

May, also in the wooded valleys of Sirmoor, forty miles east of Simla.

“Sirmoor, 15th April, 1887. While big-game shooting, I to-day crossed the Jellal River and ascended a thickly-wooded ridge separating it from the next valley.

“At the head of a jungly ravine and overhanging its steep banks I came on a tree, of no great height, with a huge nest on its top.

“The nest was only about thirty feet from the ground, and standing on the hillside above I could look down right into it, having a good view of the owner. It was a Black Vulture, sitting very close, in fact it was only when I shouted and threw sticks that it could be induced to move; then, standing up, it opened its beak and spread its wings by way of intimidation, at the same time disclosing to view one large white egg on which it had been sitting. The tree was by no means easy to climb, being covered with a tangled mass of wild vine, to say nothing of being alive with red ants, which, to my detriment, resented being disturbed.”

The nest, built in the crown of the tree, was an enormous mass of sticks with finer ones as a rough lining. The large, round, white egg—the full complement—was very nearly hatched.

During February of the next year I found the Black Vulture in the Nepal Terai, and saw an individual, in company with the common brown species, feeding on the carcase of a bear which I had shot.

XXI.—*On the Occurrence of Pseudoscolopax taczanowskii*
in Western Siberia. By H. E. DRESSER.

(Plate VII.)

THE Semipalmated Snipe, or so-called “Snipe-billed Godwit,” is certainly one of the rarest and least known of the Palæ-arctic Waders, and up to the present time its breeding-range has been undiscovered. First described by Blyth in 1848 as

Macrorhamphus semipalmatus from a specimen obtained near Calcutta in the winter, it was again described and figured by Verreaux in 1860 (Rev. et Mag. de Zool. p. 206, pl. 14) as *Macrorhamphus taczanowskii* from a specimen obtained in Dauria.

The two specimens now figured, a male and a female in full breeding-plumage, were obtained on the 12/25 May, 1908, not far from Tara, in the valley of the Irtysh, Tobolsk Government, Western Siberia. Tara is situated on the left bank of the Irtysh River, about two hundred miles below Omsk. The valley at that point is only about four kilometres broad, in some places widening to six or seven kilometres. The right bank is the higher, and is covered with pine and fir wood, forming there the southern portion of the Siberian "taiga." The left bank is broadly bordered by small non-evergreen woods, interspersed by steppe (the so-called steppe-forest belt of Russian geographers), but gives place further south to the true treeless steppe. Between these banks and the bed of the river is a wet meadow intersected by marshy rivulets and streams and covered with small lakes and ditches overgrown with reeds, swamps either treeless or with small unhealthy pine-trees, and even mossy bogs near the right bank. This meadow is uneven, with hollows, while parallel with the river are higher beds covered here and there with low bushes of *Salix*, and on the left side of the river is a narrow belt of high old *Salices*. The meadow, especially on the left side of the river, is overflowed when the water rises in the spring.

About a mile from Tara a small river called the Arkharka, only about five miles long, flows into the Irtysh, and at its mouth the meadow is very low, slimy, and treeless. In 1908 the ice on the Irtysh broke up between the 6th and 10th of May, new style, and on the 25th of May the water was still very high, so that the lower parts of the valley and that of the Arkharka were under water, with only small strips of land visible here and there. The grass was still very short, the leaves of the birch trees very small. Hooded Crows and Magpies had eggs highly incubated, or young just hatched;

the Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Common Snipe, and Lapwing had fresh eggs, and the nests of the Red-legged Falcons (*Falco vespertinus obscurus*) were ready, though as yet they were empty.

On this day three local sportsmen, Messrs. Grabinsky, Tveritin, and Florinsky, were on the Irtysh River in a boat, and about 11 o'clock in the forenoon observed two Waders at the edge of the flooded meadow near the mouth of the Arkharka, one of which was probing the muddy ground, whilst the other was walking about close to its mate. In their manners they reminded the sportsmen of Greenshanks, but on account of their rust-coloured plumage it was concluded that they must be Godwits. They were quite tame, even when approached within forty paces, and Mr. Florinsky killed both birds with the same shot. As they seemed to be somewhat uncommon Mr. Florinsky brought them to Mr. V. E. Ushakow, a correspondent of Mr. S. A. Buturlin, who skinned them. Both were in a somewhat poor condition and rather lean, the stomachs containing small shells and river-ooze. Mr. Ushakow, with the assistance of Mr. Buturlin's 'Synoptical Tables of the Birds of the Russian Empire' (in Russian), correctly identified the birds; but, inasmuch as the present species had not been recorded from further west in Siberia than Chita in Dauria, he was doubtful as to whether he was right, and sent the birds to Mr. Buturlin. On skinning the female bird Mr. Ushakow found in the lower part of the oviduct an egg fully coloured and quite ready for exclusion, which he carefully extracted, measured, and photographed. Unfortunately before he sent me this egg a mouse got at it and so damaged it that I have been unable to repair it sufficiently to photograph it in colour, so I have reproduced the photograph (p. 421) taken by Mr. Ushakow.

This egg is somewhat glossy in the surface of the shell, like that of a Snipe, but in form and general coloration is not unlike that of a Godwit, though the ground-colour is rather more grey in tone and at the larger end there are two sharp reddish-brown stripes, such as are often found in eggs

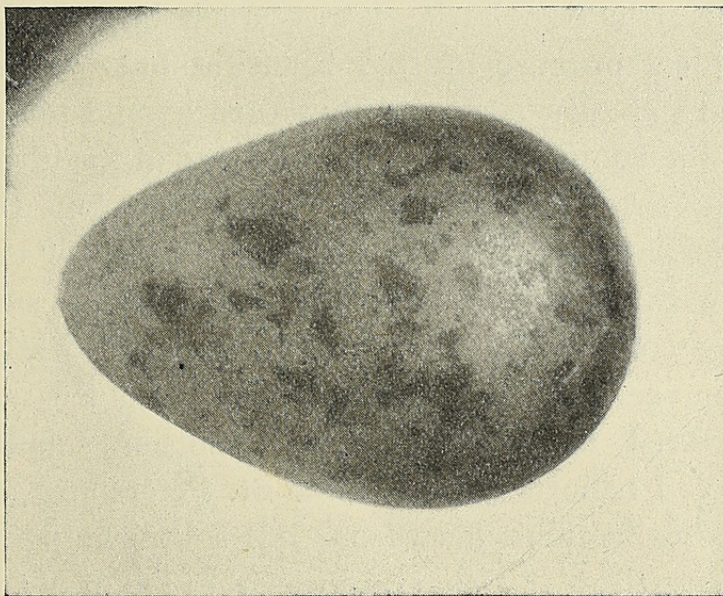


PSEUDOSCOLOPAX TACZANOWSKII.

of *Totanus glareola*, but never in those of *Limosa*; the greyish-brown surface-spots are more numerous and denser at the larger end. When blown and whole this egg measured 51.1 by 37 mm. (2 by 1.45 inch) and weighed 2.11 grammes.

Mr. Buturlin has kindly placed me in direct communication with Mr. Ushakow, and has sent me all his notes with

Text-fig. 9.



Egg of *Pseudoscolopax taczanowskii*.

the egg and the two birds, to enable me to write this article.

The present bird is not a Godwit, but appears to me to be intermediate between *Macrorhamphus* and the American Willet (*Symphemia semipalmata*).

The Semipalmated Snipe evidently breeds in the valley of the Irtysh, and I have asked Mr. Ushakow to use every endeavour to procure and send me the eggs, which I trust he will succeed in doing.



Dresser, H. E. 1909. "On the Occurrence of *Pseudoscolopax taczanowskii* in Western Siberia." *Ibis* 3(3), 418–421.

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