

BUBULCUS RUSSATUS.

Buff-backed Heron.

- Ardea russata*, Wagl. Syst. Av., *Ardea*, sp. 12.
—— *æquinoctialis*, Mont. Trans. Linn. Soc., vol. iv. p. 197.
—— *bubulcus*, Savig. Descr. de l'Égypte, Zool., tom. i. p. 298, tab. 8. fig. 1.
—— *Veranyi*, Roux, Orn. Prov., tom. ii. p. 316.
Buphus russatus, Boie, Isis, 1826, p. 356.
Erodius russatus, Macgill. Man. of Orn., vol. ii. p. 135.
Egretta russata, Macgill. Hist. of Brit. Birds, vol. iv. p. 474.
Bubulcus ibis, Bonap. Tab. Syn. des Hér., Compt. Rend. de l'Acad. Sci., tom. xl. p. 722.
Herodias bubulcus, Allen, in Ibis, 1863, p. 32.

DEVONSHIRE is the only English county that can claim this bird as forming part of its avifauna; and that claim rests upon the occurrence of the single specimen shot by Mr. F. Cornish, at South Allington, in the parish of Chivelstone, and presented by Mr. Nicholas Luscombe, of Kingsbridge, to the celebrated Colonel Montagu, by whom the circumstance was communicated to the Linnean Society on the 5th of May, 1807, and recorded in the ninth volume of their 'Transactions,' as above quoted.

"This elegant little species of Heron," says Col. Montagu, "which was shot in the southern promontory of Devon, very near the coast between the Start and the Prawl, in the latter end of October 1805, had been for several days in the same field, attending some cows and picking up the insects which were found in its stomach. It was by no means shy, and was fired at a second time before it was secured." This specimen is still preserved in the British Museum.

Beyond the above meagre notice, nothing had been placed on record respecting this beautiful species in any ornithological work; but, thanks to the labours of the modern observers who have communicated their researches to 'The Ibis,' I am able to furnish a number of interesting details as to its habits, manners, &c.

The native country of the Buff-backed Heron is Africa, where it is more or less abundant from north to south, but is especially numerous in the basin of the Nile; it is also met with in certain parts of Persia and Asia Minor, and less frequently in Greece, Turkey, Dalmatia, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. In India and other Oriental countries, its place is occupied by an allied species, the *Bubulcus coromandus*, with which it has been confounded, but which, says Dr. Jerdon, differs from the present bird by its longer tarsi, the more vivid hue and greater extent of the golden yellow feathering, and the less denuded orbits; and Mr. Swinhoe, who also regards them as distinct, remarks:—"The eastern bird can, even in its white plumage, be distinguished by the greater length of its bill, which is generally half an inch longer, and by its more naked tibiae. In the summer plumage the distinctness is more marked. The African has the crown of its head and its under neck only buff-colour, tinged with a vinaceous hue; in the other the entire head, neck, and breast are clothed with orange-coloured feathers, those of the breast only having a slight vinaceous tinge; the centre of the back is also orange, but the long loose dorsal plumes are light vinaceous pink. The specific term *russata* has been applied by Temminck to the African bird; *coromanda* is an old name for the eastern one."

In Egypt, the Buff-backed Heron frequents the banks of the Nile, which, however, it often leaves to follow the cattle and the ploughman, just as the Rooks and Gulls are wont to do in England. The Arabs, who appear to know less of the Ibis than we do in Europe, affect to consider the present bird to be that species, and frequently direct the attention of travellers to it as the sacred bird.

I now proceed to give the observations of some of the writers in 'The Ibis' alluded to above, and, in justice to them, in their own words.

The Buff-backed Heron, says Mr. Taylor, is "excessively numerous all through Egypt, and very tame and familiar. It especially affects the society of cattle. I have often seen it standing on the backs of buffaloes and cows. From this propensity to fraternize with cattle, it is called 'Cow-Bird' by the English. I never saw an example with the elongated buffy plumes on the back, which are considered to be characteristic of the species. All that I met with had the entire plumage pure white, except the crown of the head, which was buff. I conclude from this that the elongated dorsal plumes are peculiar to the breeding-season, as I cannot believe that the very numerous specimens which came under my observation were all in immature plumage. This bird does duty on the Nile as the *Ibis*, being generally pointed out to travellers by dragoons, &c., as the real *Ibis religiosa*."—*Ibis*, 1859, p. 50.

"Perhaps the most conspicuous bird that catches the eye of the traveller in Egypt," says Mr. Stafford