

EUCICHLA GURNEYI.

Gurney's Pitta.

Pitta gurneyi, Hume, Stray Feathers, vol. iii. p. 296.—Gould, Birds of Asia, part 29.—Hume & Davison, Stray Feathers, 1878, p. 244.
Brachyurus gurneyi, Hume, tom. cit. no. 6, pl. 3.

WE are indebted to the pages of 'Stray Feathers' for a knowledge of this new and magnificent Pitta; and I can readily conceive with what real pleasure Mr. Allan Hume took up his pen to write a description of so interesting a bird.

Mr. Hume has given a most careful description of both sexes of the *Pitta gurneyi*, and his reason for dedicating this bird to his friend Mr. J. H. Gurney. He remarks:—

"No more beautiful or interesting addition to our Indian avifauna has been made for many a long day; and its discovery is one of the results of the systematic ornithological survey of the Tenasserim Provinces which for the past two years has been vigorously prosecuted by my curator Mr. William Davison and my whole staff.

"Though conspicuously different from any one of them, this new species is most nearly allied to *P. cyanura*, Gmel. (*guiana*, P. L. S. Müll.), *P. schwaneri*, Temm., *P. boschi*, S. Müll.

"There is the same cuneiform blue tail, the same comparatively small bill, the same more or less rufous olivaceous upper surface, the same difference in the sexes, an orange-brown replacing on the head of the female the more marked colours of that portion of the male.

"The habitat of this fine bird is Tenasserim, where it is a seasonal visitant to the evergreen forests of the southernmost portions of the province. Mr. Davison, who collected the specimens, gives the following note on their habits:—

"This is apparently only a migratory species in Tenasserim, and occurs, so far as I have observed, only in the southern portion of the province. Laynah was the most northern locality at which I observed it, and Kenong within the estuary of the Pakchan, but on the Siamese or southern side, the most southern.

"A few specimens begin to make their appearance in the forests round Malewoon and Bankasoon (where my specimens were mostly collected) about the 10th or so of February; but they remain scarce during February, March, and the first two weeks in April. After that they become rather more numerous, and continue so to the end of May and until the regular monsoon rains have set in, when they rapidly disappear, though even in July a few specimens may be met with. The bird confines itself to the evergreen forests, never, that I am aware, venturing into the open or even into gardens. It is shy and retiring, and on the slightest indication of danger hops rapidly away, managing generally to keep some obstacle intervening between itself and the approaching person. It is by no means a common bird even when it does occur; and it was only by persistently hunting them, and never missing an opportunity of securing a bird where possible, that I and my people succeeded in getting the number we did.

"Its habits are like those of other members of the genus, keeping to the ground; it feeds on snails, worms, slugs, and insects of all kinds. When disturbed, unless closely pressed, it seldom flies, but hops rapidly away, until it gains the cover of some tangled cane-brake or other refuge, where it remains until satisfied that all danger has passed, when it emerges again into the more open spots. Favourite resorts are the narrow valleys lying between the hills. These, though densely wooded, contain little or no undergrowth.

"The note is quite that of *Pitta*, but yet differs notably from that of the other species. When suddenly come upon or otherwise alarmed it utters a peculiar note, a sort of *kir-r-r*. It has a habit of jerking up its tail and dropping its wings slightly as it hops along, which I have never observed in its congeners.

"As above mentioned, it is almost exclusively a ground-bird; but one evening I shot a male high up in a tree; it attracted my attention by the peculiar short double note it was uttering, quite unlike its ordinary note, and every time it uttered it, it flapped its wings and jerked up its tail. Usually it is found singly, occasionally a couple together. During the morning and evening they call, and may then be heard answering one another in all directions."

The figures in the Plate represent, and are drawn from, a pair of birds kindly given to me by Mr. Hume.