

XLIV.—*Notes on the Birds of Teneriffe.*

By Capt. SAVILE G. REID, R.E.

AT the end of January of the present year (1887) I fled in despair from the prolonged horrors of our English winter to the genial climate of the Canary Islands, and during a pleasant sojourn at Orotava, Teneriffe, until the middle of the following April, I made a few notes on the ornithology of that island, which may be of interest to the readers of 'The Ibis.'

I was aware that, owing to the excellent work done in previous years in that island by Messrs. Webb and Berthelot, Dr. Bolle, and Mr. F. D. Godman, there was not much prospect of anything new; but I found many interesting species and enjoyed my ornithological excursions immensely, in spite of the bad roads (always excepting the excellent "carretera," or main road) and the indifferent means of locomotion.

Through the kind intervention of Mr. Peter S. Reid, our British Vice-Consul at Orotava, well known to the native and foreign population there as "Don Pedro," I was introduced soon after my arrival to the captain of the militia, Don Benjamin Baeza, the same who in 1871 had accompanied Mr. Godman in his rambles about the island. With him I got on famously, and we were doing great things, when, alas! he suddenly sickened and died; his death putting an end to the success and pleasure of my work in a manner that I cannot attempt to describe. He was a really good fellow, who knew everybody and everything in the island, besides being a fairly good ornithologist and taxidermist and a tolerable shot. I followed the poor man to his grave a few days before we were to have gone on an expedition to the island of Fuerteventura, where we had hoped to reap a rich harvest, our preparations having been most carefully made, and everything arranged even to the hour of sailing of the schooner; which is saying a good deal in a Spanish island like Teneriffe.

The unfortunate loss of my friend and guide quite upset my plans, and I remained at Orotava the whole of the two

months of my visit; consequently my notes are confined to observations made in Teneriffe itself, and principally on the north and north-west portions of the island. It is therefore hardly desirable to tabulate the notes in any formal manner, and I think the following brief account of the general results of my work will be much more interesting.

On arriving in Teneriffe I had one or two fixed ideas in my head, thanks in a great measure to the advice of ornithological friends. These were, in the first place, to endeavour to clear up the mystery surrounding the identification of the one or more species of "Trocaz" Pigeons occurring in the Canary Islands—the *Columba laurivora* of Webb and Berthelot, the *C. bollii* of Godman, and perhaps the *C. trocaz* of Madeira and the Azores; secondly, to determine, if possible, the actual species of Buzzard, Shrike, Raven, Turtle Dove, Bustard, &c. occurring within the Canarian archipelago. I was unable to effect the satisfactory settlement of all these questions, but I trust that the information I acquired may clear up many doubtful points.

To begin with the Pigeons: an interesting subject certainly, but one requiring a visit to the other western islands of the group, notably Gomera, for a proper determination of their distribution. It was some time before I even saw a Pigeon, the shady laurel and heath forests frequented by them being high up on the mountain-side and a long ride from Orotava. I was at last rewarded, however, by obtaining a pair of birds, with nest and egg, of what is undoubtedly *C. bollii* of Godman. Three nests were found, but only one was occupied at the time. I received a second egg from another of these nests shortly afterwards. As the nest and egg of this Pigeon are perhaps almost unknown at the present time, I venture to give a few particulars.

In company with my friend Major Loyd, late 21st Hussars, I rode over a villainous path from Orotava to the mountains on the 9th March, and securing the services of an intelligent native as guide, proceeded to the laurel forest in search of the "Paloma turquesa," as they call it locally. Our guide

José told us there were only two pairs in this small patch of forest; and his statement was apparently soon verified by the discovery of two nests, both in "breso," or tree-heath (*Erica arborea*), but both empty. We saw our first Pigeon, however, and were contented. On the 16th we again rode out to the place, and were lucky enough to see a Pigeon fly off a third nest in a "haya" tree, a little lower down the hill, but close to the other two. This contained a single much-incubated egg, and is now, with the egg, in my collection. We lay in wait under shelter of neighbouring trees and obtained both birds. There is no doubt as to the species—they are *C. bollii* of Godman, with no white at the tip of the tail. All inquiries from José, as well as from intelligent natives of other parts of Teneriffe, to say nothing of the valuable testimony of Baeza himself, prove that this is *the* Pigeon of the island, and I think it doubtful if the white-tailed species, *C. laurivora*, occurs there at all.

The nests were similar to those of our familiar *C. palumbus*, slight, but tolerably compact structures of small twigs, about 10 feet from the ground. It is somewhat remarkable that only one egg is laid. My egg, above mentioned, was considerably incubated, and José, who obtained another single egg for me about a fortnight later, declared that no more were ever deposited. The eggs measure, on the average, 1.72 by 1.16 inch, and are, of course, of the ordinary Pigeon type. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the male bird returned first to the nest and was shot about half an hour after our discovery; his crop was full of the leaves of some shrub. The female did not present herself for nearly three hours, her crop being crammed with laurel-berries. They are undoubtedly very shy birds, even in the nesting-season. José assured us that they breed at intervals all the year round, which, in a climate like that of Teneriffe, is, I think, quite possible.

I regret that this is all the direct evidence I can furnish as to the distribution of the Pigeons of the Canaries. The only other skin in my collection, obtained for me subsequently by my friend Don Fernando del Hoyo, a zealous

naturalist of Orotava, is also *C. bollii*; and my theory is that *C. laurivora* (W. & B.) is not to be found in Teneriffe, though apparently numerous in the neighbouring island of Gomera. Poor Bacza, who was nine months in the latter island and killed many Pigeons there, probably over a hundred, told me they were all *C. laurivora*. This segregation of species differing so little as these two is only what might be expected in an archipelago of large islands like the Canaries, where the intervals between the islands are so wide. I was greatly disappointed at not being able to visit Gomera, but the difficulties of communication were insurmountable. The chance of three days in a wretched schooner (as experienced on one occasion by Dr. Croteh), short of provisions and water, on a voyage of some forty or fifty miles, was sufficient to damp my ardour, to say nothing of the fact that there are no roads and no hotels in Gomera, and that the people there are accounted a most uncouth and inhospitable lot by the Teneriffians—a “muy mala gente,” as they term them. When the long-promised steamer runs between the various islands, it will be a comparatively easy matter to settle the Pigeon question; and I confidently look forward to its solution within the next two or three years, for I am given to understand that the Spanish Government have at last consented to subsidize steamers carrying the local mails at regular and constant intervals.

I had very little opportunity of studying the habits of *C. bollii*, but it appears to be an uncommonly shy and wary bird, and comparatively few are obtained by the local sportsmen or “cazadores.” It must be tolerably numerous in the belt of forest between Agua mansa (the ravine where I obtained my nest, above the eastern end of the so-called valley of Orotava) and Tacoronte, for I frequently heard accounts of numbers seen in the cultivated ground below the woods, and I also noticed feathers belonging to them at the drinking-places in the woods of La Mina, above Mercedes, near the city of Laguna. But a visitor might spend months in the island before becoming aware of their existence,

nearly all those that are shot being obtained by lying in wait for them at the water.

From Baeza's account, *C. laurivora* is far more plentiful, relatively speaking, in Gomera, but there the woods are much more extensive and suited to their habits. I do not think it likely that the Madeiran form, *C. trocaz*, is ever found in the Canaries; certainly not in the western islands, Teneriffe, Gomera, Palma, and Hierro.

Before leaving the Columbidae, I may mention that the Rock Dove, *C. livia*, is very common in Teneriffe, frequenting the inland precipices as well as the rocks of the coast. Of the species of Turtle Dove visiting the island, I hope to have more to say later on.

To pass to a very different family, the Falconidae, I was at once struck, on my arrival, as every naturalist must inevitably be, by the numbers of raptorial birds constantly in sight in Teneriffe. These, on examination, resolved themselves into five species, viz.:—*Neophron percnopterus*, *Milvus iclinus*, *Buteo vulgaris*, *Accipiter nisus*, and *Falco tinnunculus*. I have little to add to Mr. Godman's excellent account of these birds (Ibis, 1872, pp. 164–167), except in the case of the Buzzard, which is somewhat unaccountably *B. vulgaris*, and not *B. desertorum* as it ought to be with due respect to geographical position. This species, the "Aguililla" of the islanders, is very common and breeds in the cliffs which form the abrupt termination of the lava-slopes immediately above the coast-line, as well as in the precipices of the crater-walls more inland. The only note I made worthy of record concerning it is that I witnessed the union of a pair near Agua mansa, the male circling round and suddenly descending upon the female, which was perched on the summit of a high isolated stack of rock in apparent ignorance of his presence, and within 200 yards of our party.

The Kestrel positively swarms, and must have a hard struggle for life, for I do not think there are any rats or mice outside the towns, and the lizards are remarkably wary. It is said to prey much on small birds; but I think the Sparrow-hawk, which is not uncommon, is the culprit in

most of the cases described by my informants. Kestrels are constantly to be seen among the houses and gardens in the middle of the town, so they may occasionally contrive to snap up a well-fed town rat or mouse.

So far as the other members of the Falconidæ occurring in the island are concerned, I have but few remarks to make about the Sparrow-hawk, which is not uncommon near Orotava and along the coast. A recently killed male specimen was brought to me at Buena Vista on the 26th February. I saw several at various times on the wing, and on one occasion, near Orotava, one of these Hawks made a very bold though unsuccessful dash at a small bird within a few yards of a large party of us. Where and when it breeds I am unable to say.

That the Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) is occasionally found in Teneriffe I am tolerably certain. I saw a small Falcon, which I recorded at the time as of this species, on the edge of the pine-woods above La Guancha; and Baeza informed me that he had shot two during his lifetime, one near the coast below Realejo, and the other near Tacoronte. He described the bird accurately, and from his knowledge of the subject I conclude there is no doubt as to these two cases. Webb and Berthelot include the Hobby in their list, but Bolle seems doubtful about it (*vide* Godman, Ibis, 1872, p. 165).

I regret that I have no information about the Peregrine. I fully expected to meet with it in the upper regions of the island, but I never saw or heard of one. Its absence, real or apparent, is the more remarkable when one considers the reliable evidence of its former occurrence, or, it may be said, abundance, given in Don José Viera's 'Diccionario de Historia Natural de las Islas Canarias,' written in 1799, a copy of which I was lucky enough to obtain. I venture to give a translation from this work:—

“The species of this noble raptorial bird found in our island has acquired considerable reputation. Edmund Scory, in his observations on Teneriffe, published by Purchas (vol. v. chap. 12), affirms that the Falcons of this island were the best and strongest that could be found in the world for

seizing and taking their prey, owing to their being of a more robust type than those of Barbary; and he relates that the Captain-General of the Canaries, amusing himself one evening in the citadel of Laguna by watching several Falcons which, with splendid impetus and skill, were dashing down upon the various water-fowl forced by the peasants with their slings to rise from the surface of the lake, counted them; also that a certain Falcon of Teneriffe, which the same Captain-General had presented to the Duke of Lerma, minister to Philip III., escaped and returned from Andalusia to its own country, performing the journey of 250 leagues in sixteen hours, and bringing with it its collar with the coat-of-arms of the Duke. Count Buffon, in his 'Natural History,' mentions this occurrence (vol. i. Birds, p. 33)."

What has become of this famous breed of Peregrines in Teneriffe? It has been exterminated, apparently. We in England know how tenaciously the much-persecuted Peregrines of our southern coasts hold their own, and it is difficult to realize the change brought about in a wild spot like Teneriffe in something less than a century, for Viera speaks of it as common in 1799.

It is somewhat strange that the Osprey (*Pandion haliaëtus*) has been so little observed in Teneriffe, where it undoubtedly occurs, for my friend, Don Ramon Gomez, has two examples in his collection, obtained by himself on the shore; and it breeds in the island of Gomera, for Dr. Crotch told me he had eggs in his possession taken there. I fancied I saw one near Orotava on one occasion, but could not identify it satisfactorily. Bacza and others assured me that it also breeds in Teneriffe, and I see no reason to doubt it, for the coast abounds in suitable nesting-sites.

Passing to the Owls, I found the Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) a common species near Orotava; an evening seldom passed without one or more being seen, and they undoubtedly breed in some thick palm trees in a villa garden just above the Grand Hotel, belonging to an English lady, Mrs. Smith, whence they were on one occasion dislodged for my inspec-

tion. I obtained several specimens near Orotava, and saw others along the north-west coast near Garaelico and Buena Vista.

The Barn Owl (*Strix flammea*) is apparently rare. My friend Gomez, the principal chemist of Orotava (who has a most creditable museum of natural history and archaeological remains), possesses a specimen; but I did not meet with one myself.

The Curator of the Botanical Gardens at Orotava, Herr Vilprecht, an intelligent observer, assured me he had seen an example of the Little Owl in the Gardens. This is not at all improbable, and I was much astonished at not meeting with some species of *Athene* in such a suitable place as Teneriffe. The absence of the Eagle Owl is remarkable in a rocky mountainous island where rabbits are fairly numerous; but I failed to hear of it, though I was continually making inquiries.

The Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) has been restricted by former writers to the upper wooded districts; but this is unquestionably an error, for it is numerous in the gardens of Orotava, and delighted us at the hotel by its song in the early spring. I have seen three or four at a time there, and a brood was hatched out during my stay. I also noticed it frequently along the sea-coast, on the north-west shore, in suitable places. It is certainly more numerous in the forest-belt, to which two other familiar species, the Robin and the Goldcrest, are confined; but, whether of late years or not, it has now obtained a permanent footing in the cultivated grounds below.

Another bird that has now become quite as common in the lower as in the forest region is the Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus rufus*), which is extremely abundant and lively in all the gardens and orchards of Orotava and elsewhere along the coast. I was sorely puzzled by the notes of this bird, which differ considerably from the well-known "chip-chop" so welcome to our ears in early spring in our English woods. The Canarian bird expresses its song at greater length in a desultory manner, though also in monosyllables resembling

the sounds "chip-cheep-cheep-chip-cheep," &c. ; and when the breeding-season arrived, and I was enabled to examine the nest and eggs, I was still more at fault, for the nests were generally four or five feet from the ground, the entrance-hole being large and near the top, the eggs being spotted with *pale* red, like those of *P. trochilus*. My specimens, however, have been submitted to several of the highest English authorities, and there is no doubt that the bird is true *P. rufus*, its notes and nesting-habits perhaps modified by its remote insular position.

I observed the Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*) in the hotel garden at Orotava, and found the Spectacled Warbler (*S. conspicillata*) extremely common in the coast-region, though absent above in the forest. My friend Major Loyd and I discovered many nests of the latter in the shallow scrub-covered ravines winding about among the cultivated fields to the eastward of Orotava. Five eggs were the usual complement, the bird sitting very close, even before incubation had commenced.

The Blackcap (*S. atricapilla*) is common in the cultivated land, and was a great feature in the hotel garden at Orotava. Its delightful song was constantly heard from the shady recesses of the thickest trees, and it was a general favourite. I never heard of the peculiar variety with the black neck and shoulders found in Madeira, nor do I believe it occurs in the Canaries. The "Capirote," as it is called, is apparently a late breeder, for I did not come across a nest up to the time of my departure; but Don F. del Hoyo has since sent me specimens of the eggs, which are exactly like those found in England. At Mercedes, near Laguna, we noticed oranges on the trees, the inside of which had been completely and neatly removed through a large hole at the top. This, we were assured by our "arrieros," was the work of the "Capirote," and we afterwards saw, in Laguna, a ripe orange fastened to the bars of a cage containing one of these birds.

I failed to meet with the Whitethroat and the Subalpine Warbler in any of my rambles, although, according to Berthelot and others, they occur in Teneriffe. I was equally

unfortunate with the Redstart and the Stonechat, though I paid a special visit to Mercedes in search of the latter.

Of the Canarian Pipit (*Anthus bertheloti*) I saw a great deal. They are very early breeders, and the first nest, found by Major Loyd near the hotel, contained three newly hatched young on the 2nd March; while in another I found three incubated eggs on the 4th of the same month. After this we examined several other nests at intervals, up to the date of our departure early in April. The nest is by no means easy to find, being artfully concealed under a tuft of weeds in broken ground. In all cases where we removed the nest we came to the conclusion that the hollow or depression in which it was placed had been scratched out and deepened by the birds, which seems to me a curious fact. The nests resemble those of our familiar Meadow Pipit, being composed of dry weed-stalks and coarse grasses, lined with finer grasses and horse-hair. The eggs, which average three in number (more are said to be laid in a second nest later on), are also very similar: greenish grey, with dark freckles all over, averaging .77 by .58 inch. This is certainly the commonest of Teneriffian birds, and is to be found breeding as high as the Cañadas, at an elevation of some 7000 feet, as well as a few feet only above the sea-level. It is a lively little bird, but not, to my mind, so objectionably squeaky and irritating as our Meadow Pipit. Like the latter, it has a feeble song, and may be seen singing on the wing. On approaching the site of a nest the old birds sneak quietly off, threading their way among the weeds like mice, and it was seldom that we could discover the nest until we had paid repeated visits to the spot.

The Ultramarine Tit (*Parus teneriffæ*) is exceeding common from the sea to the upper limit of the forest; but I failed to meet with the Great Tit in the pine trees, where it is said to occur.

Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) first appeared on the 26th February at Buena Vista. I saw quite a number of Martins (*Chelidon urbica*) flying over the houses at Orotava on the 29th March, but did not meet with the species again (*cf.* Godman, *Ibis*, 1872, p. 171).

With regard to the two Swifts found in Teneriffe, I think I may safely assert that *Cypselus pallidus* is stationary all the year round. I observed several the day I landed, 4th February, and was told by all my ornithological friends in the island that they were to be seen throughout the winter. Up to the 5th April no example of the other species (*C. unicolor*) was met with, but on that day young Baeza shot one and brought it to me. That both breed in Teneriffe is, I think, certain.

The *Fringillidæ* are numerous in the island, though the actual number of species is comparatively small. Foremost among these is, of course, the Canary (*Serinus canarius*), which, with the exception of *Anthus bertheloti*, is the commonest bird of all. It is truly a sweet songster, fully deserving its reputation; and to lie awake in the early hours of a March morning, with one's window open (think of that, ye shivering Britons!), listening to the "real wild" Canaries singing in the garden close by, is alone worth a journey to these "Fortunate" islands.

Goldfinches and Linnets are numerous, and the Common Bunting is a perfect nuisance there, as in many other places, with its harsh spluttering attempt at song. The Azorean Chaffinch (*Fringilla tintillon*) is common at a slight elevation, but does not descend to the coast-line; the male in breeding-plumage is a very handsome bird.

I was very sorry not to meet with the Teydean Chaffinch (*F. teydea*), the most interesting bird in Teneriffe, though I went to several likely places in search of it. The natives could not tell me where these birds go to during the winter, and it seems quite a mystery. Later on they appear in certain places, and are comparatively easy to obtain. Baeza and I carefully searched the pine-woods above La Guancha, where Mr. Godman obtained his specimens in 1871; but we never even heard the note of the "Pájaro azul," or "blue-bird," as they call it.

The Sparrow of Teneriffe is *Petronia stulta*, the Rock Sparrow, which is to be seen about the towns and hamlets and breeds in holes in the walls. *Passer hispaniolensis* has

been introduced some years ago, I was told, from the eastern islands, and is now asserting itself, at any rate, in Orotava, where it breeds in trees in the plaza and is not uncommon.

One of the principal objects of my visit to Fuerteventura was to observe the Trumpeter Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula githaginea*) in its wild state; but the death of poor Baeza put a stop to this. I was shown one, in a cage with a yellow Canary from Europe, which the proprietor had recently obtained from the eastern island, and which he hoped would cross with the Canary.

The Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) is only an occasional winter visitor to Teneriffe: I did not meet with it alive, but Don Ramon Gomez has a stuffed specimen in his collection. Viera, in his Dictionary, says the Chough (*Pyrrhoxorax graculus*) has been obtained a few times in Teneriffe; but it is strange that it should be practically confined to the island of Palma, where it breeds in considerable numbers in the walls of the old crater, or "caldera." My friend Don F. del Hoyo sent me a good pair from that place. There are plenty of suitable spots for it in Teneriffe, but it has never migrated from its original home to take possession of them.

[To be continued.]

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XLV.—*Notes on a Collection of Birds made by Mr. John Whitehead on the Mountain of Kina Balu, in Northern Borneo, with Descriptions of new Species.* By R. BOWDLER SHARPE, F.L.S. &c.

(Plates XIII. & XIV.)

BEYOND the few species described by me in the 'Proceedings' of the Zoological Society for 1879 (p. 245), nothing has been ascertained of the ornithology of the remarkable mountain of Kina Balu. In the present paper I give some descriptions of new species of the greatest interest to science, and it is remarkable to find that some of the genera hitherto believed to belong