



PITTA FORSTENI, *Mull.*



# PITTA FORSTENI.

## Forsten's Pitta.

- Pitta melanocephala*, Müll. & Schl. Verh. Natürl. Geschied., Zool., *Pitta*, p. 19 (1844, ex Forsten, MSS., nec Wagler).—Westerm. Bijdr. Dierk. Amsterd. (folio), i. part vi. (1854), p. 46, pl. 2.—Schlegel, Mus. Pays-Bas, *Pitta*, p. 4 (1863).—Id. Vog. Nederl. Indië, *Pitta*, pp. 5, 30, pl. ii. fig. 1 (1863).—Id. Mus. Pays-Bas, *Pitta*, Revue, p. 9 (1874).
- Brachyurus forsteni*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av. i. p. 256 (1850).—Elliot, Ibis, 1870, p. 419.
- Melanopitta forsteni*, Bp. Consp. Volucr. Anis. 1854, p. 7, no. 195.—Walden, Trans. Zool. Soc. viii. p. 62 (1872).
- Brachyurus (Melanopitta) forsteni*, Elliot, Monogr. Pittidæ, pl. xxiv. (1863).
- Pitta forsteni*, Gray, Hand-list of Birds, i. p. 295, no. 4363 (1869).

THE genus *Pitta* has been divided by some ornithologists into various subgenera, founded for the most part on the prevailing style of coloration; and so strongly characterized are these differences of coloration, that I am inclined to admit them as generic characters of no small value. To take, for instance, the section to which Forsten's *Pitta* belongs, and to which the subgeneric title *Melanopitta* has been given, how unmistakable a character is the black head! while at the same time it is accompanied by a green plumage strongly varied by a red vent and under tail-coverts and a lustrous green shoulder-patch. As a rule, too, the black-headed Pittas are remarkable for their white quills, which must form a very conspicuous feature when the birds are alive; and many of the species depend upon the amount of white on the wing-feathers for their separation one from the other. It may be taken, therefore, as a character of the greatest importance that Forsten's *Pitta* has the quills entirely black; and it is on this account nearest allied to *P. novæ-guinææ*, which has only a concealed white spot on the fourth, fifth, and sixth quills. The last-named bird, moreover, differs in having a blue shade bordering the black ventral patch, the absence of which in *P. forsteni* is compensated for by a broad band of metallic greenish blue across the upper tail-coverts. This band is found in most of the black-headed Pittas; but in *P. novæ-guinææ* it is scarcely distinguishable, being represented only by a slight metallic green tip to a few of the upper tail-coverts.

As far as we know at present, Forsten's *Pitta* is found only in the island of Celebes, and seems, indeed, to be confined to the northern parts of that island. It was found by Dr. Forsten at Kema and at Tondano. I have specimens in my collection from Menado, collected by Dr. Meyer; and the following description is taken from one of these.

*Adult.* General colour above bright grass-green with somewhat of a metallic lustre; lesser and median wing-coverts bright metallic greenish cobalt, forming a shoulder-patch; greater series green; primary-coverts and quills black, the secondaries black, externally green, like the back, the innermost entirely green; most of the upper tail-coverts metallic greenish cobalt, forming a transverse band; longer upper tail-coverts and tail-feathers dull green; head and hind neck, sides of face and ear-coverts, cheeks and throat black; rest of under surface, from the lower throat downwards, bright green, with the lower abdomen, vent, and under tail-coverts bright scarlet, bordered above with an abdominal patch of black, which descends slightly on each side of the scarlet patch, the lower feathers being black broadly tipped with scarlet; thighs brown; under wing-coverts and quill-lining black.

Total length  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches, culmen  $\frac{3}{8}$ , wing  $4\frac{3}{8}$ , tail  $1\frac{1}{2}$ , tarsus  $1\frac{1}{2}$ .

Since the above meagre description of a fine bird was in press, I have received a few additional remarks from Dr. Meyer, to whom I wrote a few days since, and who says of *Pitta forsteni* :—

"This species only occurs on the island of Celebes, and is represented in Borneo by *P. mülleri*, on Sangi Island by *P. sanghirana*, on Mindanao by *P. steerii*, and on other islands of the Philippine group (as well as on Mindanao) by *P. sordida*.

"All Pittas may be said to be rare birds everywhere, and are only met with singly or a pair at a time. I met with but one *Pitta* that was plentiful, viz. *P. rosenbergi*, on the island of Mysore, in the north of Geelvink Bay. Besides, the black-headed Pittas are still rarer than the red-bellied Pittas; and so it is also on the island of Celebes with *P. forsteni* in relation to *P. celebensis*. In the southern parts of Celebes I did not procure a single specimen of *P. forsteni*, as far as I remember, and also am not aware that

specimens collected by any one else have reached Europe from there ; whereas *P. celebensis* appeared to be less rare there than in the northern parts. Here I got specimens of *P. forsteni* in the Minahassa and in the district of Gorontalo.

“Pittas are shy birds, as I have said before ; but their flute-like cry once heard, the specimen can nearly always be got with patience and quietness ; imitating its voice, the bird can be called up till it is close to the hunter's gun. The rareness of the black-headed Pitta on Celebes is proved by the fact that its colours shelter it even less than the colours of *P. celebensis* shelter that species, or the bright blue shoulder-patches of *P. forsteni*, which always glitter on the ground, which it never quits. The colour of the iris is dark, the feet dusky, the bill black. It feeds on insects of all kinds. Its name in the Minhassa is ‘Mopo idiu,’ that is to say, ‘Green Mopo,’ ‘Mopo’ being the name for *P. celebensis*, the meaning of which word in the Alfuro language I have explained in my ‘Field-notes on the Birds of Celebes’ (‘Ibis,’ 1879, p. 126), where I also narrated the story which the natives attached to this bird.”



Gould, John and Sharpe, Richard Bowdler. 1879. "Pitta forsteni, Forsten's Pitta [Pl. 30]." *The birds of New Guinea and the adjacent Papuan islands : including many new species recently discovered in Australia* 4(X), –.

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