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The Himalayan bird collection of the Marquis Paolo Solaroli, "Prince of Sirdanah", and the type locality of *Oedicornis indicus* Salvadori, 1865

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The Zoological Museum of Turin University owns a small but fairly complete collection of Himalayan birds, known as the "Solaroli Collection", which was entered in 1841 as a gift from "the Prince Solaroli of Sirdanah" (Salvadori 1915).

Paolo Solaroli (Novara, 8.XII.1797—Turin, 1878), when he came of age, travelled in Italy and part of Europe with the final intention of reaching America. Having entered the service of the pasha of Egypt, he remained in the Egyptian army for some years, later visiting Bombay and Calcutta. Here he found a job in a factory for the production of indigo, and in the following years he became superintendent of numerous factories. He married one of the daughters of the Begum of Sirdanah, a rajate at the foot of the Himalayas, and became Commander of the local Body Guards, Colonel and Chief Justice with important appointments at the Court.

When Solaroli finally returned to Italy, he was created Baron by the King of Sardinia Carlo Alberto, and took part in the First Italian Independence War in 1848, earning various decorations for military valour. He was also aide-de-camp of King Victor Emmanuel II during the historic meeting in Teano with General Giuseppe Garibaldi (26.X.1860), was elected deputy in several legislatures and was finally created Marquis of Briona.

From a letter now preserved in the Turin State Archives, dated "Mussorie nelle Himalaye" 13 February 1841 and addressed to the then Ministry for Foreign Affairs, we are aware of the shipping of 444 bird skins belonging to 226 species, labelled with English and Indian names by Solaroli himself, as a gift to King Carlo Alberto. The collection was entrusted to the Zoological Museum of the University of Turin, at that time directed by Giuseppe Gené. His cataloguing of Indian birds was subsequently revised by Tommaso Salvadori with updated scientific names. Today the "Solaroli Collection" (Section E of

the Ornithological Department) includes 369 specimens. Those now missing were exchanged with other museums or were disposed of, as they were irreparably damaged by insects (Elter 1986).

The Solaroli Collection has never been the object of a monographic study, and only two specimens from it (nos. 4086, 4087) were used as syntypes for the description of a new species, namely *Oedicnemus indicus* Salvadori, 1865, *Atti Soc. Ital. Sci. Nat.* 8: 375, from "India". Other material was designated as pertaining to a new taxon by Giuseppe Gené, but this was never published validly: "*Oriolus decipiens*" Gené Ms. [= *Oriolus oriolus kundoo* Sykes (Salvadori 1864)].

It has now been possible to restrict, at least in part, the type locality of the Indian Stone Curlew *Oedicnemus indicus* Salvadori [now *Burhinus oedicnemus indicus* (Salvadori)] to: the surroundings of Mussoorie, in Uttar Pradesh in "the Great Himalayas starting from their origin [= "il gierme" in Solaroli's letter] up to 17,000 feet above sea level" (obviously in the former rajate of Sirdanah). The two unsexed syntypes, still preserved in the Zoological Museum of Turin University, are both labelled as from "Jmalajas" and are inscribed "Typus!" in Salvadori's handwriting. They are in fairly good condition and their measurements (in mm) are, respectively: UCC-E58-4086 (culmen from feathers 40, from skull 42; flattened wing 205; tarsus 84; tail 109); UCC-E175-4087 (culmen from feathers 39, from skull 44; flattened wing 215; tarsus 86; tail 119).

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