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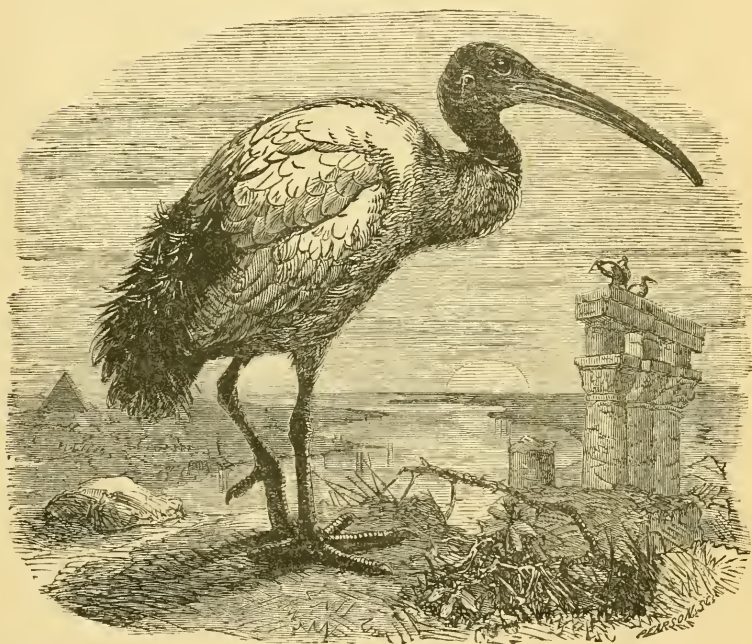
# THE IBIS,

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# THE IBIS.

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I.—*Notes on some Birds of the Canary Islands.*

By E. G. MEADE-WALDO.

BEING obliged to spend some months in the Canary Islands last winter, I devoted myself almost entirely to observing and making a small collection of the birds. I landed in Tenerife early in October and left again in June; so I saw something of both the autumn and spring migrations. In February I went to the island of Gomera, to which I paid another short visit in May, while parts of March and April I spent in Fuerteventura. Of the birds of Tenerife so much has already been written by Mr. Godman and Capt. Savile Reid, that I shall only contribute a few remarks on the habits of some of the species, and notice several additions to the migrants.

TURDUS MUSICUS.

The Song Thrush was abundant in the winter in the high woods and wherever there was sufficient covert; a few came down to within 1500 feet of the sea; they were always remarkably wild.

TURDUS PILARIS.

I saw a Fieldfare which had been shot on the 19th of March close to Orotava.

## TURDUS MERULA.

Blackbirds swarmed in the high forests during the winter ; there was a great preponderance of males. The main body left about the 30th of January, and those which remained to breed did not nest early.

## RUTICILLA PHŒNICURUS.

I saw a male Redstart on two occasions close to my house near Orotava.

## CYANECULA WOLFI.

A boy showed me two White-spotted Bluethroats which he had shot near Laguna ; and as he thought a good deal of them, I expect they are rare stragglers.

## ERITHACUS RUBECULA.

The Robin of Tenerife has the red on its breast of a dark reddish orange and the white of the abdomen and lower part of the breast very pure, the red of the throat extending a short way only. I mention this because in Gomera the Robin has the breast of a pale dirty orange, the colour extending downwards much farther than in the Tenerife bird, and the white of the breast is nowhere pure, but of a dark fawn. These differences are constant. It has been stated that the Redbreast of the Canary Islands belongs to the dark northern form ; but my Tenerife birds are much darker and brighter than ours, while the Gomera variety is much paler and generally duller. All my Gomera Redbreasts have a hook to the upper mandible, which is wanting in my Tenerife ones.

## MUSCICAPA GRISOLA.

I saw one Spotted Flycatcher that had been shot in the winter near Laguna.

## SERINUS CANARIUS.

Large numbers of Canaries ascend to the high mountains to breed, going up about the end of April ; they were only breeding in the end of May. Those which remained in the valleys bred very early, and I found a nest with hard-set eggs early in February.

## FRINGILLA TEYDEA.

I saw a great deal of the Teydean Chaffinch, which goes about during the winter in small, rather scattered flocks, sometimes associating with the Azorean Chaffinch, *F. tintillon*; in fact, I generally found them near other birds. Its call-note is a loud double chirp, sometimes like that of the Azorean Chaffinch, but very easily distinguished by its plaintive ring. It is a very late breeder, only commencing to build at the end of May. I found several pairs breeding in a stretch of pine-forest at an elevation of nearly 6000 feet, where there were many very large lichen-covered trees, and where the forest had been less hacked about than is usually the case in the Canaries. With the exception of a few Tits and Goldcrests, a pair of young Kites just on the wing, some Great Spotted Woodpeckers, and a pair of Sparrow-Hawks, whose nest I found, they were the only birds there. I heard many cocks singing a regular Chaffinch's song—several low notes, gradually rising and ending in three or four harsh ones. I found a nest in course of construction by watching the birds carry materials; they were perfectly fearless, collecting lichen &c. within a few feet of where we stood, and working away while we were under their tree. I went up to this forest again on the 4th of June, hoping to get eggs, but found it impossible to reach the nest, though I got on to the branch on which it was placed; it was completed, and from the behaviour of the birds I think they had laid. Three out of four other nests found this day were at the end of thin and decaying branches and inaccessible; they were probably empty, as in each case the parent birds were carrying materials. I got up to one nest, which was half built, very neat and round, like a Chaffinch's, but with a few pine-needles worked in; the hen came and added materials while I was sitting in the tree. I did not find these birds in the *Retama*, where Webb and Berthelot mention having found them, but in all cases they were in the pines or in the tree-heath and laurel among the pines; they were always very fearless. The plumage of the female is much bluer in summer than in winter. I am afraid the days of this species are numbered, as the

natives have now a great idea of their value, and shoot them on every possible occasion.

CYPSELUS UNICOLOR.

A very few Swifts pass the winter in Tenerife; the only one I shot there was apparently *C. unicolor*. Large numbers of *C. pallidus* arrived early in February, and the main body of *C. unicolor* later.

AQUILA, sp. inc.

I saw several Eagles during November and early in December, but never near enough to be sure of the species.

FALCO PEREGRINUS.

I saw Peregrines on three occasions in Tenerife; they all struck me as being very small tiercels, but only one was near to me; he had a very blue back and very black checks\*.

ARDEA PURPUREA.

A very fine Purple Heron that had been shot at Laguna was shown to me.

ARDEA BUBULCUS.

I saw three Buff-backed Herons during the winter, two alive and one that had just been shot.

PORZANA PARVA.

The Little Crake has occurred at Laguna; I saw one that a boy had caught.

GLAREOLA PRATINCOLA.

A man shot a Collared Pratincole, which I saw in the flesh.

Of the Waders I saw and obtained examples of the Grey Plover, Ring Plover, Kentish Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin, Curlew-Sandpiper, Sanderling, Common and Wood Sandpipers, Redshank, Greenshank, and Whimbrel, the last-mentioned in pairs up to 5th of June. I never found Snipes numerous, but they are said to be so on some occasions. Woodcocks appeared to be more numerous in the breeding-season than during the

\* [Capt. Reid will be glad to learn that this species is not, as he feared, exterminated (*cf.* Ibis, 1887, p. 429).—ED.]

winter; but this was probably owing to their showing themselves more. In May I have seen as many as ten or twelve on the wing in an evening. A small piece of turf under some chestnut trees was a favourite playing-ground, and five or six would sometimes be strutting about on it at the same time. I have had them alight within two yards of me, although I was sitting quite exposed; they were all rather small birds. The only evidence of any migration was three or four seen in a barranco, not more than 1000 feet above the sea.

I saw no Herring Gull except the yellow-legged *Larus cachinnans*. Bulwer's Petrel I never shot, but saw two or three off the coast of Tenerife when on my way to Gomera. Wilson's Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*) also occurs. Three Cinereous Shearwaters (*Puffinus kuhli*) brought to me alive by some boys refused to fly away, although absolutely uninjured. If thrown up they dropped like stones, and even when left out all day and night on a parapet, it was not until the second night that two of them disappeared; the other had to be turned on to the sea, when it went off all right.

I started with a friend for my first visit to Gomera on Feb. 6th, riding across Tenerife by the valley of Santiago, and embarking in a schooner which we had ordered to meet us at San Juan, below Guia. The schooner was two days late, and we did not land at San Sebastian, the port of Gomera, until the morning of the 10th. The distance between the islands is only some fifteen miles, but the frequent calms make the journey of most uncertain length. The principal object of my visit on this occasion was to obtain specimens of *Columba laurivora*, and if possible to get some young ones alive. Nothing less likely for Wood Pigeons than the aspect of the country as seen from San Sebastian can well be imagined; not a tree, except a few palms, to be seen, barren mountains intercepted by very deep barrancos everywhere. On the beach were flocks of Kentish Plovers and a few Turnstones, while Yellow-legged Herring Gulls, Ravens, and Egyptian Vultures, with Goldfinches, Rock Sparrows, Berthelot's Pipits, and Corn Buntings, were the

most noticeable birds near the town. Having discovered and made the acquaintance of a native sportsman, I questioned him about the birds, and he told me that there were two kinds of Pigeons in the mountain-forests: one, "Paloma turque," which I recognized from his description as the common Tenerife "Paloma turquesa" (*Columba bollii*); the other, a much larger bird, called "Rabichi" or "Rabi blanca," which I saw would be *C. laurivora*.

Starting early next morning to cross the island, we climbed slowly up, beasts of burden being very hard to get and very bad in San Sebastian. At about 3000 feet we got into some low heath-scrub, where *Sylvia melanöcephala* was plentiful, also a few of the pale-coloured Robins. We saw very many Partridges (*Caccabis petrosa*), and Ravens (*Corvus tingitanus*) were in flocks and very tame. A Red Kite soared over us; but this species is comparatively scarce in Gomera, where there are but few pine trees. Blackbirds, Thrushes, Linnets, and Goldfinches were about all the other birds we saw here; at 4000 feet the heath got higher, and I saw a most brilliant cock Azorean Chaffinch. After 4300 feet we began to descend, and soon opened out large valleys and hills of evergreen forest stretching to the north. I soon heard Pigeons cooing, and recognized the voice of *C. bollii*. Goldcrests, Tits, and Chiffchaffs were here very abundant, and at dusk many Woodcocks flighted over us, squeaking and croaking, and then we felt our way gradually downwards in the dark by an almost blind track, not arriving at our destination till 10 P.M. I started early the next morning for the high forest, where my sporting friend said I should get Pigeons, accompanied by two or three peasants carrying my things, for I intended to sleep upon the Pigeon-ground. The woods were very fine, the heaths and evergreen trees of many kinds being far larger and more luxuriant in growth than any I had ever seen before. We hunted carefully through the woods that day and the next without seeing a single *C. laurivora*; but *C. bollii* was common enough, and I shot two or three for specimens, finding some of its nests, each containing one egg, and catching alive a nearly full-grown young one, a fine

male, which I have at the present time. Woodcocks were very abundant, and so were Partridges wherever the ground was sufficiently open. Tits, Goldcrests, &c. swarmed, and I feel almost sure I saw a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker; but I had come for *C. laurivora*. Getting impatient at last, I extracted from my guides that there were no "Rabichi" up in the mountains, but that they were in the Cordillera, between the mountains and the valley, and that there it was too steep and dangerous for me to shoot, owing to the wet weather, that the stones, loosened by the rains, were falling in all directions, and that the ground fell away if walked upon. The next morning at daybreak we started for the Cordillera, having got over the objections of my companions by an offer of a good reward for each "Rabichi" I killed. To-day and henceforth I dispensed with my original guide, as he had evidently thought that Pigeons were Pigeons, and that *C. bollii* would do as well as *C. laurivora*. A capital young fellow accompanied me, Luis by name, who was very keen and knew every inch of the ground, and was also well up in the birds of his island. He carried his gun and was a very fair shot, and if there were many more like him the Gomera Partridges would soon cease to be as abundant as they are at present; for a close time is unknown, and the cock Partridge, as he sits on a rock uttering his Curlew-like scream, while his mate is hatching close by, is a most favourite object for a stalk.

On the Cordillera, which was very steep indeed and covered with thick heath and laurel-scrub and with many precipices, the whole descending into the valley by a series of terraces, I found *C. laurivora* fairly abundant, flying along the face of the mountain in pairs and singly. Their light-tipped tails were very conspicuous and looked white when flying, giving them somewhat the appearance of gigantic Turtle-Doves. Their flight was peculiar, quite unlike that of any Pigeon I had ever seen, a soft flopping flight, fairly fast. I found it exceedingly difficult to get good specimens, as if shot when flying along the mountain-side the birds were mostly dashed to pieces by a fall of over 100 feet into



the scrub; but I eventually found a place in a barranco where they used to settle in some tall trees, and there I managed to get some very good birds. They varied very much in size, my finest cock being  $17\frac{1}{2}$  inches, while some were only 15 inches in length. I had on this and subsequent days many opportunities of watching them. They are very active on the ground, on which a great deal of their time appears to be spent, as one might gather from their strong muscular thighs and legs. I only heard one bird "coo," and none of those I shot proved to be nesting, very unlike the *C. bollii*, which breeds all the winter. Their flesh was capital eating and of two colours, the muscle nearest the bone being white. Their food appears to be exactly the same as that of *C. bollii*; a few, very few, *C. bollii* come on to the *C. laurivora* ground.

Three months later, May 6th, I went again to Gomera, my object this time being to get, if possible, some young *C. laurivora* alive; Canon Tristram accompanied me on this occasion. We found the Pigeons had only just begun to breed; some had laid, and others were going to do so. I had, however, one dead young one brought to me. One egg only is laid. In the crops of some shot were the blossoms of flax and a little barley; the Pigeons came down into the barley regularly to feed. When first shot the bill of *C. laurivora* is white, the nares being pink. The brown wings contrast with the pale blue rump and iridescent green neck and head, giving the bird when on the wing and flying below a patchy appearance. These two Pigeons keep to their own domains, *C. bollii* to the high mountain-forest, *C. laurivora* to the scrub-covered slopes lower down, seldom encroaching one on the other. Whether *C. laurivora* is confined to Gomera or not remains to be proved; it certainly does not occur in Tenerife, where there is no ground really suited to its habits; but I think it will very likely be found in Palma, where I intend to search for it next autumn.

*Fringilla tintillon* was very abundant in Gomera, as was also the Canary, the young of the year, in their brown plumage, being in flocks in the valleys. The little Chiffchaff with the

light-coloured tarsi was "ticking" in every direction, a note I never heard from our bird. Rabbits were fairly common, and the common rat and the house-mouse lived in the highest mountain-forests. I also saw a small bat, with short ears and fur of a bright chestnut colour.

On March 20th I started with a friend from Tenerife, *en route* for Fuerteventura, and taking a schooner from Las Palmas, in Grand Canary, found ourselves under the high peaks of Jandia at daybreak on the 22nd. Those who have travelled among the Canary Islands will know that this was good work. We had a fair wind—plenty of it—and we had just caught the schooner, which started the day and hour it was timed to start! As we coasted along, the island looked far more mountainous than I had expected it would be; but after a time a peep through the mountains showed inland a large plain, and as there was a nice beach for landing we asked the "padron" the name of the place; he told us Gran Tarajal, and that we could land there if we liked. This we agreed to, and very soon we were on the beach of Fuerteventura, an island I had longed to visit more than any other. We had a letter of introduction to a farmer in a village, which we found to be only nine miles inland; thither we determined to go, and hiring camels on the beach—some peasants had come down on seeing our boat—we started up a valley in which was a dry river-bed, with a quantity of tamarisk growing on its banks, almost the only covert I saw in the island.

Here *Sylvia melanocephala* and *S. conspicillata* were abundant, and soon afterwards I saw Sand Grouse, Cream-coloured Coursers, quantities of Short-toed Larks, Berthelot's Pipits, some Rock Pigeons, and Egyptian Vultures. On arriving at our destination, Tuineje, where we hoped to be taken in, we presented our letter, and, though utterly unexpected, "Don Lucas de Saa" turned out of his best room and made us as comfortable as possible, as his guests. In a very short time his wife, hearing what I had come for, presented me with the handsomest pair of Houbara Bustard's eggs (*Otis undulata*) that I got on the island. They are taken by the

islanders for food!!! Many were the interesting excursions about here. I was much struck with the tameness of the birds, and especially of the Thick-knees (*Ædicnemus scolopax*), which were abundant everywhere, and came even into the villages, running about almost as tame as Fowls, and would permit an approach to within ten yards. One day I saw an old bird standing close to me, plaintively whistling, and on going up to her found she was standing by two young ones, one of which was much smaller than the other; she ran away a few yards and stood watching me,—behaviour which seems to me quite extraordinary in this class of birds. The beautiful little Trumpeter Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula githaginea*) was common about all the villages, and had young on the wing by the end of March, whilst many had commenced sitting, apparently for the second time; the long trumpeter-like pipe of the cock struck me very much.

Nearly every palm tree had its colony of Spanish Sparrows, most of the wells also harboured numbers. In the same palm trees as the Sparrows there was frequently a pair of Kestrels nesting. Near here only did I see a Stonechat (*Pratincola*, sp. inc.), that appeared to me at the time unlike any I had seen before; it was not a common bird. They had bred very early, for on March 25th I got a full-grown young bird, very much the colour of a Spotted Flycatcher. I have brought home a pair and a young bird, and on comparing them find that it is a good new species, its nearest ally being *Pratincola borbonica*. I hope to give a figure and description of this bird on some future occasion.

The Short-toed Lark was the commonest bird all over the island, and Berthelot's Pipit was also exceedingly abundant. Grey Shrikes (*Lanius algeriensis*) were common everywhere, and had their young on the wing. From the same nest they were frequently of two colours, sand-coloured and grey; I saw what was, apparently, an old bird of the sandy colour. I brought alive to England a young sandy-coloured Shrike, which is now nearly clean moulted, and is a beautiful grey bird, with pure white breast; he has a decided song, and warbles away by the hour; he began this accomplishment

while quite a baby. With *L. algeriensis* occurs also *L. hemileucurus*,—at least a skin which I brought home has been so named for me.

The Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) was more abundant here than I have ever seen it before. By the end of March their young were full-grown. On the plains the Black-breasted Sand Grouse (*Pterocles arenarius*) was common, and, though it was the commencement of their breeding-season, were still in flocks. It was the exception to see pairs, but I often saw single birds; these were almost invariably hens. Another species, probably *P. a'chata*, also occurs, but I did not meet with it; the islanders call it "Ganga mora," *P. arenarius* being "Ganga parda." The flocks of *P. arenarius* were most regular in their movements, the same flocks frequenting the same parts of the desert at the same hour of the day; their principal food was a small creeping trefoil.

The Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius gallicus*) was fairly numerous and breeding; it seemed to prefer the barest parts of the desert, where the stones were mostly small. It had bred very early, for on the 23rd of March I saw a young bird almost able to fly, and also found a small young one. The old birds did not make any fuss when I was close to their young or eggs, simply running away and, when I approached, going a little further, generally creeping about 50 yards off. The eggs were very difficult to find, the only guide to their whereabouts being the scratches made by the old birds before finally fixing on a suitable place to lay.

I found the Houbara Bustard (*Otis undulata*) on all suitable ground; they preferred the plains near to the coast; their eggs were very easy to find. On March 24th a boy brought me a fine young one, which thrived well and quickly became tamed; but one moonlight night it walked out of the door and escaped. Nearly all the eggs I found were hard-set; 20th February would be their laying-time. The old birds, though shy of people on foot, were very easily approached by a little manœuvring on a donkey or camel. On one occasion, after twice riding within ten yards of a fine pair which had squatted, after being ridden after for a little

while, I sprung them on purpose, and marked them down about a quarter of a mile off. Dismounting I walked towards them, and at first could only see the male, who coolly stalked past me within thirty yards; I soon, however, saw the hen, squatting, about fifteen yards from me, and she let me look her well over before she got up, and flying round a little way, settled by the cock, and they both hurried back to where I had first found them. As this hen had either eggs or young (and from her extreme tameness I think she had young ones), it must be very unusual to find the male associating with her.

The Bustards were in small parties, pairs, and single birds; the small parties of four or five were invariably males, the pairs male and female, single birds female. I never saw a Bustard away from the desert; they appear never to come into the corn. Small snails, lizards, and a trefoil were their principal food. There were a few Song Thrushes in the tamarisks, and the islanders told me that the Blackbird occasionally occurs. A large Pipit, of which I saw many one day, I was unable to find afterwards, so I did not get a skin. I thought, of course, I could get them any time, and when I saw them I was after a cock Bustard. The only Buzzard I saw looked like the *Buteo vulgaris*; they are pretty common in the mountains.

In the neighbourhood of Puerto Cabras, on the north-east coast, there were fewer land birds, but numbers of Waders. The Kentish Plover was extremely common, breeding both near the sea and some distance inland. The Whimbrel, Sanderling, and Grey Plover were numerous; I only saw one Curlew; the Turnstone was common, the Ringed Plover rather rare. The Yellow-legged Herring Gull was more numerous than I had seen it anywhere before, and I saw one Lesser Black-backed Gull. A trip to Oliva, in the north, produced no fresh species, but birds were much more numerous than on the east coast. There is a good deal of cornland here, and at times a great many Quails; but this year the crops are wretched, owing to the drought, and there were few. On the coast near Puerto Cabras several pairs of

the Pallid Swift were nesting in a low sandstone cliff, in holes that had the appearance of Sand-Martins' holes, only larger.

Our homeward voyage was very different to our outward, for after beating against a high headwind for two days, we had to anchor near the lighthouse on the point of Jandia, and wait for a fairer wind and less of it. This, though very tedious, was the means of my obtaining a bird that I had hoped to get, but had not seen before (I had, however, been told of its existence by the islanders), the Black Oystercatcher (*Hematopus capensis*). Whether this species breeds in Fuerteventura or no, I cannot say, but I was assured it did so on the north coast and on the islands of Lanzarote and Graciosa, and the bird I shot was an old female with well-developed eggs.

Between the high mountains of Jandia and the lighthouse runs a low headland some four or five miles long by one or two wide, all of sand, slightly raised above sea-level, and covered, when we were there, with a very sweet-scented dwarf stock. All the Waders were here in numbers, and I saw a small flock of Sand Grouse and a few Coursers, but the latter were not breeding here. Ospreys were continually in sight, sometimes three or four on the wing together. My delay enabled me to lay in a good store of lizards for my Shrike, which was thriving, and apparently the only passenger on board who did not find the journey irksome. After waiting here for two days the weather improved somewhat, and we beat across to Grand Canary, arriving *five* days after leaving Puerto Cabras, the distance between the islands being fifty-four miles.

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## II.—*Ornithological Notes on the Island of Gran Canaria.*

By H. B. TRISTRAM, D.D., F.R.S.

DRIVEN by the bitter blasts of our north-eastern coast to seek a holiday under more sunny skies during the three spring months of the present year, the Canary Islands were