

- m.* ♀ ad. sk. Pahpoon, Tenasserim, Jan. 13, Seebohm Coll.
1874 (*W. D.*).
- n.* ♂ ad. sk. Myawadée, Tenasserim, Jan. 21, Hume Coll.
1877 (*W. D.*).
- o.* ♂ imm. sk. Thoungyeen R., Tenasserim, Hume Coll.
Mar. 4, 1880 (*C. T. Bingham*).
- p.* ♀ ad. sk. Wimpong, Tenasserim, Dec. 20, Hume Coll.
1876 (*W. D.*).
- q.* ♂ ad. sk. Kaukaryit, Tenasserim, Jan. 10, Hume Coll.
1877 (*W. D.*).
- r.* ♂ ad. sk. Kaukaryit, Tenasserim, Jan. 14, Hume Coll.
1877 (*W. D.*).

II.—*A Day's Egging on the Sandbanks of the Ganges.*

By WILLIAM JESSE.

In writing this account of a day spent in hunting sandbanks for the eggs of the Terns and Plovers, I cannot help feeling that I am going over ground well known and somewhat stale; but, as it is just possible that there may be some other oologist as enthusiastic, but as inexperienced in this particular line as myself, I think that my remarks may have some slight interest.

None of the Terns and Plovers that haunt our large Indian river-systems breed in the immediate vicinity of Lucknow, the Goomti not being a stream broad enough to furnish the flats and islands patronized by these birds.

I had made one short trip down the Ganges from Cawnpore in the middle of March, through the kindness of Mr. Fisher, of the Bank of Bengal, but, partly owing to the somewhat early date, and partly to my ignorance of the habits of the birds, I was unsuccessful. However, in the second week in April last I found I could get a few days' leave, and promptly wrote to my friend Mr. Wildeblood, District Engineer at Fatehgarh, to acquaint him of the fact, and to say that I intended to come over to him with all speed, bent on oological discoveries.

On the 5th of April therefore I entered the train, thoroughly equipped for my expedition, and with the Indian oologist's

“sine quā non,” Hume’s ‘Nests and Eggs,’ and a copy of the ‘Pioneer’ to serve as my mental pabulum during the journey.

Ye Gods!!! what a journey! Travelling by train in Upper India in the month of April is not a thing to be undertaken lightly, and on this particular day the heat, dust, and glare were, if anything, worse than usual. Owing to a mistake in the Company’s own time-tables I started three hours too early, and had to wait, therefore, in the Cawnpore Railway Station. Most fortunately, when I got into the Fatehgarh train, I found in the same carriage Mr. John Cockburn, of the Opium Department, who at one time used to collect for Mr. Hume, and had been a personal friend of the late Major Cock and others of that brilliant band of ornithologists who did so much in India in the seventies and early eighties, and who have now nearly all left the “land of regrets” for ever, causing a void which it will be hard to fill up. One of Mr. Cockburn’s hobbies is the study of the Serpent-Eagles, and we passed away the time very pleasantly, and, in my case, most profitably, as we discussed various things connected with Indian bird-life.

According to Mr. Hume’s works I was afraid that I should be rather late for many of the species, he seeming to have got most of his eggs (in the N.W.P.) in the third week in March and (in the Punjab) in April. However, a talk with Cockburn soon restored my confidence, and from him I got several hints as to commencing a search.

At length, after a journey the heat, dust, and general discomfort of which can be better imagined than described, I was more than thankful to find the train crawling into Fatehgarh Station, and to be able to exchange the stuffy railway-carriage for a seat in Wildeblood’s tum-tum. Fatehgarh is a charming little Indian station, situated on the west bank of the Ganges, most of the bungalows, in Civil lines, being built along the cliffs overlooking the river-bed. Except during the rains, this bed is more or less dry sandy ground, covered with “jhao” jungle, a sort of tamarisk, and a great resort of wild swine. Fatehgarh, in

fact, is one of the few stations now in Northern India where you can commence beating in the station itself, and come home with a boar or two by 10 o'clock, after a good morning's ride.

The following two or three days were spent in searching the country in the immediate vicinity of the station, but beyond a few eggs of the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron ginginianus*), Stone-Plover (*Oedicnemus crepitans*), and Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*), I got nothing worth mentioning. I finally made up my mind to spend the 9th on the river, searching the banks, and to make a long day of it. Accordingly the office babu, a most obliging man, was summoned, and orders were given that a boat was to be found and everything ready for starting early on the morrow. The tum-tum was at the door by 5.30 A.M., and after a light chota hazri we jumped in and found ourselves soon after 6 A.M. at Nathia Ghat, where our boat and men were in waiting. The boat was a small edition of the country craft, and very light and handy for its size. The middle portion had been planked over, and on the deck thus provided were placed chairs, provisions, guns, binoculars, and collecting-boxes.

It was a lovely morning when we pushed off, bright and cool, and giving no indication of the tremendous roasting we were to get later on. Slowly we drifted down stream, keeping our ears open for the faintest cry of a bird, and closely scanning every bit of sand with the glasses. The method of procedure is as follows:—As soon as you near a sandbank island—sand-spits not entirely surrounded by water are almost always useless—if you see any birds upon it, run the boat ashore, spread out your men in line, and beat the whole place very carefully. By this means, if there are eggs, you will not be likely to overlook them. We had drifted for some little time without meeting with anything, when the glasses revealed a Spur-wing Plover (*Hoplopterus ventralis*) sitting on the sand. Running the boat ashore, I walked straight up to the spot, and there in a slight hollow, unlined, except for one or two small pieces of drift, were four richly-marked eggs. These were not many days short

of hatching out, but, by the exercise of a little patience, and with a little gentle persuasion from hook and blowpipe, they made very nice specimens. Although absolutely certain of the identity of these eggs, I shot the bird, much against my will, as it was the first clutch of this species that I had taken. About ten minutes after this we came upon another island, round which some Terns and several of the beautiful little Swallow-Plover (*Glareola lactea*) were wheeling. I could see at once, as we approached, that these birds had eggs, and, after a search, we were rewarded by several clutches of the Swallow-Plovers and a nice one of the Black-bellied Tern (*Sterna melanogaster*). Here I should have also found the eggs or young of the large River-Tern (*Sterna seena*), for a pair of these birds were in a wild state of excitement, dashing down within a foot or two of my head, but I was not successful and missed them.

For some time after this we drew blanks. We passed numerous sand-spits, but no islands. As we drifted along we saw numerous ghavials, their black bodies shining in the sun, but as we had no rifle we could not take a shot at them. Presently we came to a small island on which was a colony of the Skimmer or Scissor-bill Tern (*Rhynchos albicollis*). They apparently had only just begun to lay. In only five nests did we find eggs, and only one in each of these. As we robbed their nests these birds kept flying round us, uttering all the time their peculiar twittering cry, somewhat resembling that of a Sparrow.

The "loo" had now begun to blow in earnest, and although, when in mid-stream, its fierce heat was somewhat tempered by the water, the banks were like furnaces and the air was thick with whirling sand. Fortunately the wind was behind us, so that the discomfort was not so great as it would otherwise have been. After tiffin, Wildeblood, who was hardly so enthusiastic about eggs as myself, walked home, and I continued my voyage alone.

As the boat drifted down I saw numerous water-birds. In one gaggle of Geese I counted over 100, and in a flock of Swans over 40, besides various Ducks, chiefly Gadwalls,

I think, though I did not shoot any. On one island I came across a pair of the Great Stone-Plover (*Esacus recurvirostris*), the eggs of which I was very anxious to get, but unfortunately they were not yet laid. Further on I found a number of nests of the Skimmer, but they were empty. However, as I got a fine clutch, though very hard-set, of the large River-Tern (*Sterna seena*), I was quite compensated. We also picked up one or two more clutches of the Spur-wing, and then I came upon a large colony of Swallow-Plovers, and we had a busy time collecting and marking the eggs. These little birds were most anxious about their treasures, and would come tumbling down, literally almost at one's feet, pretending a broken wing, and would go shuffling along, apparently hardly able to move, every now and then lying quite still, as if thoroughly exhausted, only to fly off immediately that any attempt was made to catch them. The birds usually lay their eggs on the damp soil, not far from the water's edge, but in this colony many had been laid in the shifting sand and were half buried in consequence. The nests were merely little circular hollows, about three inches across; often there was no hollow at all. The eggs lay, of course, on the bare sand, as often as not in the open, but sometimes partly concealed by a tuft of jhao or a piece of driftwood. Mr. Hume puts the number down as usually four, yet, strangely enough, all my eggs were in pairs or single, and numbers of them were very hard-set. Among this colony I found a clutch of the Black-bellied Tern. During the day the birds trust to the heat of the sun's rays, and merely stand by or wheel round over their eggs. One can form a pretty good estimate of the heat of the sands at this time of the year from the fact that Mr. Cockburn assured me that he once found a Skimmer's egg hard-baked.

After leaving this island I found a few more eggs of the Spur-wing and of the Black-bellied Tern, and then I had to stop. By this time the sun was sinking, and I had at least six miles to walk, so I set to work to blow my eggs. This was a somewhat tiring and lengthy job, as, altogether, I had