Digitised by the Harvard University, Download from The BHL http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/; www.biologiezentrum.at

NOTES

ON THE

MOUNTAIN PARTRIDGE

(*OREORTYX PICTUS*)

IN CAPTIVITY

BY

DR R.-W. SHUFELDT, C. M. Z. S.
Member of the American Ornithol. Union, etc.

Oreortyx pictus is the largest and handsomest of all the American Partridges. It is a Pacific coast form at present being restricted in its range to certain parts of California and the state of Washington. Locally, it is known by the name of the « Mountain Quail », and it is resident wherever it occurs. The habits of this Partridge in nature, as well as the two subspecies of the genus found also in the Pacific coast region, have been well described by Bendire in his *Life Histories of North American Birds* (pp. 13-17).

About a year ago or more, a bird-fancier in Washington, D.-C., obtained upwards of twenty living specimens, males and females, of this fine Partridge from a collector in California. Washington was my home at the time, and I was given every facility to study these specimens, and even to take examples of them to my residence. They were all adults and in excellent plumage. One old male, and the best one in the bevy I did take to my house where I kept him under observation for several days.

Digitised by the Harvard University, Download from The BHL http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/; www.biologiezentrum.at

This gave me an excellent opportunity to study the habits of the bird in confinement, as well as to make photographs of him with the view of showing his natural attitudes and behaviour. In this latter operation I was entirely successful, and succeeded in securing a number of very satisfactory negatives. A photograph from one of the best of these is reproduced here as an illustration to the present article.

I found the bird, a male, to be not very wild, although it took to flight several times in the large room where I had let its loose to observe it behaviour.

In nature this bird frequently in giving its call mounts on the top of old posts or stumps, or roots of upturned trees. It rarely lights, in the latter however, being essentially a ground-loving species. So when I came to photograph it, I allowed the specimen to walk up and down on a tree-trunk, fixed for the purpose in a sub-horizontal position in front of the camera.

The most satisfactory exposure was made just as it was about to fly off the end of this stump.

While walking about it was with a very dignified mien, with its plumage generally kept pressed close to its body, and the « plume » carried at almost any angle from the horizontal line to the vertical one. Its *crest* is quite an independent ornament from the plume, but *both* may be erected together as is shown to be the case in my illustration. *The two* feathers constituting the latter are kept in contact for their entire lengths at all times and in all positions, giving the appearance of their being but one of them. This plume is nearly straight, and not decidedly *curved* and the feathers separated, as shown in Audubon's utterly incorrect and ridiculous figure of this species (N. 59, pl. 291) in his *Birds of America.* These *two* feather are inserted one directly behind the other on the middle of the crown of the head, in a small, longitudinal and narrow apterium there occurring. This was first figured, I believe, by Dr. Hubert Lyman Clark in his memoir *The Feather-Tracts of North American Grouse and Quail* (1898,

Pl. I. — Mountain Partridge (*Oreortyx pictus*) ♂ ad. Photographed from life by Dr Shufeldt and somewhat reduced.

Digitised by the Harvard University, Download from The BHL http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/; www.biologiezentrum.at

Digitised by the Harvard University, Download from The BHL http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/; www.biologiezentrum.at

Digitised by the Harvard University, Download from The BHL http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/; www.biologiezentrum.at

fig. 3), a work wherein the pterytography of all the United States Partridges is described and compared.

These birds during the time I had the opportunity of observing them, gave vent to but few notes, and they were low and soft, not at all like the loud clear call they frequently utter in nature. A number of these birds died in the large cage in which they were kept, although they fed well on wheat and other seeds of the kind, and drank water frequently. Doubtless it was due to the fact that the conditions under which they were forced to live were so completely different from what they were accustomed to enjoy in their own sunny California. Moreover, their cage was crowded by the presence of several pairs of the scaled Partridge (*Calipepla squamata*) and the European Quail (*Coturnyx dactylisonans*). In my opinion these birds would do well if placed in a large aviary out of doors, with their natural food and environment closely imitated. They might even be induced to breed under such circumstances. There are admirable facilities for tyring such experiments at the National Zoological Gardens at Washington, D.-C. but for some reason or other it is not done. This is quite likely to be the case, just so long as a government thinks more worthily of spending millions upon the building of battleships and begrudingly appropriates but a few dollars, comparatively, to the establishment and stocking of institutions of public instruction and entertainment.

Nearly all the Partridges of N. America have been studied by me now in confinement, and I have photographed most of them alive, and published the results.

Representatives of the genera *Colinus*, *Calipepla*, and *Lophortyx* have been thus secured nearly the size of life, while with Gambel's Partridge I was especially successful, and showed there too, that the several feathers composing its crest were kept together, as I have described above for *Oreortyx*, and not spread out, in the manner of a fan, as Audubon erroneously depicted them in his plate, an error which has led so many ornithological artists astray since his time, who have blindly followed him. "Any

Digitised by the Harvard University, Download from The BHL http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/; www.biologiezentrum.at

kind of a *skin* of a bird is better than no skin at all", is a very good rule for the practical ornithologist, but this will hardly apply to plates of birds intended to illustrate ornithological works, though Audubon was only too frequently under the impression that it did.

ZOBODAT - www.zobodat.at

Zoologisch-Botanische Datenbank/Zoological-Botanical Database

Digitale Literatur/Digital Literature

Zeitschrift/Journal: Ornis - Journal of the International Ornithological Committee.

Jahr/Year: 1899

Band/Volume: 10

Autor(en)/Author(s): Shufeldt R.-W.

Artikel/Article: NOTES ON THE MOUNTAIN PARTRIDGE (OREORTYX PICTUS) IN CAPTIVITY 71-76