

ON THE GENUS *PITTA* VIEILLOT.

BY D. G. ELLIOT.

IN 1816 Vieillot instituted in his 'Analyse d'une nouvelle Ornithologie élémentaire,' p. 42, the genus *Pitta* for those birds designated Brève by Buffon. *Pitta* was defined as follows:

"BRÈVE, *Pitta*. *Corvus*, Linn. Gm. Lath.

Bec robuste, un peu épais à la base, droit, convexe en dessus, comprimé, pointu; mandibule supérieure échancrée vers le bout; l'inférieure entière, égale.—Ailes longues.—Queue courte.

*Esp.* Brève, Buff."

Beside the character "*Queue courte*," he gives no other which might not equally apply to the species in the other division of the family which are at present included in the genus *Eucichla*. "*Queue courte*" is a relative term, as all the species of *Pitta* have short tails in comparison to their size, although some have them longer than others, and even all the members of *Eucichla*, the so-called long-tailed species, are not equal in this respect, *E. ellioti* and *E. gurneyi* having rectrices intermediate in length between the very short-tailed species, of which *P. brachyura* (Linn.) may be considered the type, and *E. gnaiana* (Müll.), which represents those with long tails, and is the type of its genus.

Vieillot cites the Brèves of Buffon as those birds he intended should be included in his genus. These are four in number, *three* only of which, not *all* as stated by Sclater (*Ibis*, 1877, p. 260), belong to the short-tailed group, and one to the long-tailed. They are the *Merle des Philippines*, pl. 89 (*P. sordida* Müll.), *Merle des Moluques*, pl. 257 (*P. moluccensis* Müll.), *Merle vert des Moluques*, pl. 258 (*P. coronata* Müll.), and *Merle de la Guiane*, pl. 355 (*P. gnaiana* Müll.).

*Pitta* Vieillot is therefore a composite genus, and an author when dividing the family into different genera has a perfect right to choose as the type for his division *Pitta* any of the species among those included by Vieillot in his genus, when he had made them all equal, and recognized no generic differences among them, and placed both short- and long-tailed species in one genus.

In my 'Monograph,' published in 1863, I restricted the term *Pitta* to those birds with the long, pointed tails, and adopted for the short- nearly square-tailed species the term *Brachyurus*, Thunberg (Vet. Akad. Handl. 1821, p. 370). This, however, has been twice previously employed in zoölogy, first by Latreille in 1802 for a genus of crustacea, and again in 1814 by Fischer for one of mammals, and cannot, therefore, according to the principles adopted by naturalists at the present day, be again employed in ornithology. In 1859 Reichenbach in his 'Systema Avium,' pl. lii, separated the fourth species in Vieillot's genus, *le Merle de la Guiane*, from the rest, and made it the type of a new genus *Eucichla*, thus leaving the short-tailed birds to represent Vieillot's genus *Pitta*, of which the type, if we take the first species mentioned by Buffon, would be that on plate 89, the *Merle des Philippines* (*P. sordida* Müll.), and not *P. brachyura* as given by Scater (Cat. Bds. Brit. Mus., XIV, 1888, p. 413), which is not mentioned at all by Buffon in his work, the *Merle de Bengale*, as figured on Plate 258, being a Moluccan and not an Indian species.

If, therefore, the Pittidæ are to be divided into three genera, we should have *Anthocinclæ* with *A. phayrei* as its type, *Pitta*, with *P. sordida* for its type, comprising all the birds with very short, slightly rounded rectrices, and *Eucichla* with *P. guaiana* as type, including the species with rather elongated, pointed tails. Not sufficient is known at present of the anatomy of *Coracopitta* to warrant its reception into Pittidæ, the probability being that it belongs to a different family.