

MELAMPITTA LUGUBRIS, *Schl.*

Black Ground-Thrush.

Melampitta lugubris, Schl. N. T. D., iv. p. 47.—Sclater, Proc. Zool. Soc., 1873, p. 696.—Gould, Birds of New Guinea, pt. 2.

WHAT are the natural affinities of this most curious bird? is a question which will exercise the ingenuity of ornithologists for some time to come. The generic appellation *Melampitta*, or "Black Ground-Thrush," bestowed upon it by Professor Schlegel, shows that by that eminent ornithologist the bird was evidently considered a near ally of the genus *Pitta*; and this is the position which I myself would assign to it. But the interesting aspect of the question still remains with regard to the affinities of the Mascarene genus *Philepitta*, another systematic puzzle to ornithologists. As the name of the latter genus implies, it was considered to be a relation of the Pittidæ, in which family it has generally been included; but Mr. Sharpe has referred it to the Paradiseidæ—an indication of the difficulty presented by the structural peculiarities of the bird.

An important link between *Pitta* and *Philepitta* seems to be offered in the present species, which unites the general appearance of a true Ground-Thrush with something of that velvety plumage for which *Philepitta* is famous; and therefore I cannot but regard this discovery of Baron von Rosenberg's as of the highest interest to the ornithologist, not only as uniting genera whose affinities were doubtful, but also as exhibiting another of the mysterious links which unite the fauna of Madagascar and certain portions of the Malayan archipelago.

Nothing is known of the present species beyond the fact that it was discovered in the northern peninsula of New Guinea, and was afterwards met with by d'Albertis in the Atam district.

The entire bird is black with a slight bluish tinge, the feathers of the forehead, region of the eye, lores, base of mandible, and chin having a velvety appearance. The length is about six inches.

My Plate is taken from Signor d'Albertis's Atam specimen, and represents the species of the size of life.