

THE NOMENCLATURE AND VALIDITY OF CERTAIN
NORTH AMERICAN GALLINÆ.

BY E. W. NELSON.

Plates XIV and XV.

IN 'THE IBIS' for April, 1902 (pp. 233-245), Mr. Ogilvie Grant has a paper entitled 'Remarks on the Species of American Gallinæ recently described and Notes on their Nomenclature.' In this the author gives characteristic expression to a sweeping condemnation of the recent work done in this group by American ornithologists. Among thirty species and subspecies described or revised under old names by American workers since the publication of Mr. Grant's Volume XXII of the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum' in 1893 he considers only four worthy of recognition.

After reading the paper in 'The Ibis' one is prompted to ask if Volume XXII was intended by its author to fix the limit of knowledge in that direction. This is not the first instance, however, in which our critic has differed radically from the views of American ornithologists as shown by his disposal of the commonly recognized subspecies of the Ruffed Grouse, in the cited Vol. XXII.

The tone of absolute finality with which he treats the subject in his recent paper would lead the uninitiated to believe that there could be no appeal from his decisions. In reality, however, in a number of instances they contain such a mixture of misstatement and misrepresentation that they would be unworthy of notice except that they might be accepted at face value by those unfamiliar with the facts. In his recent paper he gives an interesting revelation of the point of view and the methods by which he reaches some of his extraordinary conclusions. No weight is given to the intimate knowledge of the topography and geographic distribution in their territory possessed, usually as the result of years of study and field work, by American ornithologists. On the contrary Mr. Grant appears to approach the subject quite unhampered by any embarrassing knowledge of American geography and to be quite unaware that distribution and varying physical conditions have any real bearing on American ornithology.

This is shown by the confidence with which he makes a comparison of two specimens of the same subspecies from different parts of its range and thereby disproves the existence of another subspecies in quite a distinct and distant faunal area. To render still simpler the process of rejecting species described by American ornithologists our critic does not hesitate to doubt or even deny the existence of characters and specimens not seen by himself.

In 'The Auk' for July, 1902 (pp. 309-311) Dr. J. A. Allen pertinently comments on some of Mr. Grant's remarks concerning various species found north of the Mexican boundary. The following notes are mainly limited to a reply to the strictures on the species described by myself from Mexico. In order to give a clear idea of the basis for my work on the Mexican Gallinæ, so summarily disposed of by Mr. Grant, a few details are necessary.

For about twelve years I have been engaged in a biological survey of Mexico, during which time I have traversed in detail all but an insignificant part of the country. Throughout this period specimens of birds have been collected with the special object of illustrating geographic distribution and variation. Our collection contains about 400 specimens of Mexican Gallinæ, representing all but two or three of the known species, and usually including specimens taken at (or near) the type locality. In studying this material, together with that in the U. S. National Museum, whenever I have found series of specimens from separate districts showing easily recognized differences, and these characters are backed by my personal knowledge that the localities in question are in different faunal areas, my inference has been that the characters thus separating the birds were of specific or subspecific value, as the case might be. During the progress of my work I have constantly consulted Mr. Robert Ridgway who coincides in all of my conclusions regarding the Mexican Gallinæ. Our specimens in this group have also been examined by various other ornithologists who take the same view in the matter. Mr. Grant's condemnation of my work therefore falls with equal force upon the judgment of a number of the best American ornithologists.

Fortunately some of the species treated by my critic have characters sufficiently marked for photographic reproduction, as shown on the accompanying plates.

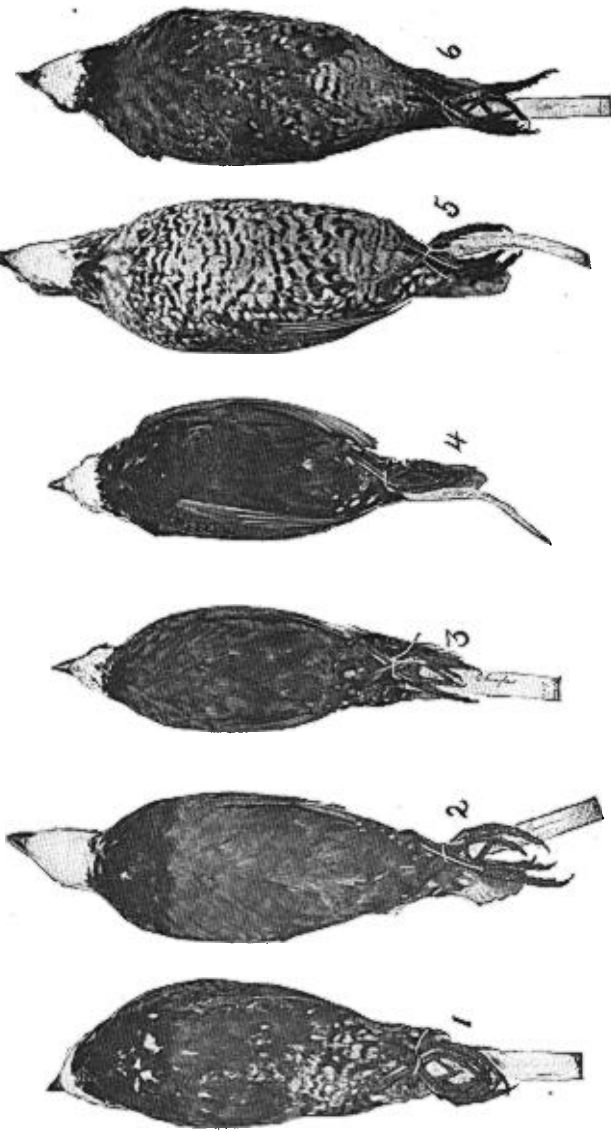
Meleagris gallopavo *Linn.* In reply to my surmise that this name should be referred to the birds which the Spaniards introduced into continental Europe (and which were taken thence to England) probably from the mountains of Vera Cruz, Mr. Grant "cannot see any possible ground for such a supposition," and says "the fact remains that the 'Turkey Cock' figured by Albin in 1740, on which the Linnæan name was founded, can only have been of West or North Mexican origin." To give thus positively the exact origin of the bird from which Albin's crude, diagrammatic figure of a domestic turkey is taken is pure assumption — for Albin says not a word on the subject.

Meleagris gallopavo merriami *Nelson.* Mr. Grant states that by contrasting my specimens of this bird with examples of *M. gallopavo* and *M. americana* and avoiding a comparison with *M. g. intermedia* (with which he says it is "obviously synonymous") I would have it considered very distinct. As a matter of fact I did compare the series of *merriami* with a series of *intermedia* before describing the former, but in the preliminary description only published the results of the comparisons with the two forms with which there was or might have been a possible contiguity of range. *M. g. merriami* and *M. g. intermedia* occupy very distinct faunal areas separated by a broad belt of desert country unsuited to any form of *Meleagris*.

The Committee on Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union has recently compared *M. g. merriami* with its relatives — including *M. g. intermedia* — and found it to be distinct, while Mr. Grant does not claim ever to have seen a specimen of this form.

Dendrotyx oaxacæ, **D. macrourus griseipectus**, **D. macrourus striatus** and **D. macrourus dilutus**. Our collection contains twelve specimens of these birds instead of four. Furthermore my familiarity with the region in which the various forms of this bird occur enables me to affirm positively that the differences upon which these birds were described have a definite geographic significance.

Callipepla gambeli fulvipectus. This form is rejected because Mr. Grant has examined a specimen of a female bird from Hermosillo, Sonora, and finds it the same as *C. gambeli*!

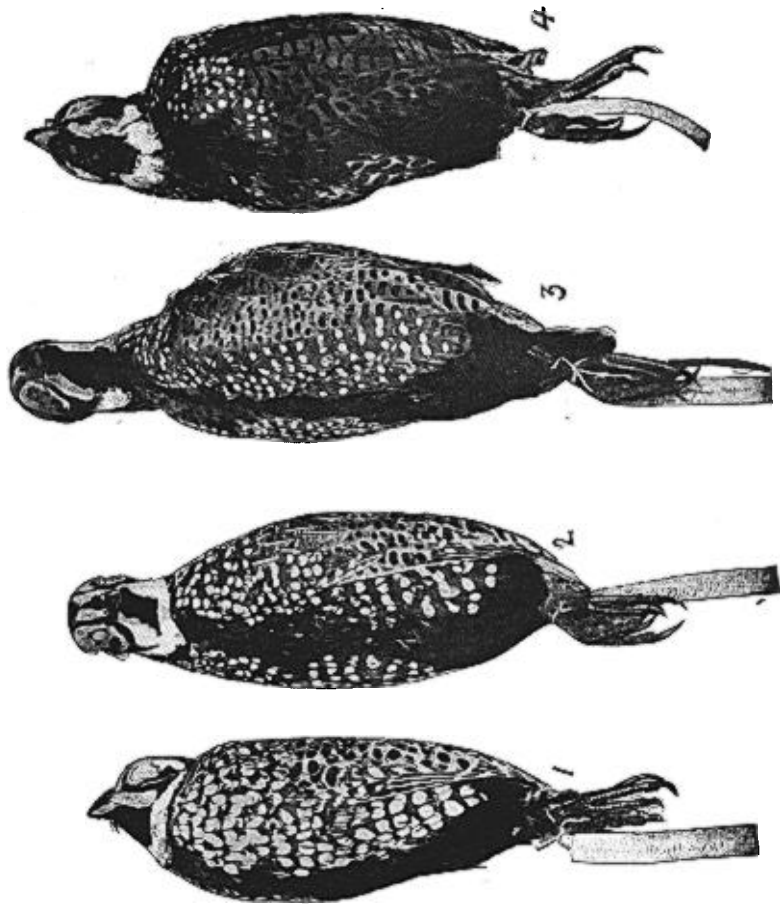


SPECIES AND SUBSPECIES OF COLINUS.

1. *C. pectoralis*.
2. *C. graysoni nigrippectus*.
3. *C. minor*.
4. *C. godmani*.
5. *C. virginianus texanus*.
6. *C. virginianus maculatus*.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE XIV.

- Fig. 1. *Colinus pectoralis* (Gould). ♂ from Carrizal, Vera Cruz. Neck and breast with a broad black collar underlaid with much more or less concealed white; rest of underparts to crissum plain *dark rufous*; crissum irregularly marked with black, white and rufous (in some specimens nearly plain rufous).
- Fig. 2. *Colinus graysoni nigripectus* Nelson. ♂ from Atlixco, Puebla. Decidedly *larger* than *C. pectoralis*; pectoral black collar rather narrower with less concealed white; rest of underparts plain *light rufous* except for a few black and white marks on under tail-coverts.
- Fig. 3. *Colinus minor* Nelson. ♂ from Palenque, Chiapas. Decidedly *smaller* than *C. pectoralis* (even smaller than *C. godmani*). Narrow, poorly defined black collar below white throat patch; rest of underparts plain dark rufous clouded with black on borders of feathers, with a few white marks on under tail-coverts.
- Fig. 4. *Colinus godmani* Nelson. ♂ from Jaltipan, Vera Cruz. Somewhat larger than *C. minor*; differs mainly from latter in much darker colors, especially below; underparts from throat patch to crissum bright black with some shading of rufous; the black predominating in this bird as the rufous does in *C. minor*.
- Fig. 5. *Colinus virginianus texanus* (Lawr.). ♂ from Matamoros, Tamaulipas. White throat patch bordered by a poorly marked, narrow black collar followed by a narrow *pale reddish* pectoral band; most of breast and rest of underparts strongly barred with black and white.
- Fig. 6. *Colinus virginianus maculatus* Nelson. ♂ from Atla Mira, Tamaulipas. Size about as in *C. v. texanus*; differs from latter mainly in broader more strongly marked black collar and in having breast and rest of underparts to crissum *dark rufous* spotted and mottled more or less sparingly and posteriorly with black and white.



SPECIES AND SUBSPECIES OF CYRTONYX.

- 1. *C. montezumæ mearnsi*
- 2. *C. montezumæ.*
- 3. *C. merriami.*
- 4. *C. sallie.*

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE XV.

- Fig. 1. *Cyrtonyx montezumæ mearnsi* Nelson. ♂ from Chisos Mts., Texas. Differs strikingly from *C. montezumæ* (fig. 2) in paler gray ground color and much larger and more crowded white spots on sides of breast and flanks; dark spots on wings larger.
- Fig. 2. *Cyrtonyx montezumæ* (Vigors). ♂ from Irolo, Hidalgo. Sides of breast and flanks dark slate gray with medium sized white spots; wings marked with medium sized, rounded dark spots.
- Fig. 3. *Cyrtonyx merriami* Nelson. ♂ from east slope of Mt. Orizaba, Vera Cruz. Differs strikingly from *C. montezumæ* and *C. sallæi* in the uninterrupted extension of black throat patch down fore neck, leaving a white patch on each side of neck in place of usual white collar; black cheek patch larger and extends down and joins black throat area thus isolating malar white stripe from white area on side of neck; distribution of color on sides of breast and flanks similar to same in *C. montezumæ* but ground color paler gray and white spots smaller; dark marks on distal half of wings larger and obovate or flattened oval.
- Fig. 4. *Cyrtonyx sallæi* Verr. ♂ from Ozolotepec, Oaxaca. White collar on fore neck complete and united with white malar stripe; distribution of color on sides of breast similar to same in *C. merriami* and *C. montezumæ*; sides of body back of breast darker slaty than in *merriami* with the small white spots of latter replaced with larger, more oblong spots of chestnut; wings much darker than in *merriami* and with narrow black bars in place of rounded spots.

This locality is well within the range of true *C. gambeli*. He has therefore compared typical birds of the same subspecies and concluded that he is "unable to see any reason whatever for separating these birds [*C. g. fulvipectus*] from typical *L. gambeli*." Just what bearing this comparison has on the validity of a subspecies living at a distance in another faunal area is not plain.

Lophortyx bensoni (*Ridgw.*) (= *Callipepla douglasi bensoni*). Mr. Grant states that he "can find no published description of this species," but on page 404 in volume XXII of the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum' (on the title page of which his name appears as author), under the synonymy of *Lophortyx douglasi*, he will find cited "*Callipepla elegans bensoni* Ridgw. P. U. S. Nat. Mus. X, p. 148 (1887) [Campos, Sonora]." In the place thus referred to he will find an extended description of this well marked geographic race. It is also described in Mr. Ridgway's 'Manual of North American Birds' (1st ed. p. 585; 2d ed. p. 589).

Colinus virginianus maculatus. "We have a series of birds from the area indicated and Mr. Godman and I are both satisfied that Mr. Nelson's name is a mere synonym of the subspecies *C. texanus*." This decision can only be understood by the supposition that it is another instance of the comparison of birds that have nothing to do with the case. The Biological Survey collection contains over forty specimens of this subspecies which have been compared with about as many of *C. texanus*. The accompanying photograph of typical specimens of *C. v. texanus* and *C. v. maculatus* render further comment unnecessary.

Colinus graysoni nigripectus and **Colinus minor**.¹ Mr.

¹ Since writing the notes on these birds I have received additional information which appears to affirm conclusively my position. In order to test the correctness of my determination of the small and rather dark birds living along the humid basal slope of the Cordillera in Vera Cruz as *Colinus pectoralis* (Gould) I recently sent two specimens taken at Jico and Carrizal, near Jalapa, in that State to the British Museum for comparison. These specimens I have considered as typical *C. pectoralis*, and a similar specimen from Carrizal is shown over that name in the accompanying plate. With the two specimens of *C. pectoralis* I sent a typical specimen of *C. graysoni nigripectus* from Atlixco, Puebla. Through the kindness of Mr. Oldfield Thomas and Dr. R.

Grant states that "In my opinion there can be no doubt that both these names of Mr. Nelson's are synonyms of *C. pectoralis*." Fortunately our collection contains specimens of true *C. pectoralis* which inhabits the upper tropical east slope of the Cordillera of Vera Cruz. *C. minor* is a still smaller bird than *C. pectoralis* and lives in the hot lowlands of Chiapas far from the home of the latter. *C. g. nigripectus* lives on the plains of the southern end of the Mexican tableland in southern Puebla and is decidedly larger and paler than *C. pectoralis* and much larger than *C. minor*. The females also show well marked differences. The relative size, and color pattern of the underparts of typical specimens of *C. pectoralis*, *C. minor* and *C. graysoni nigripectus* are shown in the accompanying photograph. The differences shown by these three birds are confined to definitely segregated areas which differ from one another in climatic and other physical characters and have a real geographic significance despite the dictum of Mr. Grant. A specimen of *C. godmani* is photographed with *C. minor* to show the close relationship between them.

Cyrtonyx montezumæ mearnsi. Although Mr. Grant states that neither he nor Mr. Godman have been able to see the slightest grounds for separating this subspecies, yet a series of specimens of typical *C. montezumæ* from the southern end of the Mexican tableland and of *C. m. mearnsi* from the southwestern United States may be distinguished across a room by the large and crowded appearance of the white spots on the under parts of *C. m. mearnsi*. As a matter of course the two forms intergrade but I have never seen a specimen showing the characters of *C. mearnsi* from anywhere about the southern half of the Mexican tableland. The accompanying photograph of typical examples of *C. montezumæ* and *C. mearnsi* show the most striking differences between the two.

Bowdler Sharpe of the British Museum one of Gould's two types of *C. pectoralis* was borrowed from the Liverpool Museum for comparison. During Dr. Sharpe's temporary absence Mr. Thomas writes me that "Your 155523 from Atlixco is decidedly larger and has a larger bill than any of the others [*i. e.*, the type and two specimens from Jico and Carrizal], and those from Jico and Carrizal more closely match the type, indeed its wing is a shade less than theirs."

Cyrtonyx merriami. The characters of this species are so well marked that in conjunction with my critic's comments, it serves to illustrate strikingly the true value of Mr. Grant's criticism and conclusions. He says that "By almost invariably contrasting his supposed new birds with the species to which they are least nearly allied, 'old friends' are made to appear in the guise of very distinct species. We cannot imagine that so excellent a field-naturalist as Mr. Nelson does this wilfully, and must therefore infer that such errors are due to insufficient knowledge of the subject and want of material. By referring to the various 'keys to the species' in the 'Catalogue of Birds,' XXII, Mr. Nelson would have escaped such absurdities as redescribing *Cyrtonyx sallæi* under the name of *C. merriami* and comparing it with *C. montezumæ*!" "There can be no doubt that *C. merriami* is a synonym of the beautiful species described in 1859 as *C. sallæi*." The foregoing authoritative disposal of *C. merriami* made me almost fear that Mr. Grant held the power to make the 'tiger change its spots.' On examination of the type of *C. merriami* however I find that the color characters between it, *C. montezumæ* and *C. sallæi*, are such that a photograph brings out some of the most salient differences. After examining the accompanying photographs of these birds I think that any competent ornithologist will admit that I was justified in the "absurdity" of describing *C. merriami* as distinct and in comparing it with its nearest relative *C. montezumæ*, even after consulting the "keys to the species" in the 'Catalogue of Birds, XXII.'

Dactylortyx. While admitting that my revision of this genus was done on scanty material I see no reason for considering myself in error in describing *D. chiapensis* and *D. devius*. That Mr. Ogilvie Grant cannot find any differences in a series of 23 specimens in the British Museum, in the light of his recent utterances, is not at all surprising and really would not appear to have any bearing on the facts in the case.