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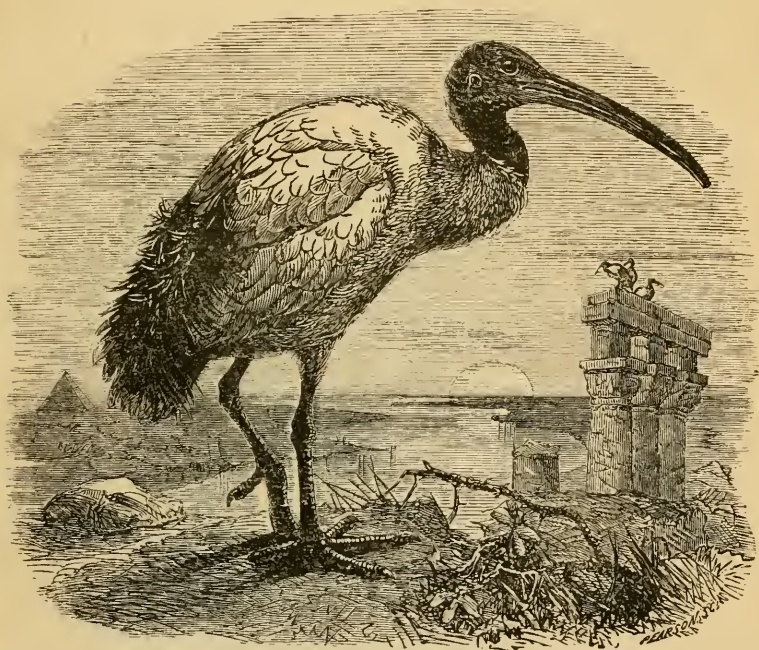
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EDITED BY

PHILIP LUTLEY SCLATER, M.A., Ph.D., F.R.S.,
SECRETARY TO THE ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON.



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VII.—Notes on the Island of Palma in the Canary Group.

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

(Plate III.)

MR. MEADE-WALDO concludes his interesting paper in the last 'Ibis,' on the "Birds of the Canary Islands," by expressing his surprise that he has found so much to tell after all that has been written upon them. I can only follow him by the confession that I feel he has exhausted the subject, and that were it not for the imperative order of our Editor, I should not have ventured to take up my pen. The island of Palma certainly claims especial notice at the hands of the ornithologist, from its peculiar features, from what it does possess in the way of bird-life, and from what it does not possess. The peculiarities of the avifauna of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote may be easily explained by the fact that they are, if not geologically (for they are as purely volcanic in their origin as the other members of the Canarian group), yet biologically simply western outliers of the Great Sahara, and have derived their forms of life from there across the narrow sea which separates them from the African coast. The comparatively low elevation of the volcanic rim which girds each of these islands, and which rarely rises above 2000 feet, has forbidden the growth of the evergreen forest which crowns, or has crowned, the heights of all the other islands above 3500 feet. This has acted and reacted by attracting the cloud-belt which always hangs on their north and north-eastern sides, securing plentiful supplies of water, and nourishing the forests, which thus attract and sustain a rich variety of animal and vegetable life. Consequently in Fuerteventura for certain, and in Lanzarote, so far as we know, there is no trace of what we may term the peculiar Canarian Avifauna. The Houbara Bustard, the Courser, the Trumpeter Bullfinch, the Sandgrouse are all manifestly immigrants from the Sahara. Mr. Meade-Waldo's new Chat (*Pratincola dacotiæ*) is certainly, so far as we know, peculiar; but we must bear in mind the fact that the opposite coast of

Africa is unexplored, and that quite possibly the scanty scrub of the African coast-line is its true motherland.

There is, however, one bird of Fuerteventura which deserves special notice, the Titmouse, rightly designated by Mr. Meade-Waldo *Parus ultramarinus*, though it seems to be invariably smaller than any Algerian specimens, and generally to have a broader white band on the forehead. We may easily trace its passage from the southern shores of the Mediterranean along the western coast-line of Morocco, till it crossed the narrow sea to Fuerteventura. Here it has remained unmodified, excepting for its slightly smaller size, a result not to be marvelled at in the barren desert plains and bare wadys of the island, with such scanty scrub as to render it difficult for even a Titmouse to find sustenance. Indeed, were it not for the occasional patches of cultivation, with a few palms and fig-trees, I do not see how the bird could long survive. But when crossing from the south end of Fuerteventura, it took up its abode in the wooded islands of Canaria, Tenerife, and Gomera, with their magnificent belts of evergreen forests, it found abundant food, and attained the full size of its Algerian progenitor, with a much darker back, and it lost entirely the white tips to the wing-coverts, which neither Mr. Meade-Waldo nor I have ever detected in a single specimen from any of the three above-mentioned islands. In another respect the Tenerife Tit differs from that of Palma. It is found in all localities and situations from the shore to the desolate cumbres, 5000 feet above the sea. It is equally at home on the house-roofs of Orotava, the gardens of country-houses, the evergreen forests, and the naked cliffs on the summit of the Paso del Croce of Canaria. Not so, as Mr. Meade-Waldo has shown, the *Parus palmensis*. I am certainly unable to explain why there should be such a contrast in several respects between the avifauna of Palma and that of its close neighbours, while these only differ among themselves in the presence or absence of certain species caused by the intervention of man.

Palma is, to me, the most attractive member of the Canary group. Though more affected by human colonization than

Gomera, it possesses greater natural variety of soil and scenery and has some unique features. On the map it is laid down pear-shaped, with the narrow end pointing due south. As we approach it from the east its profile is again exactly like a pear, a bold round mountain-mass, with precipitous sides, but gradually sloping from the neck till its southern point is lost in the sea. Closer examination explains very simply this formation. Originally a circular volcanic mass of 7600 feet in height, with a central crater, Palma must have been a larger edition of what the far more ancient Gomera is to-day. During some convulsion the lava burst through the southern side of the crater, and poured forth its stream into the sea, thus forming the neck of the pear, and leaving in the centre of the island a vast hollow cup, known as the Caldera, or caldron, 7 miles in diameter from north to south, and 5 from east to west, with its inner sides sometimes 5200 feet deep, and that an absolutely sheer precipice, the bottom of the Caldera being 2400 feet above the sea-level. On the north-west of the island there is no available anchorage, even for the smallest craft; while the only anchorage on the east is a partially sheltered roadstead, with a small artificial harbour, at Ciudad de Santa Cruz. This is the metropolis of the island, and one of the best and most interesting cities of the whole Canary group, with a noble ancient church, and a handsome town-hall erected by the Emperor Charles V. There is a thoroughly old-world air about the place, with its clean streets, running one above the other, parallel to the shore, very much like a miniature Funchal, its well-stored and attractive-looking shops, and the quaint and bright costumes of both men and women, indicating at once whether they hail from the north-west or south of the island. There is a comfortable Spanish fonda, but foreign visitors are rare. Only one did we meet with—an intelligent and cultured Bavarian physician, bent on investigating the hygienic character of the country. There is no consul or consular agent, and until this year, when for the first time the interinsular steamers call once a week, thanks to the enterprise of Messrs. Forwood, Brothers, there

was no communication with the outer world, save by wretched little schooners ; and the only trade of any importance was that with Havana, chiefly consisting in the export of onions. Happy, bright, rather lotus-eating, troubled for the most part with neither poverty nor riches, the people of Palma might be taken for lineal descendants of the cultivators of the garden of the Hesperides.

The land rises steeply from the shore at Santa Cruz de Palma or, as it is universally called there, La Ciudad, and a finely engineered road, the only one of the kind in the island, zigzags up the hill for several miles, affording magnificent views at every turn, and then runs southwards through a sloping plain to Buenavista. Everywhere the land is carefully cultivated from the shore upwards. Every kind of fruit, from the pine-apple and orange to the cherry and the plum, thrives at one elevation or another. One of the staples of the island is a fine quality of silk, grown, spun, dyed, and woven on the spot ; its cigars pass as the choicest Havanas ; and its wines are the best in the Canaries. What can a reasonable man desire which he may not find in Palma ? And besides, there is or, perhaps I should say, there was, till yesterday, a chance of discovering a new species of bird. This latter, however, was not one of our pleasures of anticipation when we landed at Ciudad, though it was the most agreeable of the pleasures of surprise. We inquired after local naturalists on our arrival, but without success. However, in a country where visitors are few, news spread quickly, and soon we had a call from one gentleman who had been collecting the Lepidoptera of the island, and who brought his collection to show to us ; and from another, the editor of the local paper, who was really a botanist, and brought some specimens of a local subalpine plant (*Viola palmensis*), which only grows, at a height of 7000 feet, in two spots, where, from his information, we afterwards found it.

Our first day's expedition was to an evergreen forest, some four miles N.W. of Ciudad, where we had reason to believe we should meet with the "Turqueze" Pigeon, whatever species it might be. The first part of our ride was rugged and

bold, but through a comparatively bare country, zigzagging across tremendous barrancos, with their steep sides full of caverns, and fine Canary pines clinging to the cliffs wherever they could find a foothold. All these swarmed with Choughs (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*), now busily employed in domestic duties, and perching indiscriminately on the ledges and on the pines. The ridges between each barranco are carefully cultivated, and cottages and gardens bright with geraniums, roses, and fuchsias were scattered about in every possible spot, while the rugged track was fringed with the overhanging boughs of fast-ripening and tempting-looking peaches. The Choughs stalked about the little fields, like Rooks at home, and a couple of specimens were at once secured. The Swifts (*Cypselus unicolor* and *C. pallidus*) dashed up and down the barrancos, the latter more numerous lower down, the former affecting the higher parts of the mountain-sides. As we ascended, the barrancos became less deep, and at length we turned up a path on the crest between two gullies, and soon entered the forest, merely scrub at first. Half an hour's ride through the dense underwood brought us into the true forest, and under a magnificent pine-tree, which overshadowed a copious spring, we dismounted and picketed our horses. Here we were certain from several signs that the Pigeons must come to drink. Through the glen by our side flowed a little perennial stream, overshadowed with the dense foliage of the teil, the laurel, the viñatigo, the ebony, and many others. Meade-Waldo at once proceeded up the glen, and had not left me for many minutes, when a Chaffinch's note caught my ear, and soon I saw the white wing-bars of a bird which crossed from the other side to the pine under which I sat, followed immediately by another. They were evidently courting, and I secured my first pair of *Fringilla palmæ**, of which a figure (Pl. III.) is given herewith. Mr. Meade-Waldo observes that the note differs slightly but markedly from that of *Fr. tintillon*; and in this he is undoubtedly correct, though I found here, not for the first time, that my hearing is not so good as it was fifty years ago.

* [*Cf.* Ibis, 1889, pp. 510, 511.—Ed.]

Soon after I had secured my Chaffinches, I saw one and another *Columba laurivora*, with their unmistakable long tail, dash down the glen, but far out of shot, and I proceeded up the forest to rejoin my companion. Two more *C. laurivora*, two ineffectual shots; but I secured another Chaffinch, and the Robin, which in no way differs specifically from that of the Island of Tenerife. This, I observe, has been recently described by a German naturalist as distinct*; but I cannot admit its validity, though certainly the coloration is more intense than in most, not all, British specimens, but not more so than in examples from Andalusia. I have examined the large series in the British Museum, and in Lord Lilford's, Mr. Seebohm's, and my own collections, and I cannot draw any line. In fact, there are British specimens which will exactly match every other. Still it is an interesting fact worthy of note, that all the Robins from Palma, Canaria, and Tenerife are of the deeper hue, those from Gomera of the paler. I soon met Meade-Waldo, who had also seen several *C. laurivora*, and had added the Chaffinch, Sparrow-Hawk, and various other birds to his bag. Later in the day he shot a Pigeon, which I marked down in the barranco; but so dense was the undergrowth, and so rugged the cliff-sides, that after an hour's vain attempts to retrieve it, we had to abandon the quest.

I may mention here that in Palma we frequently found scattered Canary pines mingled with the evergreen forest, an occurrence never noticed in Gomera, and very rare in Tenerife, where the pine begins about 5000 feet up, at the point where the laurel ceases.

Three days later, our appetites whetted by the discovery of the new Tit and Chaffinch, and the sight of the big Pigeon, we started on horseback for the circuit of the island—one of the most delightful rides I ever enjoyed. We took the south road from La Ciudad, and after passing Buenavista turned straight up the mountain, passing a straggling belt of chestnut well stocked with Chaffinches, and then at once entering the lovely laurel-forest. Here the Chaffinch was still not uncommon, and it seems to have a much wider per-

* [*Erithacus superbus*, König, J. f. O. 1889, p. 183.—ED.]

pendicular extension than its ally in the other islands ; for I found it in the pines and shot my last specimen near Buena-vista, not 500 feet above the sea. The views as we climbed the mountain were magnificent and ever varying. At length we reached the summit of the pass, over 5000 feet above the sea. The laurels extend to the very crest ; but there at once all is changed. We are standing on the rim of the Caldera, the mighty caldron, into which we look down, while we can see the eastern slopes to the sea on the other side. The rim is here notched to the depth of about 1000 feet, and has thus afforded a good pass for the mountaineer. The descent within is rapid, and instead of laurel we have scattered pines, which clothe both the slopes of débris and the perpendicular cliffs alike, and we have all the southern tongue of the island spread before us as far as the eye can reach, plainly showing where the lava had once burst through the walls of the crater. We had been keeping a keen look out for the Tit, of which Meade-Waldo had shot the type a few days before, in the laurel, but could find none, till we came to the pines. Here they were soon heard, and he secured several specimens. He has so fully and accurately described this bird, that I can add nothing. Here also I secured a Goldcrest from the top of a pine-tree, which fortunately fell to earth, instead of remaining, as they usually do, near the end of an inaccessible bough. It was exactly like those of Tenerife and Gomera, and quite distinct from the Madeiran bird, but is, in my belief, a thoroughly good species, which has been described by Mr. Seebohm ('Brit. Birds,' vol. i. p. 459) as *Regulus teneriffæ*. It approaches the Firecrest in some particulars, especially in having the black band on the sides of the crest continuous across the forehead, from which the black band is separated by a whitish band ; but it differs from *Regulus ignicapillus* in having greyish-white lores like *R. cristatus*. I have examined large series of *R. cristatus* from every locality—Japan, Himalayas, Algeria, and Europe—and find no variation in these points, and the distinction holds good in every specimen obtained in the Canaries.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Seebohm has merely inci-

dentally described and named this bird, without anywhere giving a formal diagnosis, so that it has escaped general notice.

But to return to our ride. We skirted along the eastern side of the Caldera till at the southern end we climbed its rough broken walls for an hour, and descended by a gentle slope upon the southern plain of the island. The course of lava-streams could be easily traced in many directions. We put up at the clean little town of Los Llanos, where is a cigar-factory and some silk-weaving, and which was a convenient centre from which to work the inside of the Caldera. Our first day's expedition, and that from dawn till after sunset, was to the basin of the Caldera, which we entered over the ridge we had climbed yesterday, but several miles lower down, and then turned sharp to the north. The bottom of the crater has a diameter of less than five miles and contains several farms, the wine of which is in repute. But our object was the forest, sadly wrecked and destroyed by wasteful and reckless cutting. Were it not that the Canary pine, unlike any other species with which I am acquainted, sends up shoots from the stump or root of every felled tree, which become small timber in the course of a few years, I fear the pine would soon become extinct in Palma. A mountain-brook ran down the centre of the Caldera, but did not appear to attract any bird save the Grey Wagtail. We had hoped to find the new Tit in some numbers; but though scattered all over the inner sides of the Caldera, where there were pines, the number of individuals was few, and the labour of climbing these precipitous slopes with a gun was most exhausting. Though geologically the most interesting, this was our poorest ornithological day in Palma. There was evidently no harvest to be reaped in the south, so we determined to move quarters to the N.W. end of the island, where we heard of fine forests of pine facing the sea. This was a 14 hours' ride. We had to cross the ridge, still 1500 feet high, which forms the southern wall of the channel through which the lava poured, and then, crossing the bed, a width of two miles, to mount again to the crest of the northern wall,

3000 feet high. The soil all the way to the south point is rich and well cultivated, vines, fruit-trees of all kinds, tobacco, onion, and maize being the principal crops. But there were not the birds we wanted. Plenty of Ravens, Choughs, Rock Doves, Pipits, Canaries, Linnets, Buntings, and Goldfinches,—only the birds that accompany cultivation. And after we had reached the western crest, and rode for hours northwards along the heights, though we had a highly developed agricultural country stretching from the heights to the shore, its very richness became monotonous and uninteresting. At length, towards evening, as we were nearing the N.W. corner of the island, we saw in front of us the beginning of a real pine-forest, not straggling trees like those of the Caldera. Our destination was a straggling village of isolated farmsteads, each in the centre of its own vineyard. We were received by the village shopkeeper, who did his best for us and put us up tressel-beds behind the counter. The pine-forests extend for many miles on the higher part of the outer side of the Caldera, right round from the N.W. to the N.E. of the island; and here is the true home of the Palma Titmouse, though Mr. Meade-Waldo did twice find it beyond the limits of the pine.

The only other birds which seemed plentiful in the pine-forest were the Cliffchaff and the Goldcrest and, near its outskirts, the Blackbird. Our day's ride along the top of the Cumbre, skirting the pine-forest, in fact, on the rim of the old crater, was magnificent, though long, and I know nothing so grand in Tenerife as the view across the Caldera from one of the highest points of its rim, the Pico de Muchachio, 7600 feet above the sea. The rim looked very even all round, as though we were standing on the edge of a titanic boat. At first it was quite clear, and we looked down 5200 feet on to the farms and fields we had visited two days before. It required a young and cool head to look down that precipice from the saddle on a path not more than a yard wide. I preferred to dismount and lie down to peep. I am not aware that in any other part of the world have I ever looked down a cliff sheer for more than

5000 feet. But this is said to be the deepest crater in the world. It is only at this point that the wall of rock is absolutely perpendicular.

In a few minutes a volume of cloud came rolling up the southern gap in the crater, and filled it to within 1000 feet of the rim with what seemed a solid mass. Very wonderful it was to see the sharp rim on which we sat standing out in a perfect circle, with only a piece broken out to the south. We were able to tell exactly the height of the clouds, for we knew exactly the measurement of our position and that of the pass from the Ciudad opposite, which was just reached by the clouds. The top of Gomera peered up like a little island, and the Peak of Tenerife beyond, but not a trace of the Cañadas of Tenerife; all below 6000 feet was buried. There was not the slightest haze. There was not a ripple on that pavement of cloud. The crown of Gomera looked so close that at first we thought it must be a piece of the edge of our own crater, and Tenerife looked not twenty miles off. Of course the sea was equally covered with the drapery, and we had an unbroken panorama on all sides. Above us the Choughs soared in flocks till almost lost to sight in the empyrean, the Swifts dashed about us, but other life there was none. We were on the Cumbre, or barren heights, and could see how exactly the cloud-line is limited to the forest-zone or, perhaps, rather fixes its limits, while all above it is dreary, barren desolation. Nor does this daily-recurring cloud result in rain. On this, as on other occasions, we passed through the cloud to the coast, where rain had not fallen for weeks. It was in the northern laurel-forests, after we left the pines, that we had our most interesting rambles and scrambles after Pigeons, both White-tail and Bar-tail, which with their results have been so fully described by Mr. Meade-Waldo in the last number of 'The Ibis.'