seek for food at all times of the day, while others were returning with supplies. As the sun set they became still more active. While I sat watching them from a neighbouring roof-top in the evening, numbers emerged from the inky darkness and, one by one, settled on the stark, bare, outstanding arms of the cotton-tree. After resting for a little time like gaunt spectres on the tree-top, off they went, one after the other, with a "*kwa*," seldom more than two in the same direction. As darkness set in, many returned, and the noise and hubbub from the trees rose to a fearful pitch. Until night hid them from my view, I could see the old birds going and coming, and hear the clamour of the young. What kind of nocturnal slumbers the priests enjoyed in the temple below I never took the trouble to inquire, though I have little doubt that, from constant use, the noise of these *croakers* has become quite essential to their good night's rest."

"I fully expected to find in Formosa the Red-backed Night-Heron of the Philippines, and was annoyed to discover that it was still our European friend that prevailed. This bird was building abundantly in the fine old banyans in the city of Taiwanfoo. In summer, when the young require incessant feeding, it is not unusual to meet the Night-Heron abroad during the day searching for food; but at other seasons it is strictly a night-bird, roosting in daylight in company, among osiers or bamboos, on the banks of inland waters, and rambling about in the twilight and darkness of night in search of food. In the darkest nights their loud *kwa* may be heard as they wing their way overhead. The Chinese call them *Am-kong-cheow*, or bird of darkness, and look upon them with superstitious dread. They are thought to have some connexion with evil spirits; and as it is the Chinese custom to propitiate the evil demons, that they may not play any of their mad pranks on humanity, so they give protection to these their birds. In large cities superstition is laughed down, and not so prevalent; we therefore, in the Formosan capital, were not thought to commit any great sin in disturbing the ill-hallowed bird; but among the country-people at Tamsuy, the villagers for miles round would flock to us when we were out with guns, and beg us not to disturb a colony of Night-Herons that had commenced nesting-operations in a fine bamboo-grove. This plantation of tall bamboos, mixed occasionally with longans and other trees, was on a hemp-farm of four acres, which it entirely encircled. The flock of Night-Herons, about two hundred or more in number, showed themselves about this wood for the first time in March. For a fortnight they merely made it their roosting-site for the day. In April all was excitement, fighting, and building; and towards the middle of the month many of the birds were laying. In the first few days of April a large colony of *Herodias garzetta* came to the same trees; and about the middle of the month a large flock of *Buphus coromandus*. At first the confusion was very great, the flocks of the several species coming into constant collision; but before the end of the month all seemed amicably arranged, and you would often see on the same tree several nests of the three distinct Herons, the females sitting and the males standing by to protect. This large mingled heronry was a most interesting sight; and many times on a fine evening have I taken boat and crossed over to the Heron-farm to view it. A small wood of large trees stood close by the huts, and these a party of *Ardea cinerea* had made their home; and here and there among the bamboos you could see a few *Herodias eulophotes*. Thus within the precincts of these few acres one had an opportunity of observing the habits of no less than five species of Herons. I have seen many heronries in different parts of China and Formosa, but none so large or so excitingly interesting as the one on the Tamsuy river. It was a sight not easily to be forgotten."

The Plate represents an adult and a young bird, about two-thirds the natural size.