ERYTHROPITTA CÆRULEITORQUES.

Red-headed Pitta.

Pitta cæruleitorques, Salvad. Ann. Mus. Civ. Genov. ix. p. 53 (1876-77)—Rowley, Ornithological Miscellany, ii. p. 324, pl. lxiv. (1877).—Meyer, tom. cit. p. 327.—Gould, Birds of New Guinea, part vii. (1878).

In an interesting communication made by Dr. Meyer to Mr. Dawson Rowley's 'Ornithological Miscellany' that gentleman points out the distribution of the red-breasted *Pittæ* in the Malayan archipelago, and shows how each of the species which I consider should be kept under the heading of *Erythropitta* in the present work has its own separate area of distribution, however closely they may be allied as species. Thus *Erythropitta celebensis* is the species of Celebes, *E. palliceps* of Siao, *E. cæruleitorques* of Sangi (Sanghir), *E. erythrogastra* of the Philippines, *E. cyanonota* of Ternate, *E. rufiventris* of Batchian and Gilolo, and *E. mackloti* of Papua and its islands, as well as the northern part of Australia. Many other instances of a similar distribution could be brought forward.

Count Salvadori, in his original description of the present species, writes as follows:—"This species and the *P. erythrogastra* of the Philippines are the only species of the subgenus *Erythropitta* which have a blue band on the neck; and *P. cæruleitorques* differs from the above-named bird principally in the more uniform red colour of the head, which becomes much brighter on the neck, by the absence of the two dull bands on the side of the crown, by the reddish-brown colour of the sides of the head and throat, by the blue colour of the breast being more extended crosswise and separated from the red of the abdomen by a well-marked black band, and by the somewhat larger dimensions."

Dr. Meyer obtained several examples of the blue-ringed Pitta from Sangi, at Tabukan, on the north-east coast of the island, no difference being observable in the colour of the sexes; and I give the following extract from his remarks communicated to the 'Ornithological Miscellany:'—

"This species inhabits the largest island of the Sangi group, and is an interesting one, because it is more closely allied to *Pitta erythrogastra* from the Philippines in the north than to the two species from islands immediately to the south (viz. *Pitta palliceps* from Siao, and *Pitta celebensis* from Celebes), and therefore presents a good example of variation of species in consequence of separated insular habitat. Good examples for the same point of view are, amongst others, *Pitta cyanonota* from Ternate, and *Pitta rufiventris* from Halmahera, in their relation to the species from the neighbouring islands (New Guinea, Celebes, the Sangi and the Philippine Islands). *Pitta palliceps* on Siao is as slightly different from *Pitta celebensis* on Celebes as *Pitta cæruleitorques* on Sangi is from *Pitta erythrogastra* on the Philippines. That insular separation is a reason for such variations is not to be doubted, in my opinion; nevertheless we cannot examine this subject more closely at present. *Pitta celebensis*, for instance, does not show the least difference over the whole extent of the island of Celebes. My specimens from the neighbourhood of Makassar resemble exactly those from Manado (nearly the north and south points of this long island); whereas when we cross over to the closely neighbouring island of Siao, immediately a variation appears in *Pitta palliceps*. Whether this variation has specific value or not is of no importance at all upon this part of the question. Authors do not agree, and never will agree, at least for some time to come: one says it has, the other says it has not; but all see that a difference exists; and this is of value, notwithstanding its smallness, because it is a constant one. That insular separation does not always produce constant differences is known; and I only mention it here for this reason—that it refers to a closely allied species, *Pitta macklotii*. I got a large series of specimens on New Guinea in different places, viz. at Dorè, Andei, Passim, Inwiorage, Rubi, and on the Elephant Mountains, and some on the island of Jobi in the north of Geelvink Bay. I first thought that the Jobi specimens differed by brighter colours in general, and noted this difference in my diary; but now, in the cabinet, I do not see the slightest difference from several of the New-Guinea specimens."

The following description is a translation of the original one given by Count Salvadori:—

Head above red, the latter colour perceptibly brighter towards the hind neck; sides of head and throat brownish red; a very broad patch of black on the lower throat; a blue band round the hind neck, another very broad one on the breast, the latter succeeded by a band of black; the wings, upper tail-coverts, and tail bluish lead-grey; back, scapulars, and sides of breast olivaceous; abdomen and under tail-coverts very bright red; tips of the longer under tail-coverts blue; primaries marked in the middle with a white spot; a white spot near the bend of the wing; bill and feet dusky.

Total length 6 inches, culmen 1·0, wing $4\frac{5}{8}$, tail $1\frac{1}{2}$, tarsus $\frac{5}{8}$.

I owe the opportunity of figuring this species to the kindness of two friends, Count Salvadori and Mr. George Dawson Rowley, both of whom lent me their specimens.

[R. B. S.]