

THE GIANT HERON.

The giant heron (*Ardea Goliath gigantodes and nobilis*) is found in the central and southern part of Africa. The feathers of the upper part of the head and the tuft upon the top of the head, also the feathers on the curve of the wings and the under part of the body with the exception of the white throat, are chestnut brown. The remaining upper part of the body is ash gray. The loose hanging feathers on the fore part of the neck are white on the outside, and black inside. The eye is yellow, the upper part of the bill is black, the under part is greenish yellow at the point, and violet color at the root. The foot is black. The length of this heron is about one hundred and thirty-six centimeters, the breadth one hundred eighty-six; the length of the tail twenty-one centimetres, and the length of the wings fifty-five.

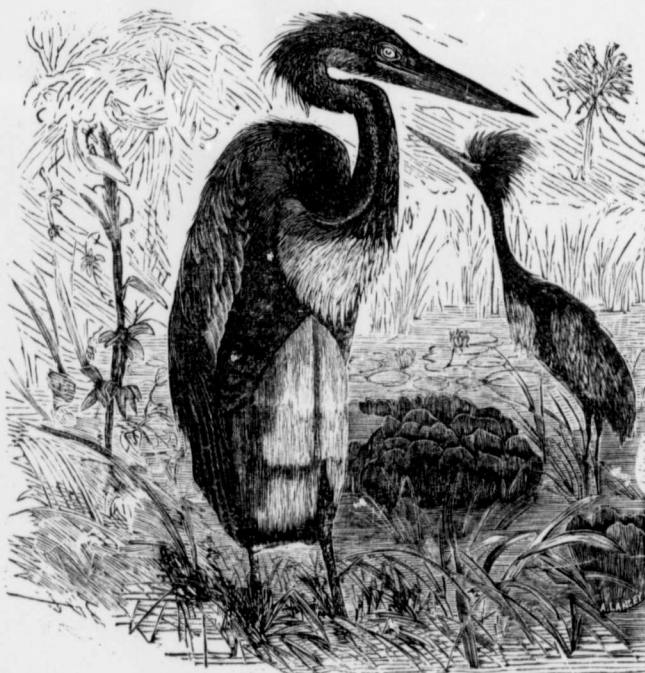
This bird is found near shallow water. It visits small ponds in the fields, water ditches, and pools, and in winter seeks shallow bays of the sea and waters about the coast, especially where there is a forest in the vicinity, or at least high trees, where it is accustomed to rest.

These giant herons are more timid than any other of the species. Every clap of thunder terrifies them, and they are afraid of men even when seen at a distance. It is a very difficult matter to surprise an old heron, for it seems conscious of every danger, and immediately takes to flight if frightened. They have a shrill voice.

Their food consists of fishes, frogs, serpents, especially adders, young swamp and water birds, mice, insects that live in the water, and earth worms. Naumann says that when a heron reaches the pond, if it does not suspect the presence of an observer, it generally goes immediately into the shallow water and begins to fish. Bending its neck, and lowering its bill, it fastens a keen look upon the water, and moves softly and with measured strides, but with such cautious steps that not the least splashing sound is heard. It circles round the whole pond in this way, seeking food, throwing its neck quickly forward, then suddenly drawing it back, holding a fish firmly in its bill. If the fish aimed at is in deep water, it moves with its whole neck under the water, and in order to preserve its balance opens its wings a little. It seldom misses its aim.

These herons form settlements, the nests sometimes numbering a

hundred. In April the old herons make their appearance at the nests, repair them if necessary, and then begin to lay. They are about a metre broad, shallow, and simply put together of sticks, twigs, reeds, or straw. They are lined in a very slovenly manner with hair, wool, or feathers. They lay three or four eggs, which average sixty millimetres in length and forty-three thick. The shells are smooth, the color is green. After three weeks of brooding the young birds are hatched. They are helpless, awkward, ugly creatures. They seem to be constantly hungry and eat an incredible amount. They remain in the nest about four weeks. After leaving the nest the parents care for them for a



GIANT HERON.—(One fifth Natural Size.)

few days and then leave them to their fate. Old and young then disperse, and the settlement is deserted.

Baldamus says that the fear which these herons have of all birds of prey, even crows and magpies, is really laughable. The robbers appear to know this, for they plunder the heron settlements with shameless impudence, and expect no greater revenge than a few feeble blows of the wings.

They are easily raised in captivity, their food consisting of fish, frogs, and mice.—*From Brehm's Animal Life.*

A WISE MAN will make more opportunities than he finds.—*Lord Bacon.*

A FEATHERED SHEPHERD.

In South America there is a very beautiful bird called the agami, or the golden-breasted trumpeter. It is about as large in the body as one of our common barn-yard fowl, but as it has longer legs and a longer neck it seems much larger. Its general color is black, but the plumage on the breast is beautiful beyond description, being what might be called iridescent, changing, as it continually does, from a steel-blue to a red-gold, and glittering with a metallic lustre.

In its wild state the agami is not peculiar for anything but its beauty, its extraordinary cry, which has given it the name of trumpeter, and for an odd habit of leaping with comical antics in-

faithful guardian drives its charge home again.

Sometimes it is given the care of a flock of sheep; and, though it may seem too puny for such a task, it is in fact quite equal to it. The misguided sheep that tries to trifle with an agami soon has cause to repent the experiment; for, with a swiftness unrivalled by any dog the feathered shepherd darts after the runaway, and with wings and beak drives it back to its place, not forgetting to impress upon the offender a sense of its errors by pecks with its beak.

Should a dog think to take advantage of the seemingly unguarded condition of the sheep and approach them with evil designs, the agami makes no hesitation about rushing at him and giving combat. And it must be a good dog that will overcome the brave bird. Indeed, most dogs are so awed by the fierce onset of the agami, accompanied by its strange cries, that they incontinently turn about and run, fortunate if they escape unscathed from the indignant creature.

At meal-times it walks into the house and takes its position near its master, seeming to ask for his caresses. It will not permit the presence of any other pet in the room, and even resents the intrusion of any servants not belonging there, driving out all others before it will be contented. Like a well-bred dog, it does not clamor for food, but waits with dignity until its wants have been satisfied.—*From "Benevolent Birds," by Will Woodman, in St. Nicholas.*

TRIMMING THE ELEPHANT'S FEET.

The whole of a day was spent recently at Bridgeport, Conn., by five men in trimming the feet of two elephants. The operation is performed, the *New Haven Register* says, once on the road, once in the fall, and again in the spring. The sole of an elephant's foot is covered with a thick, horny substance, which as it grows thicker, tends to contract and crack, often laming the animal. At the time of trimming the elephant stands on three legs and places the foot to be operated upon across a large tub. Two men hold the leg down, and one stands at the animal's head to prevent him from turning. Then with a two-foot drawing knife one man shaves off great pieces of bone from the sole of the foot. The elephant holds the foot high of his own accord, and after the operation he flourishes his trunk, trumpets, and expresses sincere thanks.—*Scientific American.*