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R. L. Walker,
1912,

THE
BIRDS OF WILTSHIRE.

COMPRISING

All the Periodical and Occasional Visitants,
as well as those which are indigenous
to the County.

BY THE

REV. ALFRED CHARLES SMITH, M.A.,
*Christ Church, Oxford; Rector of Yatesbury; Member of the British
Ornithologists' Union; Hon. Sec. of the Wiltshire Archæological
and Natural History Society;*

AUTHOR OF

'ATTRACTIONS OF THE NILE,' 'SPRING TOUR IN PORTUGAL,' 'A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH PALESTINE,'
'BRITISH AND ROMAN ANTIQUITIES OF THE NORTH WILTSHIRE DOWNS,' ETC.

Published for the Author by
R. H. PORTER, 6, TENTERDEN STREET, LONDON, W.;
AND
H. F. BULL, DEVIZES.
1887.

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To

MY OLD AND VALUED FRIEND,

ALFRED NEWTON,

PROFESSOR OF ZOOLOGY AND COMPARATIVE ANATOMY,

M.A., F.R.S., ETC., ETC.,

AND FELLOW OF MAGDALENE COLLEGE, IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

WITH WHOM I HAVE ENJOYED A CORRESPONDENCE

ON OUR FAVOURITE HOBBY FOR THE LAST THIRTY-SEVEN YEARS,

I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME.

M366817

PREFACE.



AN enforced holiday of six months, owing to illness, and consequent absence from my parish, and confinement to the house during the winter months, have given me the leisure which has hitherto been wanting, for reprinting some papers on the Ornithology of Wilts, which I published above thirty years ago in the earliest volumes of the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society. To the reproduction of these papers in one volume I have been repeatedly urged by many of my Wiltshire neighbours, but by no one more persistently than by the old friend to whose opinion, on all matters relating to birds, I have long been accustomed to bow with implicit obedience (Professor Alfred Newton), to whom I am proud to dedicate this volume, but who—be it thoroughly understood in the outset—is in no way responsible for any errors, heresies, blunders, or defects which these pages may contain; for he has never seen them, nor will see them until they are beyond the power of correction.

For when I speak of the *reprinting* the ornithological papers, the first of which appeared in the first number of the *Wiltshire Magazine*, I should explain that on the covers of those magazines I have, from time to time, printed a notice, requesting to be informed of the occurrence of any rare bird, or anything interesting in regard to birds in all parts of the county; and—thanks to the kindness of many friends, and some who had previously been strangers to me, I have, in the course of the thirty-four years which have elapsed since I first asked for such information, received such a mass of valuable material that

much of the papers I formerly wrote required to be rewritten ; and a great deal of additional matter had to be added, to bring up to present date anything approaching to a full history of the birds of Wiltshire : for my aim is—whether I succeed in accomplishing it or no—to make this volume a record of all the species which belong to our county as inhabitants or periodical migrants, as well as of all such as have been known occasionally to visit it.

Moreover, having been obliged to spend many winters and springs in warmer climates, I have had unusual opportunities of making myself acquainted, in their own haunts, with many of the rarer stragglers which occasionally visit our island. Previous to the printing of my former papers on the Ornithology of Wilts, I had only had opportunities of becoming personally acquainted with the birds of Western and Northern Europe ; but since that time I have rambled, gun in hand, and with binocular—quite as indispensable a companion to an ornithologist—for several seasons on the southern shores of France and Italy, in Spain and Portugal, and, above all, in Egypt and Nubia ; and there I have watched in its own home, and studied the habits and life history of, many a bird which, though recognised in Great Britain as an occasional visitor, very rarely comes in the flesh before the British ornithologist. So that I have something to add from personal observation elsewhere to my former account of some of the feathered visitors to this county.

In reprinting and collecting into a volume the ornithological papers which were scattered over many volumes of the *Wiltshire Magazine*,* let me first say that in preparing those papers I did not scruple occasionally to gather from various standard books on birds whatever suited my purpose, though I fear I cannot now distinguish such, still less can I refer them to their several authors. Also I would premise that this book has no

* *Wiltshire Magazine*, Vol. I., pp. 41-45, 105-115, 239-249 ; II., pp. 162-172, 290-301 ; III., pp. 337-357 ; IV., pp. 26-35, 285-298 ; VI., pp. 167-182 ; VII., pp. 81-102 ; IX., pp. 45-57, 211-222 ; XI., pp. 160-174 ; XII., pp. 44-72, 152-185. See also for other ornithological papers Vol. III., pp. 129-145 ; VIII., pp. 135-144 ; X., pp. 115-130.

pretensions of a scientific character, nor does it aspire to be other than a plain account of the Birds of Wiltshire, written by a Wiltshire man, and for Wiltshire people, and is meant to supply in a popular manner some information to those who are not very learned in the subject, but who desire to know something of the feathered tribes by which they are surrounded, as well as those which periodically or occasionally visit us. There are no scientific disquisitions in this volume. I have not even touched on the writings of Charles Darwin, much as I admire and heartily as I accept the groundwork of his beautiful theory. I shall probably be accused of turning a deaf ear to modern discoveries, and of putting forth a treatise which might have been written fifty years ago. No doubt, to a certain extent, there is some truth in such accusations; but to dabble in science, and to argue on scientific subjects without much scientific knowledge, very soon leads the presumptuous writer into a very quicksand of trouble. I can, then, discourse on birds only according to my lights, and if I be somewhat old-fashioned and behind the age in my old-world notions, I submit that modern opinions are not always correct, and that our predecessors in ornithology were not always so ignorant as modern presumption sometimes supposes. Moreover, this professes to be in some sense a *reprint* of that which was published before the theories of Darwin and Wallace were put forth, and before the new nomenclature and classification came into existence.

But whatever the nomenclature—for a rose under any other name would smell as sweet—and whatever the classification (for this is, at last, but a matter of opinion on which our best ornithologists still differ widely), the study of birds still remains, as in the good old days of Gilbert White and Bewick, a most interesting and fascinating study, carrying its votaries along the most pleasant paths, and adding tenfold interest to every walk. The unobservant passer-by may think that all birds are alike, except in size and colour; the casual observer may imagine that in this pursuit there can be little to learn; but the truth is, that in all pursuits of this kind, and certainly not the least so in the

one before us, the farther he advances the more he sees to admire, the more he discovers how little he knows. Let him examine the plumage of a bird—let him take a single feather, and see its wonderful growth, its mysterious colouring, its perfect adaptation to the end for which it was made. What an admirable defence against cold and heat, how light and buoyant! Let him examine the different methods of nidification adopted by the different species; how every species adopts a method peculiar to itself, yet one which is exactly followed by all the members comprising that species. What consummate skill and ingenuity are displayed in the construction of their nests; how beautiful and curious and varied are their eggs!

These and a thousand other such things, unnoticed by the many, but discovered at every turn by the student in ornithology, point out how perfect are the works of God, how varied and beautiful, how exactly suited to their several positions are the creatures of His hand. The contemplation of them not only fills the heart with pleasure, but lifts it up in praise and adoration to the great and bountiful Creator, whose least work so far surpasses the greatest triumph of the most scientific men.

It would occupy too much space to append a full list of my very numerous correspondents on this subject; but I shall not, I hope, be misunderstood, or thought to have made an invidious selection, when I am so much indebted to many, if I especially enumerate some who have most materially assisted me. First and foremost of these I must mention my very intimate and deeply lamented friend, the *Rev. George Marsh*, for many years Vicar of Sutton Benger, in this county, who was a thorough practical ornithologist, whose ear was so accurate as to detect in an instant any unwonted note in the woods or hedgerows or garden; and whose knowledge of birds, from long personal observation, was so profound that he seldom failed to identify the feathered songster who uttered it. With every specimen in his admirable collection at Sutton Benger* I was in my younger

* This collection, at the death of its owner, passed into the possession of his brother, the late Mr. Matthew Marsh, sometime M.P. for Salisbury,

days quite familiar, and I was never tired of listening to their histories as their owner loved to describe them. Moreover, I made copious extracts from the MS. notes which he lent for the purpose; and I am indebted to him in no slight degree for much and varied bird knowledge which he imparted to me through a friendship of many years, which only terminated with his death. Still more early was my acquaintance with the fine collection of birds made by *Mr. Ernle Warriner*,* of Conock House, in the parish of Cherrington, near Devizes, which I had frequent opportunities of examining on the many happy Sundays which I spent there when at my first school hard by. That was declared by its owner to be a *perfect* collection of British birds, as recognised up to that date (about A.D. 1833), and contains many fine specimens of very rare stragglers to Great Britain, a considerable number of which I know from its collector's mouth to have been Wiltshire specimens; but as most unhappily all record of them is lost, it is impossible to say which are Wiltshire killed, and which are imported from other countries. It is, I think, to Mr. Warriner and his beautiful collection of birds that I am indebted for my first introduction to this delightful branch of natural history, which has been my cherished hobby ever since. Another ornithologist of olden time, whom it was my great privilege to know, by a correspondence extending over several years, and subsequently by a visit which I paid him at his beautiful seat in Yorkshire, was the well-known *Charles Waterton*, whose essays in natural history and remarkable autobiography are familiar to all, as is also his thorough practical acquaintance with birds and their habits; but whose extraordinary power of preserving in their natural, life-like

at whose death it was given by his widow, and a room to contain it added, by her beneficence, to the South Wilts Museum, at Salisbury, where it may now be seen, in admirable preservation.

* Subsequently in the possession of his son, Captain Ernle Warriner, and for many years deposited in the house of the late Mr. William Tugwell, and now, by the kindness of the owner, deposited in the Museum of the Wilts Archæological and Natural History Society, at Devizes,

attitudes* the many animals and birds which he had collected was known to but few: indeed, I may say that none but those who have seen them can realize the incomparable specimens, amounting to some thousands in number, which this prince of naturalists had collected and prepared during the many years of his wanderings in the wilds of Demerara and other foreign countries. During a glorious week which I spent at Walton Hall in 1857, Mr. Waterton took infinite pains to teach me the process he invented and practised; but though I paid every attention to the instructions of my master, and made many an attempt in that direction on my return home, I was obliged to own that it required not only the intimate anatomical knowledge and the unwearied patience, but also the delicacy of touch and the deftness of finger of a Waterton, where my more clumsy hands utterly and shamefully failed.

To descend to more modern times, I would first express my acknowledgments to the *Rev. A. P. Morres*, Vicar of Britford, near Salisbury, for the admirable papers 'On the Occurrence of some of the Rarer Species of Birds in the Neighbourhood of Salisbury,' which with much earnest solicitation I prevailed on him to write, and which I had the pleasure of printing in the

* My first acquaintance with a specimen of Mr. Waterton's skill in bird-stuffing was as follows: For some reason which I now forget, he declined to send specimens, as he had been invited to do, to the first Great Exhibition, in 1851, and when I ventured to express the extreme regret with which I and others learnt his decision, he said he would send a few samples to the College of Surgeons to the care of Professor Owen, and bade me go there and see them. I did not find Professor Owen at home, but Mrs. Owen, kindly offering to show me the specimens, took me into the library, and bade me beware of the beak of a fine Eagle Owl, which was sitting on a perch, just inside the door; and it was not till I had examined it on all sides for a considerable time that I could convince myself that the bird was not alive, but merely a skin prepared by Mr. Waterton—literally a skin and feathers only; for when Mrs. Owen lifted off the head, as one might lift off the top of a cardboard box, there was neither wool nor tow nor stuffing of any kind, neither bone nor cork nor wire, but simply a hollow skin, which had been manipulated by so masterly a hand, and by so knowing an anatomist, that the dried skin showed the exact hollows and swellings, here a depression, and there an excrescence, which the muscles and the sinews of the bird when in life would have caused.

magazine of the Wilts Archæological and Natural History Society.* To these papers, so far as they relate to this county, I shall have occasion to make frequent reference in this volume, as well as to many notes on the occurrence of rare birds in South Wilts, with which the same able ornithologist has from time to time favoured me. To the *Rev. George Powell*, Rector of Sutton Veny, and to *Mr. Ernest Baker*, of Mere, I am also much indebted for many interesting communications of a like character, and extended over many years, with reference to the visits of accidental stragglers in South Wilts. Also to the *Rev. T. A. Preston*, late of Marlborough College, and the founder, as I may say, of the excellent museum there, for many valuable notices of birds in his district. To the late *Major Spicer*, of Spye Park, himself an excellent outdoor naturalist, with whom I have enjoyed much ornithological communication, and whose fine collection of birds and magnificent ornithological library were always open to my inspection. To my old friend *Colonel Michael Foster Ward*, of Bannerdown House, Bath, for frequent notices of occurrences in his district; and last, but by no means least, to *Mr. Grant*, formerly bird-preservee in Devizes, for the pains he has taken in preparing for my use a full catalogue of the rarer birds which have passed through the hands of himself and his sons. To one and all of these, and to a host of others in all parts of the county, I here beg to tender my heartiest thanks, not only for the information given me, but for the kindness and cordiality with which they have received and replied to my many minute, and sometimes, I fear, troublesome inquiries.

In addition to the collections of Mr. Warriner and Rev. G. Marsh, and other general collections in the Devizes and Salisbury Museums, also the Marlborough College Museum, and those of Rev. A. P. Morres, Rev. G. Powell, Mr. Ernest Baker, Major Spicer, and Colonel Ward, mentioned above, I have also had the advantage of an acquaintance many years ago with the admirable

* (1) Vol. XVII., pp. 94-127; (2) Vol. XVIII., pp. 183-213; (3) Vol. XVIII., pp. 289-318; (4) Vol. XX., pp. 154-185; (5) Vol. XXI., pp. 211-255; (6) Vol. XXII., pp. 83-106; (7) Vol. XXII., pp. 191-211.

collection of British birds which my old friend Mr. Wadham Locke possessed when he lived at Ashton Gifford, near Warminster; and I have also examined and profited by the fine collections of Mr. Rawlence, of Wilton; of Mr. Elgar Sloper, at Devizes; and of Mr. Gwatkin, of the Manor House, Potterne. Moreover, I possess a very fair collection of my own, both of birds and eggs, which I began in my Eton days more than fifty years ago; so that I have had an ample supply of specimens at hand, without straying beyond the borders of our county; and if I fail in setting forth the birds of Wilts in this volume, it is certainly from no lack of willing and able correspondents, nor from the want of sufficient collections from which to draw my material.

With these words of preface I send forth my newly-fledged Wiltshire bantling to try its wings in a flight through the county, craving indulgence for its shortcomings; but this I know I shall meet with from ornithologists, for there is, I verily believe, such a friendly feeling among birdmen, and such a freemasonry among all lovers of the feathered race, that if they see a poor victim mercilessly pecked at by cruel critics they will fly to the rescue and drive off the attacking bird of prey; nor cease till they have delivered the timid quarry, before he is overwhelmed by his fierce assailants.

There is a satisfaction to me in preparing these pages for the press in the old home of my boyhood and youth, the hedge-rows of which were the scenes of my first bird-nesting expeditions, and the woods and coppices of which echoed to the report of my gun more than fifty years ago.

OLD PARK, DEVIZES,
May, 1887.



CLASSIFIED LIST OF

ORDER.	TRIBE.	FAMILY.
1 RAPTORES . <i>(Birds of Prey)</i>	———	1 <i>Vulturidæ.</i> Vultures . 2 <i>Falconidæ.</i> Falcons .
		3 <i>Strigidæ.</i> Owls .
2 INSESSORES . . <i>(Perchers)</i>	1 DENTIROSTRES - <i>(Tooth-billed)</i>	4 <i>Laniadæ.</i> Butcher Birds . 5 <i>Muscicapidæ.</i> Fly-catchers 6 <i>Merulidæ.</i> Thrushes .

THE BIRDS OF WILTSHIRE.

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2 <i>Pandion haliaeetus</i>	Osprey	64
3 <i>Falco gyrfalco</i>	Gyr Falcon	66
4 <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Peregrine Falcon	68
5 <i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Hobby	72
6 <i>Falco rufipes</i>	Red-footed Falcon	74
7 <i>Falco aesalon</i>	Merlin	75
8 <i>Falco Tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel	78
9 <i>Astur palumbarius</i>	Goshawk	80
10 <i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Sparrow Hawk	81
11 <i>Falco milvus</i>	Kite	83
12 <i>Buteo vulgaris</i>	Common Buzzard	85
13 <i>Buteo lagopus</i>	Rough-legged Buzzard	86
14 <i>Buteo desertorum</i>	African Buzzard	88
15 <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Honey Buzzard	88
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17 <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Hen Harrier	93
18 <i>Circus Montagui</i>	Montagu's Harrier	95
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Classified List of

ORDER.	TRIBE.	FAMILY.
2 INSESSORES . (Perchers)	1 DENTIROSTRES . (Tooth-billed)	7 <i>Silviidæ</i> . Warblers. . .
		8 <i>Paridæ</i> . Titmice . . .
		9 <i>Ampelidæ</i> . Waxwings . . .
		10 <i>Motacillidæ</i> . Wagtails . . .
		11 <i>Anthidæ</i> . Pipits . . .
—	2 CONIROSTRES . (Cone-billed)	12 <i>Alaudidæ</i> . Larks . . .
		13 <i>Emberizidæ</i> . Buntings . . .
		14 <i>Fringillidæ</i> . Finches . . .

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42	<i>Phenicura titys</i>	Black Redstart	148
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55	<i>Sylvia trochilus</i>	Willow Warbler	163
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Classified List of

ORDER.	TRIBE.	FAMILY.
2 INSESSORES . (Perchers)	2 CONIROSTRES (Cone-billed)	14 <i>Fringillidæ</i> . Finches .
		15 <i>Sturnidæ</i> . Starlings .
		16 <i>Corvidæ</i> . Crows .
————	3 SCANSORES . (Climbers)	17 <i>Picidæ</i> . Woodpeckers .
		18 <i>Certhiadæ</i> . Creepers .
		19 <i>Cuculidæ</i> . Cuckoos .
————	4 FISSIROSTRES (Wide-billed)	20 <i>Meropidæ</i> . Bee-eaters .
		21 <i>Halcyonidæ</i> . Kingfishers
		22 <i>Hirundinidæ</i> . Swallows .
		23 <i>Caprimulgidæ</i> . Goatsuckers
3 RASORES . (Ground Birds)	————	24 <i>Columbidæ</i> . Doves .
		25 <i>Phasianidæ</i> . Pheasants .
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Classified List of

ORDER.	TRIBE.	FAMILY.
3 RASORES (<i>Ground Birds</i>)	————	26 <i>Tetraonidæ</i> . Grouse . .
		27 <i>Struthionidæ</i> . Bustards . .
4 GRALLATORES. (<i>Waders</i>)	————	28 <i>Charadriadæ</i> . Plovers . .
		29 <i>Gruidæ</i> . Cranes . . .
		30 <i>Ardeidæ</i> . Herons . . .
		31 <i>Scolopacidæ</i> . Snipes . .
		32 <i>Rallidæ</i> . Rails . . .
		33 <i>Lobipedidæ</i> . Lobe-feet . .
5 NATATORES. (<i>Swimmers</i>)	————	34 <i>Anatidæ</i> . Ducks . . .

GENUS. SPECIES.	ENGLISH NAME.	PAGE
129 <i>Perdix cinerea</i>	Partridge	332
130 <i>Perdix rubra</i>	Red-legged Partridge	334
131 <i>Perdix coturnix</i>	Quail	335
		338
132 <i>Otis tarda</i>	Bustard	339
133 <i>Otis tetrax</i>	Little Bustard	364
		369
134 <i>Glareola torquata</i>	Pratincole	371
135 <i>Cursorius isabellinus</i>	Cream-coloured Courser	374
136 <i>Edicnemus crepitans</i>	Great Plover	377
137 <i>Charadrius pluvialis</i>	Golden Plover	380
138 <i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	Dotterel	382
139 <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed Plover	385
140 <i>Vanellus cristatus</i>	Lapwing	386
141 <i>Hæmatopus ostralegus</i>	Oyster-catcher	389
		391
142 <i>Grus cinerea</i>	Common Crane	391
		392
143 <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Common Heron	394
144 <i>Ardea comata</i>	Squacco Heron	403
145 <i>Botaurus minutus</i>	Little Bittern	404
146 <i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	Bittern	405
147 <i>Nycticorax griseus</i>	Night Heron	407
148 <i>Ciconia alba</i>	White Stork	408
149 <i>Ibis falcinellus</i>	Glossy Ibis	410
		412
150 <i>Numenius arquata</i>	Curlew	412
151 <i>Numenius phæopus</i>	Whimbrel	415
152 <i>Totanus calidris</i>	Redshank	417
153 <i>Totanus ochropus</i>	Green Sandpiper.	418
154 <i>Totanus glareola</i>	Wood Sandpiper.	419
155 <i>Totanus hypoleucos</i>	Common Sandpiper	420
156 <i>Totanus glottis</i>	Greenshank	421
157 <i>Limosa rufa</i>	Bar-tailed Godwit	423
158 <i>Machetes pugnax</i>	Ruff	424
159 <i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	Woodcock	425
160 <i>Scolopax major</i>	Great Snipe	428
161 <i>Scolopax gallinago</i>	Common Snipe	429
162 <i>Scolopax gallinula</i>	Jack Snipe	431
163 <i>Tringa subarquata</i>	Curlew Sandpiper	432
164 <i>Tringa Canuta</i>	Knot	433
165 <i>Tringa variabilis</i>	Dunlin	437
166 <i>Tringa maritima</i>	Purple Sandpiper	438
		439
167 <i>Crex pratensis</i>	Land Rail	440
168 <i>Crex porzana</i>	Spotted Crake	442
169 <i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	Water Rail.	443
170 <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Moorhen	444
171 <i>Aramides Cayannensis</i>	Cayenne Rail	445
		447
172 <i>Fulica atra</i>	Common Coot	448
173 <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	Gray Phalarope	449
174 <i>Phalaropus hyperboreus</i>	Red-necked Phalarope	452
		455
175 <i>Anser ferus</i>	Graylag Goose	455

Classified List of

ORDER.	TRIBE.	FAMILY.
5 ¹ NATATORES (Swimmers)	—————	34 <i>Anatidæ</i> . Ducks . . .
		35 <i>Colymbidæ</i> . Divers. . .
		36 <i>Alcedæ</i> . Auks . . .
		37 <i>Pelicanidæ</i> . Pelicans . . .
		38 <i>Laridæ</i> . Gulls. . . .

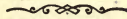
GENUS. SPECIES.	ENGLISH NAME.	PAGE
176 <i>Anser segetum</i>	Bean Goose	457
177 <i>Anser albifrons</i>	White-fronted Goose	459
178 <i>Anser torquatus</i>	Brent Goose	460
179 <i>Anser leucopsis</i>	Bernicle Goose	464
180 <i>Anser Egyptianus</i>	Egyptian Goose	465
181 <i>Anser gambensis</i>	Spur-winged Goose	467
182 <i>Anser Canadensis</i>	Canada Goose	468
183 <i>Cygnus musicus</i>	Whooper	469
184 <i>Cygnus olor</i>	Mute Swan	471
185 <i>Tadorna vulpanser</i>	Common Shelldrake	474
186 <i>Anas clypeata</i>	Shoveller	475
187 <i>Anas strepera</i>	Gadwall	477
188 <i>Anas acuta</i>	Pintail Duck	478
189 <i>Anas boschas</i>	Wild Duck	479
190 <i>Anas querquedula</i>	Garganey	481
191 <i>Anas crecca</i>	Teal	481
192 <i>Anas penelope</i>	Wigeon	482
193 <i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Eider Duck	483
194 <i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	King Duck	485
195 <i>Oidemia nigra</i>	Common Scoter	486
196 <i>Fuligula ferina</i>	Pochard	487
197 <i>Fuligula nyroca</i>	Ferruginous Duck	488
198 <i>Fuligula marila</i>	Scaup Duck	489
199 <i>Fuligula cristata</i>	Tufted Duck	490
200 <i>Fuligula glacialis</i>	Long-tailed Duck	491
201 <i>Fuligula clangula</i>	Golden Eye	492
202 <i>Mergus albellus</i>	Smew	494
203 <i>Mergus serrator</i>	Red-breasted Merganser	495
204 <i>Mergus merganser</i>	Goosander	496
		499
205 <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Great Crested Grebe	500
206 <i>Podiceps rubricollis</i>	Red-necked Grebe	501
207 <i>Podiceps cornutus</i>	Slavonian Grebe	502
208 <i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Eared Grebe	503
209 <i>Podiceps minor</i>	Little Grebe	504
210 <i>Colymbus glacialis</i>	Great Northern Diver	505
211 <i>Colymbus arcticus</i>	Black-throated Diver	508
212 <i>Colymbus septentrionalis</i>	Red-throated Diver	509
		510
213 <i>Uria troile</i>	Common Guillemot	511
214 <i>Mergulus alle</i>	Little Auk	512
215 <i>Fratercula arctica</i>	Puffin	514
216 <i>Alca torda</i>	Razor-bill	516
		517
217 <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Common Cormorant	518
218 <i>Phalacrocorax graculus</i>	Shag	521
219 <i>Sula alba</i>	Gannet	522
		524
220 <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern	525
221 <i>Sterna Arctica</i>	Arctic Tern	526
222 <i>Sterna fisispes</i>	Black Tern	528
223 <i>Larus minutus</i>	Little Gull	529
224 <i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	531
225 <i>Larus tridactylus</i>	Kittiwake	532
226 <i>Larus canus</i>	Common Gull	533

Classified List of

ORDER.	TRIBE.	FAMILY.
5 NATATORES . (Swimmers)	————	38 <i>Laridae</i> . Gulls . . .

GENUS.	SPECIES.	ENGLISH NAME.	PAGE
227	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Lesser Black-backed Gull	534
228	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull	535
229	<i>Larus marinus</i>	Great Black-backed Gull	536
230	<i>Lestris cataractes</i>	Common Skua	537
231	<i>Lestris crepidatus</i>	Richardson's Skua	539
232	<i>Puffinus Anglorum</i>	Manx Shearwater	540
233	<i>Thalassidroma Oceanica</i>	Wilson's Petrel	542
234	<i>Thalassidroma Leachii</i>	Forked-tailed Petrel	543
235	<i>Thalassidroma pelagica</i>	Storm Petrel	544

THE BIRDS OF WILTSHIRE.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE county of Wilts has been sometimes thoughtlessly said to be poor in Ornithology ; indeed, I have heard it denounced by superficial observers as exceptionally wanting in the various members of the feathered race ; pre-eminent, doubtless, in the remains of antiquity—so these gentlemen are good enough to allow—but in birds a barren field indeed. Against any such verdict I enter a decided protest, and I even maintain, on the contrary, that, taking into consideration that Wiltshire is an inland district, and therefore cannot be expected to abound in birds whose habitat is the sea and the seashore, our county will scarcely yield to any other, similarly situated, in the number and variety of the species of birds to be found there ; and I now proceed to prove this by statistics.

Let us first, however, examine the physical aspect of Wiltshire, and we shall see that it is not composed of bleak open downs alone, as its detractors superciliously affirm ; but that it can show a great diversity of scenery, and much of it of surpassing beauty. We have, it is true, our broad, open, expanding downs—and what native of Wiltshire does not glory in them and admire them ?—but we have at the same time our richly-timbered vales : if we have hill, we have also dale ; if we have open plains, we have also large woods and thick forests. Where shall we find more clear and limpid streams, where more green and laughing meadows, than in the valleys of Avon (the northern and the southern

Avon), the vale of Kennet, or of Pewsey, or of Wily, or of War-dour? Where, again, in all England can we meet with a forest to compare with that of Savernake? And in woods and parks and well-timbered estates, both in the north and south of the county, we are exceptionally rich.

But it is an undisputed fact in Ornithology—indeed, I may say in Zoology, and even in Natural History generally—that those districts afford the greatest variety of species which comprise the greatest variety of scenery; for as some kinds of birds prefer an open plain, others a sequestered valley; as some delight in the recesses of deep woods, others court the margins of streams, and all these are usually to be found in their own peculiar locality, the ornithologist in search of particular species will devote his attention to the country suited to the habits of the bird of which he is in search. Thus (to take an example which must be familiar to everybody), who would think of beating a thick wood for snipe, or of wading through a marsh for partridges? It is the same with every species of bird, as well as with all quadrupeds, reptiles, insects, and other inferior tribes of the animal kingdom. The Almighty Creator has peopled with the living creatures which He has made, no less the wild dreary plain than the sunny, smiling valley; no less the bleak open down than the sheltered, sequestered nook. I myself have found specimens of animal life far above vegetation among the eternal snows of the Swiss Alps, 9,000 feet above the sea, and on the immense deserts of rock and snow composing the Norwegian ‘fjelds.’ But far more than this, that indefatigable naturalist, De Saussure, who first surmounted the avalanches and glaciers which presented, till then, an impassable barrier to the ascent of Mont Blanc, discovered on the very top of that noble mountain several minute insects, which seemed to revel in the cold and rarified air of that exalted spot, upwards of 15,000 feet above the sea! And again, Lieutenant Greeley, in the Arctic expedition which reached the highest latitude ever attained by man, describes the existence in summer of many butterflies, and quite a ‘plague of flies,’ amidst the icebergs and snows of 83° N. lat.

But if there are living creatures to be found in every kind of country, in remote, inhospitable, and almost inaccessible rocks and snows, as well as in more genial and milder regions; and if each creature, of whatever class and however minute, is still most wonderfully formed and fitted for the particular locality assigned to it, we may assert again, without fear of contradiction, that the district which comprises the greatest variety of scenery may be expected to produce the greatest variety of species.

From the great variety, then, of scenery which Wiltshire possesses, we should expect to find a great variety of species of birds; and such, I boldly assert, is the result of our inquiries.

Of the five orders into which birds are commonly divided, three compose that large class called the 'Land Birds,' and two the 'Water Birds.' And if we examine the work which at the present day is generally accepted by the bulk of ornithologists as their manual and book of reference—I mean Yarrell's 'British Birds'—we shall find that in the last edition, completed in 1885, of the Land Birds therein enumerated there are just 199 species. But this list contains the names, not only of every bird which *inhabits* this country throughout the year; or which, being migratory, is a *periodical sojourner* here during the summer or winter, or an *occasional visitant*, passing us on its way to northern or southern latitudes, but also of every bird which has ever been seen in this country. If a straggler from Asia or Africa, happening to fall in with a storm of wind, should be hurried out of its course and carried to our shores, that one single occurrence suffices at the present day to place its name on our British list. I am not now about to enter into the question of the advantage or disadvantage to science of such a method. I only state that this *is* the method adopted by our British ornithologists, and by this means the addition of some tempest-driven, or lost straggler, is being continually made to our ever-increasing list. And yet, notwithstanding this modern method of swelling the list of British birds, and though with such additions to it from year to year, the last edition of our standard ornithological work

contains but 199 Land Birds, I have been enabled to claim no less than 133 species of them as belonging to our county.

Of the two other orders comprising the other class, or 'Water Birds,' it cannot be expected, as I before said, that this, as an inland county, should possess a very large supply. Still, even of these there are some families amongst the Waders—as the Plovers, Herons, Snipes, and Rails—which affect our open downs or marshy valleys to a great degree; and there are others which are more essentially Sea-Birds—as the Ducks, Grebes, Terns, and Gulls—which are very frequent visitors, more especially in the south of the county, the portion nearest to the sea-coast. Besides this, we have an occasional visit from many other varieties of Water Birds continually occurring. So that of the 176 species of Water Birds enumerated in the new edition of Yarrell, I may claim 102 for our Wiltshire list; so that again the diligent ornithologist, though he confine his observations to his own county, will not unfrequently meet with specimens of birds whose more peculiar domain is the sea and the shore. And this brings up the total list of Wiltshire birds to 235.*

Another and a strong proof of the favourable retreat afforded by this district of England to certain species of birds, and one which by no means should be omitted in speaking of its Ornithology, is that for a great number of years our wide downs, and, above all, Salisbury Plain, were the resort of that noble bird the Great Bustard; and though of late years it has most unhappily become extinct in Great Britain, in consequence of the draining, enclosing, and cultivating of our waste lands, yet the downs of Wilts deserve honourable mention as one of its last strongholds. With all these facts before us, I repeat that Wiltshire *does* offer a

* On comparing this with the published catalogues of birds of other counties, I find that in

<i>Cornwall</i> (with coast on two sides)	Mr. Rodd	enumerates 290 species.
<i>Humber district</i> (with open coast)	Mr. Cordeaux	" 276 "
<i>Lancashire</i> (with sea-board)	Mr. Mitchell	" 256 "
<i>Somersetshire</i> (with some coast)	Mr. Cecil Smith	" 216 "
<i>Middlesex</i> (no coast)	Mr. Harting	" 225 "
<i>Sussex</i> (with much sea-coast)	Mr. Knox	" 242 "

very large field to the inquiring ornithologist. In great measure, too, it is an open and an untrodden field, singularly wanting in writers on this particular branch of Natural History. Good old Aubrey professed, indeed, to give some account of the Natural History of Wilts;* but as regards its Ornithology, and I should not wrong him if I included all the other branches, he was ludicrously ill-informed, even for that unscientific age. In very little more than one page of quarto size he disposes of the whole of the birds of Wilts, enumerating just fifteen genera, and in the following unmethodical sequence: 'Larkes, Buntings, Linnets, Woodpeckers, Wheateares, Bustards, Gray Crowes, Rookes, Feasants, Bitterns, Herons, Sparrow-hawkes, Hobbies, Ganders, Sea-mewes;' and within these narrow limits he contrives to embody quite as many errors as facts; the latter, too, being of the very tritest and best known. Perhaps that was excusable in one who wrote on Natural History two hundred years ago, when ignorance of the very rudiments of that science, and even of the existence of some of the commonest species all around, was universal. But the only other writer on the birds of Wilts has no such excuse; for Dr. William George Maton, of Redlynch House, Salisbury, of high repute as an eminent physician, a Fellow of many learned societies, and undoubtedly an accomplished botanist, conchologist, geologist, and antiquary, and who flourished at the beginning of this century, wrote what he was pleased to call 'The Natural History of a Part of the County of Wilts;†' and certainly, as regards the chapter on 'Aves,' anything more meagre and more absolutely misleading, on account of its wholesale omissions, than the wretched account he gives of Wiltshire birds, it is impossible to conceive. The whole number of *species* mentioned by him amounts to just twenty-three; and these are not selected for their rarity, for the Heron, the Sand-martin, the Lapwing, the common Water-hen,

* The 'Natural History of Wiltshire,' by John Aubrey, F.R.S., A.D. 1685.

† The 'Natural History of a Part of the County of Wilts, comprehended within the distance of ten miles round the City of Salisbury,' by George Maton, M.D., F.R.S., V.P.L.S., F.S.A. Published (after his death) A.D. 1843.

the Land-rail, the Barn Owl, the common Gull, and the Black-bird are among the chosen few. Thus we cannot be said to have gained any help from the only two writers on British birds who have preceded us.

One giant, indeed, we have had among us, when the eminent ornithologist, Colonel Montagu—himself a native of Wiltshire—for a time resided at Lackham, in this county; for he was one of the most acute observers and one of the most reliable authors of his day; but he left behind him no list of Wiltshire birds; and those who are familiar with his admirable books are aware that he alludes comparatively seldom to the species he met with in this county, and that his references are chiefly confined to the birds of Devonshire, where he resided on leaving Lackham.* Neither must I omit the name of Gilbert White, the author of the charming ‘Natural History of Selborne,’† still the most delightful and the most fascinating of all books on that subject; but though while living in an adjoining shire, he pushed his inquiries into Wiltshire, and doubtless gained part of his experience within the borders of our county, he can scarcely be cited as a writer on our birds. Indeed, though I have searched in every direction, I have failed to find any pioneer who should guide me on my path, and I can refer to no writer who has previously treated of the birds of Wiltshire, or even bequeathed to us a bare list of species, of any practical value. I must not omit to add that since the publication of my papers on the Ornithology of Wilts, thirty years ago, we have had the Rev. A. P. Morres’ very valuable papers, above mentioned, on the ‘Occurrence of some of the Rarer Species of Birds in the Neighbourhood of Salisbury,’ printed in the Magazine of the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society, 1877-1885. Also very many useful notices by the Ornithological Section of the Marlborough College Natural History Society, printed in its

* ‘Ornithological Dictionary; or, Alphabetical Synopsis of British Birds,’ by George Montagu, F.L.S., 1802, and Supplement to the ‘Ornithological Dictionary,’ by the same author, 1813.

† ‘Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne,’ by the Rev. Gilbert White, M.A., 1789.

annual Reports from the formation of the society, in 1865, to the present time. Also a handy little volume, in 1870, on the 'Birds of Marlborough,' by E. F. im Thurn, at that time a student there.

CLASSIFICATION.

I proceed now to enter into some preliminary details in order to the better understanding of those who have devoted little attention to the subject, and also for the assistance of those who are beginning to investigate it, and would know something more of the various species of the feathered race around them. And I propose to begin with the *general* subject of the classification, and then go on to glance at the structure and the faculties, enlarging more particularly on the beaks and feet of birds; whereby I hope to unfold their several positions in the great scale of nature; and without which preliminary observations I fear I should fail to convey anything more than a confused idea of the admirable, and indeed perfect, organization of this most interesting class of creatures. With this view, and to start from the very beginning, or, as in speaking of birds, I may say *ab ovo*, I proceed to the somewhat dry, but important, subject of classification, giving a general outline of the rules by which birds have been classed, and the divisions and subdivisions which, for many long years, have been accepted.

But here I must confess my inability to follow the most recently accepted classification of British Birds, as put forth by the learned gentlemen to whom that task was committed by the British Ornithologists' Union. Far be it from me to say a single word against that new arrangement, subversive though it is of all my long-cherished views of correct order. I simply say that, as I do not understand the reasons which dictated so revolutionary a system, it is impossible for me to follow it. At the same time, entertaining—as I do—a most profound respect for those advanced men of science who have determined the new arrangement, I feel satisfied that they have ample reason for the conclusions to which they have come; and indeed, as a loyal

member of the B.O.U., I honestly did try my very best to fall in with, and adopt, the new scheme; but I soon found myself so hampered, so bewildered, so confused, so completely at sea as I floundered on in this unaccustomed route, that I felt constrained to get back to the old well-beaten path with which I had for so many years been familiar; and I suppose I am too old, or at all events too old-fashioned, to accommodate myself to what is in reality an uprooting of the principles which had for half a century guided my ornithological studies. So I have returned to the same classification which I followed in the Ornithology of Wilts, and which was that pursued by the revered authors with whom I was most familiar—Bewick and Selby, Yarrell, Hewitson and Gould.

Some system of classification is, at all events, absolutely necessary to him who desires to attain to a comprehensive knowledge of birds; and, indeed, he must not expect to gain even a superficial acquaintance with them, or to grasp in his mind any definite and precise idea of the positions they severally occupy, without a certain amount of labour. The schoolboy, in his research after knowledge, must toil through many a weary and irksome task; the linguist, in acquiring a new language, must pause over dry rules of grammar; the eminent statesman, the victorious general, the brilliant orator, never gained their proud positions without industry and diligence; and so, to compare smaller things with great, before we proceed to investigate the several properties, peculiarities, and habits of individual birds, it will be necessary first to understand thoroughly the relative positions they occupy; and in order to do this, we must devote a little attention, which will be amply repaid by the result. In Ornithology, as in other sciences, we must not attempt to run before we can walk; we must not rush headlong *in medias res*. Step by step we must be contented to advance; but our way will not be weary, if we give attention to surmount the little obstacles which at first sight seem to oppose us; our journey will not be irksome if we pause to smooth away the little inequalities of the path; and the more we advance, the easier

becomes the way, the smoother the road, till at length we find ourselves unencumbered by hindrances, and surrounded by all the sweets and pleasures of this most fascinating study.

Now, one of the very first requirements in every branch of Natural History is method; one of the most indispensable is order: without this, it will be impossible to progress; and Ornithology, like a skein of silk, which, if handled with due care is easily unwound, deprived of method soon becomes a tangled mass of knots, which defy the skill of the extricator to unravel them. The very first lesson, then, that we must learn, and one which we must never forget if we would know anything of Ornithology, is a little insight into the classification of birds, whereby what before seemed hopeless confusion becomes, by the touch of this magic wand, the very perfection of order. There seems, at first sight, to be a wide difference between the majestic swan and the diminutive tree-creeper, between the lordly eagle and the insignificant sparrow, between the noble bustard and the tiny wren; but by methodical arrangement we see how link succeeding link, and species connected by the strongest affinity with species, they are all integral parts of the same great chain; united by many intermediate bands, but still component parts of the same great whole. Nay, not only so, but, by the help of classification, we can not only assign to each bird, quadruped, insect, fish, or reptile its own appropriate place, but, beginning with the noblest of God's creatures, with man, we can pass gradually through all the animal kingdom, stopping to admire with what excellent method, and by what almost insensible degrees, the race of quadrupeds merges into that of birds; how the race of birds is intimately connected with fishes, fishes with reptiles, reptiles with insects, insects with animals of inferior order, and these again with the vegetable, and—as some affirm—even the mineral kingdom. These are surely wondrous facts, and of exceeding interest: to follow up and pursue this chain requires time indeed, and skill and opportunities, such as few can command; but to gain an insight into this beautiful order and arrangement is within the reach of all; and the more we inves-

tigate it, the more we shall learn how true it is of the Almighty Creator, that 'God is not the Author of confusion, but of peace.'

Before I proceed to examine in detail the method of classifying birds, as generally practised by our standard writers on the subject, it may be of interest briefly to trace the several stages by which it has arrived at its present excellence.

Among ancient writers on Natural History, there are but two, viz., Aristotle and Pliny, who have professed to give any general description of birds; and interesting, and in some cases instructive, as their treatises in many respects certainly are, they are mixed up with such a mass of absurdity and fable as very much to mar their intrinsic value. In that early stage of ornithological knowledge, of course anything approximating to systematic arrangement was not to be expected. But to come down to more modern times, the first approach to order is traced to Belon and the French naturalists, who in the middle of the sixteenth century began to classify after a certain system. As the groundwork of their scheme was, however, derived from the habitat and food of birds, it was necessarily in many respects very incorrect. In the next century Gesner, at Zurich, and Aldrovandus, at Bologna, struck out a plan in the right direction, by dividing the whole class into *land* and *water* birds; but then, as if satisfied with this good beginning, they deduced their subordinate divisions from the nature of the aliment. It was reserved for our own countryman, Willoughby, at the latter end of the seventeenth century, to lay the foundation of a more accurate arrangement; for, accepting the grand divisions already laid down, of *terrestrial* and *aquatic*, he made his subdivisions from inquiries into the general form and structure, and especially from the distinctive characters of the beak and feet; still he seems to have been unable to shake off completely the prejudices of his time, for he allows varieties in size, the different kinds of food, and such trivial things to bias him in his arrangement. Ray and Pennant followed up the course so well begun by Willoughby, and the close of the last century saw this systematic arrangement *from the anatomical structure* of birds very generally established.

Since that time all the numerous systems of classification have proceeded from the same principle of structure. Various, indeed, have they been, adopted by ornithologists of this and other countries; some fanciful, as the 'Quinary System,' or 'series of circles,' established by Vigors; others complicated and puzzling from their needless minuteness; others positively erroneous, as a farther acquaintance with birds has shown; but the method which I here set forth, adopted by modern ornithologists, and more particularly by those of this country, has this great advantage over all that have preceded it, in addition to its superior accuracy, that it is simple and plain, as well as comprehensive; neither from over minuteness burdening the memory unnecessarily, nor from an opposite extreme of indefiniteness leaving any deficiency or doubt. This, moreover, is the system adopted by Yarrell, Hewitson, and the principal British ornithologists of the present day.*

To proceed, then, with the classification of birds, I must repeat what I touched on in a previous page, that birds are commonly placed in two grand divisions, viz., 'Land Birds,' or those whose habitat is the land; and 'Water Birds,' or those which principally court the water, as their names respectively imply. These are two great classes, separating our British birds into two nearly equal parts; the number of Land Birds amounting to 199, the Water Birds to 176 species.

The first great division of these two classes is into the five 'Orders,' the members of which are of somewhat similar habits and formation, and partake of the same general characteristics.

Of these five, the first is the 'Raptorial' order, composed of those birds usually known as '*birds of prey*;' and, as their natural habit is, the destruction of the feebler tribes and the smaller animals, they have been most mercilessly persecuted by man in all countries. This continual persecution will easily account for their rarity and their habitual shyness, seldom ven-

* I should add that though I now confine my observations to birds of this country, yet the same arrangement applies equally to birds generally throughout the globe.

turing near the habitation of man, and always taking flight at the distant approach of their great enemy. Still, sometimes in our great woods or thick enclosures, and often on our open downs, the most unobservant must have seen the Hawk hovering with expanded wings high in the air, or dashing in pursuit after a luckless bird, or pouncing with unerring aim on some unfortunate mouse. The most careless must have occasionally heard the wild hooting or the unearthly shriekings of the Owl, as it has hurried past in search of prey in the shades of evening. The principal characteristics of this order are the long and curved claws, the hooked and powerful bill, the muscular limbs, the great strength, the predatory habits, the love of animal food; these are traits so marked and peculiar, that it will require but little discrimination to distinguish birds belonging to this order from all the others.

The second embraces those innumerable small birds which are so familiar to all of us; and contains a much larger number of species than either of the other four orders. These are the 'Insectores,' or '*perching birds*,' which fill our woods and gardens, abound in our fields, and may be met with at every turn in our daily walks. They possess far more intelligence than birds of any other class, are remarkable for the vocal powers with which some of them are endowed; but especially derive their name from the perfect form of the foot, which is so admirably adapted for perching or grasping, and in which the hind toe is always present. When we come to examine the subdivisions of this order, we shall find that the 'Insectores' comprise birds varying greatly from one another in habits and general appearance; yet all belonging to this division partake of the grand distinguishing features which I have shown to be characteristic of it.

The third order contains the 'Rasores,' or '*ground birds*,' comprehending all such as being land birds, and yet not being birds of prey, and not having feet perfectly adapted to perching, obtain the principal part of their food upon the ground; their wings in general are short, and they are not capable of such extended flight as belongs to members of the two preceding

orders; but in lieu of this they are provided with very strong limbs and powerful muscles, and with short toes, enabling them to run with great swiftness. This division does not contain any great number of species, and yet as many of them are sought for by the epicure, and others still more by the sportsman, there is, perhaps, no class of birds the habits and general nature of which are so generally known as this. When I mention that the 'Rasores' include not only all the gallinaceous birds, as our Barn-door Fowls, but also Partridges, Pheasants, and Grouse, the truth of this statement will be at once seen. As all the members of this order are extremely good for food, a beneficent Providence has caused them to be very productive, and the number of eggs to a nest is usually very considerable.

The fourth order begins the other great division, viz., the 'Water Birds,' and comprises those numerous aquatic birds which, not having webbed feet, and so not being perfectly framed for swimming and diving, nevertheless are formed for living partly in the water, and generally procure their food from wet and marshy places, if not from rivers, lakes, and the sea-shore. These are the 'Grallatores,' or '*waders*,' and are distinguished from the land birds by their habits, as well as by the length of leg and neck so fitted for their aquatic ways; also by the formation of their feet, so admirably adapted for wading on soft mud, for running lightly over water-plants, and enabling them to move easily in their accustomed haunts. The Herons, Snipes, and Plovers may serve as examples of this class.

The fifth and last order contains the true water birds, whose domain is essentially the sea, or the inland lake and large river. These are *bonâ fide* inhabitants of the water, passing nearly all their time there, retiring far away from land as day approaches, feeding in the sea, sleeping on the sea, and only occasionally visiting the shore. These are the 'Natatores,' or '*swimmers*,' whose boat-shaped bodies and webbed feet attest their remarkable powers of swimming and diving, and render it impossible to mistake them as belonging to any other order. From the position and extent of the British Islands, the birds which comprise

this division are very numerous on our coasts, as anyone will at once acknowledge who has seen the clouds of ducks, gulls, etc., darkening the sea-shore in the autumn.

Such, then, being a sketch of the five great orders of birds, and such the characteristics of each, the lines of demarcation between them seems so broad and well defined that one might almost be inclined to doubt the possibility of confusing them. Yet (as I before remarked) in nature there seem to be no sudden transitions; no rapid jumps from one kind to another; no gaps between them; all is done gradually and with becoming method; we are led almost insensibly from one order to another, so much does the last species of one assimilate to the first species of the next. Thus, for instance, when passing from the first to the second, from the birds of prey to the perchers, see the connecting link between the two, so ably sustained by the Shrikes or Butcher-birds. Perchers, indeed, they are, with feet as perfect for grasping as any in the class; at the same time, how like to the birds of prey in their habits, in their cruel method of seizing, impaling on a thorn, and devouring their victims. Again, in passing from the perchers to the ground birds, mark the Pigeons. What a connecting link between the two orders do they form; some partaking of the character of true 'Insectores,' others approximating in every respect to the 'Rasores.' Or, again, in passing from the third to the fourth, from the ground birds to the waders, how slight is the boundary, how gentle the transition from the Bustards to the Plovers; compare the smaller Bustard, the last of one order, and the great Plover, the first of the next, and how much do they resemble each other, how little the difference to mark the two divisions, how similar in their appearance, their shape, their habits, the locality they affect. And once more, though the webbed feet of the last order may seem at first sight so plain and distinguishing a characteristic as to leave little room for gradual transition here, between the waders and swimmers, yet it is not so: observe the well-known Coot and the Phalaropes; mark their peculiar feet, furnished with membranes, though not wholly webbed, their decidedly aquatic habits, their

powers of swimming and diving, and by their intervention see how easily we pass from the true waders to the true swimmers. Thus we are led on from order to order, not suddenly or unconnectedly, but gradually and almost insensibly, proving to us the perfect harmony of all the works of nature, while at the same time we can trace sufficient marks of distinction to prevent any real confusion.

Having detailed somewhat at length the method pursued in this first great subdivision of the Land and Water birds, I now proceed to show more concisely in what the other subdivisions consist. At present we may be able to define the *order* to which any given bird may belong, but we are still very far from placing it in that particular position which alone it is entitled to hold.

The next great subdivision of birds is into 'Tribes,' which will not occupy us long; for, of the five orders, it is usual to pass by four, as not needing this subdivision, and to apply it only to that very large one, the 'Insessores,' or '*perchers*.' These birds being so numerous, and withal so similar in some of their habits, have nevertheless certain marked characteristics, distinguishing at one glance the 'tribe' to which they belong, and thus very much simplifying their classification. The *perchers*, then, are divided into four tribes, the first of which is the 'Dentirostres,' or '*tooth-billed*,' so called from the distinct tooth or notch near the extremity of the bill, enabling the bird to hold securely whatever it may seize; it is chiefly composed of insect-eating birds, and of these the Redbreast is an example. The second is the 'Conirostres,' or '*cone-billed*,' so called from the conical form, as well as immense strength of the beak; these birds are principally consumers of grain, as an instance of which we may name the common House-sparrow. The third comprises the 'Scansores,' or '*climbers*,' the members of which are remarkable for their power of climbing, and to this end they are furnished with toes arranged in pairs, with stiff bristling tail to serve as a support, with tongues capable of great elongation and extension, whereby they may transfix the insects they find in the trees they are

ascending; of this the Wood-peckers are examples. The fourth and last tribe is composed of the 'Fissirostres,' or '*wide-billed*,' so called from their enormous width of gape; these have usually very small feet, and take their food principally on the wing; everyone will readily perceive how well the Swallows answer to this description.

Having now reached the point at which the four tribes of perchers are on an equality with the remaining four entire orders, we come to subdivide these several classes into 'Families.' The word 'families' describes itself at once: these, it will clearly be perceived, are groups of birds belonging to the same order and tribe, and having still nearer affinities one to another, not shared by members of another family, though belonging to the same order and tribe. Thus, for example, the tribe 'tooth-billed' is composed of a number of families—the thrushes, the warblers, the titmice, etc.—all resembling one another in the formation of their beak, and other characteristics of the tribe; but each family containing distinctive marks, separating them from the remaining families, and uniting them in a closer alliance to one another.

When we have mastered the classification of birds up to this point, we have attained no slight knowledge of their arrangement; but again we must pursue our inquiries a little further, and subdivide these families into 'Genera.' Of these each family contains a certain number, some more, some less, the members of each genus having still further points of resemblance between them than with those of other genera, though of the same family. Thus to take, for example, the warblers, *sylviadæ*: in this family there is the genus *curruca*, containing the 'whitethroats;' the genus *regulus*, containing the 'golden-crested wrens;' the genus *saxicola*, containing the 'chats.' Thus, again, of the family of grouse, there is the genus *tetrao*, containing the real 'grouse;' the genus *lagopus*, containing the 'ptarmigans;' the genus *perdix*, containing the 'partridges.'

And so again in like manner, to come to the last subdivision, which concludes the arrangement of birds according to scientific

classification; every genus contains certain 'Species,' differing from one another in some respects, the points of difference being sometimes marked and clear, at other times slight, and hardly perceptible. Thus, as the family of grouse contains among others the genus 'partridge,' so the genus partridge in its turn comprises these several species, the 'common partridge,' the 'red-legged partridge,' and the 'Barbary partridge.' Again, as the family of warblers contains among others the genus 'chat,' so the genus chat contains the 'whinchat,' the 'stonechat,' and the 'wheatear.'

It will be needless to pursue this explanation any farther, but I refer to the table, recapitulating the above method of classification, and enumerating the several species of birds known in Wiltshire, each in its own appointed place.

Such, then, is a general outline of modern classification as commonly adopted in this country. I am quite aware that the above description of it is far from perfect, and some of the subdivisions may to the experienced seem defective: to enter into further detail would have occupied too much time, and have produced obscurity and confusion; and perhaps, for practical purposes, what I have said will be amply sufficient. Volumes and treatises without number have been written on the subject, and our best Ornithologists have employed a vast deal of time and learning to bring it to perfection: the above is but a short epitome of the result of their labours. To those who care nothing for the science of Ornithology, I fear the repetition of so many hard names may seem irksome; but to those who would learn something of birds, I am certain it is no loss of time to gain an insight into their classification; for an acquaintance with this will pave the way to their future studies, simplifying what would otherwise be abstruse, laying bare what would otherwise be hidden, and unravelling what must otherwise be complicated: for (as I observed at the beginning, now I repeat once more) order and method are the very foundation stones of natural history: we can never arrive at any advanced knowledge of birds without them; we may be able, indeed, to detect

some species on the ground, on the wing, or by their notes; we may have some acquaintance with their respective habits and peculiarities, but till we can place them in their own positions, classify them with something of order, arrange them in reference to their congeners with something of method, our knowledge and observations will be of small avail in teaching us the secrets of Ornithology; and we shall fall short in understanding the beautiful balance held by nature; the general connection between birds of the same order and tribe; the more intimate connection between those of the same family; the close union between those of the same genus; and the almost insensible degrees by which they pass from one to another, all of which are subjects of exceeding interest to the careful observer; and our Ornithological knowledge, instead of being comprehensive, will be desultory; instead of being valuable, will be defective; instead of being useful, will be productive of neither instruction nor pleasure.

NOMENCLATURE.

In regard to nomenclature. As with the arrangement and order, so with the names of the birds, I have generally followed that of Yarrell, with which I am most familiar; but, indeed, the strange names under which some of the most common birds are now hidden, appear to my old-fashioned notions a positive calamity. I confess to a very strong opinion on this point, and I would vehemently protest, if that were of any avail in so humble and unlearned an individual, against the prevalent multiplication of genera and the consequent infliction of new and unaccustomed names. In my judgment, the one essential requisite in regard to the name of a bird is that it should be that by which it may most readily be distinguished; and to that end the name of a species once generally adopted should never, unless in some very exceptional case, be laid aside. Wherefore Mr. Seebohm's plan, as adopted in his admirable work on the 'History of British Birds,' commends itself to my mind very strongly; and if I were starting afresh, instead of in some sense

reprinting, I should be very much disposed to adopt his simple plan of accepting the specific name *auctorum plurimorum*, or that which has been most used by previous writers. It has long been a very sore subject of complaint against English ornithologists, on the part of foreigners—amateurs as well as dealers—that whereas every bird is generally known all over Europe under one acknowledged name, which is recognised everywhere, the English alone substitute another at will, which completely destroys its recognition. This complaint I have often listened to in France and Germany in former years; but what will now be said, when so many even of the most familiar birds are re-named? Having thus relieved my mind by expressing a very decided opinion—I hope not too presumptuously—I proceed to point out that I have taken some pains to ascertain the meaning of the names given to birds, where not at first sight apparent, not confining my attention to the generic and specific names only, but extending my inquiries to those which are provincial, both in our own and neighbouring foreign countries; for the name, whether deliberately bestowed on a species by the scientific author, or affixed to it locally as a nickname, generally describes some peculiarity, or alludes to some characteristic habit or appearance.

STRUCTURE.

I come now to the general structure of birds, upon which a few words should be said; but I would at the outset premise that I am not going to enter into any learned disquisition on their internal economy, or start any new theory regarding their shape or their functions. I propose merely to give a plain statement of their formation, whereby such persons as are either beginning this delightful study, or are not very proficient in it, may gain some insight into the subject. But before we examine their general structure, let us for one moment consider the position which birds were formed to hold in animated nature, and the element they were fitted to people; then, when we proceed to consider their formation, we shall notice how admirably it is adapted to that end, how exactly suited to that purpose. We

are told in the history of their creation that they were formed out of the water, and that they were made 'to fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.'—That, then, is their own proper sphere, that the domain allotted to them to occupy. It is true that we find some continually remaining in the element from which they first derived their origin, passing almost all their time in the water; others again there are which seldom leave the surface of the earth, and are neither formed for swimming nor for flight; but the great majority of species are essentially denizens of the air, soaring high above our heads, skimming here and there, floating with expanded wings, 'cleaving with rapid pinions the vast aërial expanse.' Now it is clear that to enable them to do this, the general formation of their bodies must be extremely different from that of the Mammalia, though to a certain extent there are strong resemblances and analogies between them and their respective orders. As there are carnivorous quadrupeds, so there are rapacious birds, and both are equally fierce, sullen, unsociable, and solitary in their habits, possessed of great strength, and often of considerable courage. As there are herbivorous quadrupeds, so there are granivorous birds, and both of these are gentle and gregarious in their habits, a mild and tractable race, and easily domesticated. There are also birds as well as beasts of an amphibious nature, having organs suited to their habits, and these live chiefly in the water, and feed on aquatic productions; and there are many similar resemblances. Like the quadrupeds, too, they are warm-blooded and vertebrate; but, unlike them, they are oviparous, and, instead of fur, are usually clothed almost entirely with feathers; while instead of fore-feet they are furnished with wings; and we shall presently see that there are many other striking points of difference in structure between them. Unlike the heavy bodies of the Mammalia, which are formed to live on the surface of the earth, the bodies of the birds are light and buoyant. They each possess externally head, neck, body, tail, legs, and feet; but instead of the large head, the heavy neck, the deep chest, the wide shoulder, and the sinewy legs of the quadrupeds, the ob-

servant Bewick bids us note 'the pointed beak, the long and pliant neck, the gently swelling shoulder, the expansive wings, the tapering tail, the light and bony feet, of birds.' Every one of these seem formed to combine, as far as possible, the least weight with the greatest strength. There is no superfluous bulk in the structure of a bird. Compared with its dimensions, and the width of its expanded wings, how trifling and insignificant a proportion does the body seem to occupy; how every part seems to conduce towards lightness and buoyancy. The plumage, too, with which they are clothed is soft and delicate, and yet so close and thick as to form an admirable protection against the intense cold of the atmosphere through which they wing their way, and to which their swift movements must necessarily expose them; the feathers which compose it are attached to the skin, somewhat after the manner of hair, and are periodically moulted or changed, and nothing can exceed the beauty, and often brilliancy, of their colouring, as nothing can be conceived more adapted to combine the two objects of extreme warmth and excessive lightness. With such an airy framework, and clothed with a plumage in specific gravity but little exceeding the air itself, we are at no loss to understand the ease with which birds mount from the earth and soar among the clouds; but to enable them to pass quickly through the air, to progress rapidly and without fatigue, no instruments could be devised more excellent than the wings with which they are provided; so light and yet so vigorous, furnished with such strong muscles, so spacious when extended in flight, and yet so compact when closed in rest. By the help of these oars or sails they can strike the air so forcibly, and with such a succession of rapid and powerful strokes, as to impel forward their bodies with wonderful velocity; the greater the extent of the wings in proportion to the size of the bird, the greater is the facility with which it can sustain itself in the air, and the greater the rapidity of its flight. As an example of this, compare the stretch of wing and the proportionate speed of the common Swift and the common Sparrow. Almost all species can fly with exceeding swiftness; but the progress of some is so very rapid, as

rather to rival the velocity of the arrow from the bow than the movements of any other creature. Yet, with such amazing power, what can be lighter than the materials of which the wings are formed?—the bones hollow and filled with air, the muscles strong and unencumbered by flesh, the feathers large, like sails, and of exceeding buoyancy. Then again, in like manner, what can be more perfect than their tails? These, too, are only composed of feathers, but they serve as rudders, enabling them to steer their course through the air at pleasure, with the greatest ease and with the greatest accuracy.

Thus, when we look at the *external* formation of a bird, we can but admire its symmetry and elegance, the buoyancy and lightness of its frame, so admirably adapted for flight; but not less perfect nor less calculated to excite our admiration in its *internal* structure. Is a bird furnished with bones and muscles so absolutely necessary to its aerial evolutions? But mark how thin and light are the bones, how delicate the muscles, those only excepted which are adapted for moving the wings. Then, again, observe the lungs. Small, indeed, they are, but so placed, and the air so introduced into them from the windpipe, that in passing it is conveyed into certain cells or membranous sacs disposed for this purpose over the body. These sacs are situated in the chest and among the muscles, and between the muscles and the skin; and in some birds are continued down to the wings, and extend even to the pinions, thigh bones, and other parts of the body. For the same purpose the feathers, and especially the wing feathers, also contain a large quantity of air. Now all these cavities, and others not enumerated, such as the hollows of the bones, can be filled and distended with air at the will of the bird. By this means the strength and bulk of the bird is increased, without adding to its weight; and such a general diffusion of air throughout the body must be of infinite service in enabling it to fly, to poise itself in the air, and to skim far above the surface of the earth. Nor is that the only use of this wonderful provision of nature. I again quote Bewick, who says: 'It is likewise eminently useful in preventing its respira-

tion from being stopped or interrupted by the rapidity of its motion through a resisting medium. Were it possible for man to move with the swiftness of the Swallow, the actual resistance of the air, as he is not provided with internal reservoirs similar to those of birds, would soon suffocate him.' Another very remarkable peculiarity in the internal economy of birds is their mode of digestion. The bill is scarcely, if ever, used for mastication, but solely as an instrument of prehension; it is the gizzard, whose amazing strength and powers can scarcely be overrated, that grinds down the grain and other food, and renders it fit for digestion. Experiments have been made by which it has been incontrovertibly proved that glass, nails, and the hardest substances have in a few hours been filed down by the action of the gizzard, without any injury accruing to it thereby. As a help to this digestive power small stones are often swallowed by birds, which are eminently useful in assisting this grinding process, thus rendering the food more amenable to the gastric juices.

After this rapid glance at the general structure of birds, can we conceive anything more adapted for buoyancy and for rapid motion through the air than their external and internal formation? We cannot but be struck with their wonderful adaptation to the position which they were created to fill. Let us now push our inquiries a little farther; and still bearing in mind that they are denizens of the air, and roam at vast distances above our heads, and all around us, examine into the senses and faculties with which they are endowed.

FACULTIES.

In the first place we shall find them furnished with unusual powers of sight, hearing, and smell; and to this end they are supplied with three double organs of sense, viz., eyes, ears, and nasal cavities.

The *sight* of some, and particularly of the rapacious birds, is so acute and piercing as to enable them to see their prey from an enormous height in the air, whence they dash down with astonishing swiftness and unerring aim. The vulture sailing in

circles at an immense altitude can distinguish his prey on the ground, without the aid of any other faculty than his eyes, as has been clearly proved by experiment; the lordly eagle soaring amid the clouds seems to prefer that elevated station, whence to seek some victim on the earth, and his wonderful power of vision seldom fails to discover the desired object far below; the kestrel-hawk, with which all are familiar, balances himself in the air at a considerable height, while his piercing eyes search the ground below for the mice which constitute his food: these are all diurnal birds of prey, and are especially noted for the keenness of their vision; but not less extraordinary is the eye of the owl, which seeks its prey by twilight, and cannot endure the full glare of day; should any accident expose him to the light of the sun, he either closes his eyes entirely or defends them with a curtain or blind, which is an internal eyelid, and which he can close in an instant. At such times he presents but a grotesque and foolish appearance; but see him as he emerges from his hollow tree, or the ivy-clad ruin in the deepening twilight; watch him as he regularly beats the field, and quarters it like a pointer; see him suddenly drop upon the unfortunate mouse that was hurrying through the grass, and judge what acuteness of vision must be there. In the nocturnal species the eyes are usually directed forwards, and are brighter, larger, and clearer than those of the diurnal birds, and thus, from their size, position, and construction, are admirably calculated for concentrating the dim rays of twilight. In the other Orders we do not expect to find such wonderful powers of sight, for their habits do not require it; yet here, too, we shall often find considerable swiftness and extent of vision. The fly-catcher will sit perched on a twig, and suddenly dart upon an insect passing often at a considerable distance, which we are wholly unable to perceive. The bold and sagacious raven and the destructive carrion-crow have been famed for their far-seeing propensities. The rook, too, has the same property; for which cause we may constantly see the dull-eyed starlings attaching themselves to their society and relying on these excellent sentinels, feeding in greater security. The swift,

careering through the air on rapid wing and dashing past like a meteor, not only can see to steer its way clear of all obstacles, but can discern the passing insect, which it catches in its mouth as it rushes by. The pigeons, mounting high into the air, can perceive the grain which they are seeking from an almost incredible distance. The redstart will avoid the shot by rising on seeing the flash from the cap; and many of the ducks, and especially the divers, disappear under water the moment the trigger is pulled, seeing the flash and diving almost instantaneously, and so escaping the death intended for them. These are a few instances of the extraordinary powers of vision belonging to the feathered race. An eminent French naturalist has calculated it to be about nine times more extensive than that of man; and anatomists, after dissecting the eye of the golden eagle, or one of that family, whose sight is considered the keenest of all, declare that nothing can be conceived more perfect than the structure. The eye of the falcon, which feeds by day, will differ from that of the owl, which feeds by night; both will differ from that of the swan, which has to procure its food under water; but all are exactly adapted to their own peculiar spheres of action, all are capable of very astonishing sight.

Again, the *hearing* of some is so subtle, that they can detect their prey when hidden from view by this sense alone, and by the same power are ever on the alert for the approach of an enemy. As the eagle is the most renowned for powers of vision, so we may without hesitation pronounce the owls to possess a more acute sense of hearing than any other family; it seems that this faculty is given them in common with other nocturnal and crepuscular animals; as, for example, the bats, to enable them to guide themselves in their flight on the darkest nights, and to direct them to their prey. The organs with which they are furnished to secure this end are of a very remarkable construction, and developed to an extraordinary extent; the auditory opening, or ear-conch, is sometimes extremely large, and is then furnished with an *operculum* or cover, which they can open and close at will; but in those

species where the aperture is smaller, such an addition is not provided. Another peculiarity in the nocturnal birds of prey is that the two ears are not alike; the one being so formed as to hear sounds from below, the other from above. This, though an old discovery, is not very generally known, though it is doubtless an admirable help to catch the faintest sound proceeding from every direction; and with such organs the owls are enabled to detect in an instant the slightest rustling of their prey. Next to the owl, perhaps the night-jar (or goat-sucker, as it is commonly though erroneously called) possesses the most acute sense of hearing; this bird is also crepuscular, and seldom hunts for moths till the shades of evening, and, as in the owl, its ears are of a very large size. But there are many other birds gifted with remarkably acute powers of hearing. See the song-thrush descend on the lawn on a damp morning; watch how he inclines his ear on one side, then hops forward, and again listens, till at length he draws forth the worm which his fine ear had told him was there, and which, alarmed at his hops and peckings, had hurried to the surface, supposing they were occasioned by his dreaded enemy, the mole. Or, visit some fine old heronry, and try to penetrate near their chosen nursery without your presence being detected; these nocturnal birds are not particularly keen of sight during the day, but long ere you can approach them, however cautiously, their keen sense of hearing has told them you are near. Another bird remarkable for possessing this faculty in an eminent degree is the Curlew: of all the shore birds there is not one so difficult of approach as this; his organs of hearing are so sensitive that it is almost impossible to come near him. And again, the Swedish ornithologist, Professor Nilsson, speaks of the Black-cock as being most acute both in hearing and in sight. Such are some of the innumerable instances one might collect of another sense being possessed by the feathered tribes in extraordinary perfection: that some birds hear more quickly than others is an undisputed fact; but we shall always find, if we examine into it, that to those the most subtle sense of hearing is given whose habits cause them to require it most;

while from those which would not be benefited by it, it is in a measure withheld.

I have spoken of the powers of sight and hearing so conspicuous in birds; I come now to the other sense with which they are provided, that of *smell*. This, too, we shall find to be peculiarly delicate in some families, though perhaps generally it is but little required, and therefore but little developed; and we shall for the most part find that those birds whose nostrils are the most conspicuous and open will possess this sense in the highest degree, while those whose nostrils are concealed and almost impervious will share in it but little. The bird which is certainly most remarkable for this faculty, though of late years it has been gainsaid by certain American naturalists, is the Vulture. Blest, as I have already remarked, with a keen sense of sight, the Vulture soaring through the air, and above the dark forests, is also directed to his prey by the extraordinary perfection of his organs of smell. His food is always putrid, and the effluvium arising therefrom is necessarily most rank; but yet when we watch their proceedings, as I have done, in their own tropical countries, the wonderful manner in which these birds will congregate at a putrid carcase, hidden though it may be in a pit or a thick forest; and how, first appearing as a speck in the distant heavens, then gradually increasing in size as they come nearer, they arrive singly from all quarters, whereas till then, not a single individual was to be seen, we can form some idea of the great powers of smell which these birds must possess. Mr. Waterton, who has seen them in Guiana, Demerara, and other parts of Southern America; and Mr. Gosse, who more recently has seen them in the West Indian islands, have published in their respective most interesting little volumes such strong and conclusive evidence of the amazing extent of this sense in the vulture, as to silence all dispute on the subject. The family of the crows, also, claims our attention as possessing very great powers of scent. It is this which so often directs them to their food from great distances in such a mysterious manner as to cause the wonder and incredulity of

man. Some observers, who have seen troops of ravens hurrying along to the banquet of some fallen animal, where not a bird till then could be seen, have attributed their discovery of the feast, not to the true cause, their keen sense of seeing and smelling, but to some unknown faculty, thinking it impossible that scent could be carried so far, and having little conception of the superior acuteness of some of the senses of birds. Again, the rook discovers the grubs hidden in the earth by the same wonderful sense; the carrion-crow scents the tempting morsel from a distance; the magpie is not behind-hand in the same perception. Some of the water-birds, too, seem to have this faculty very highly developed. The curlew will take wing when you are at a great distance, if you approach them down the wind; the hungry woodcock will discover by the smell where it will be profitable to probe the mud with his beak. Most of the ducks are so sensitive, that the man who works a decoy knows full well that he has no chance of success unless he keeps to leeward of the flock; and, as an additional precaution, burns a piece of turf, and holds it smoking in his hand, to prevent their scenting him. Thus we see the faculty of scent no less conspicuous in birds than in other animals: the well-known properties of the pointer and the foxhound will not surpass the exquisite sense of smell of some of the birds, and even the notorious bloodhound will scarcely outdo the vulture in the same faculty.

But besides these three powers of seeing, hearing, and smelling, with which we have proved them to be remarkably endowed, we find the feathered tribe gifted with the power of *feeling* or *handling* (if I may apply such a term to the beak), not usually allotted to the inferior races of the animal kingdom. Their beaks serve them for hands, as well as for lips and teeth, and wonderfully are they adapted to a variety of purposes; but as, in addition to their exceeding interest and variety of form and use, the beaks are principal characteristics whereby to distinguish the position birds are entitled to hold, and their habits, I propose to consider this subject separately, so for the present pass it by.

Again, they are furnished with tongues, which are not only

organs of taste, but partly also of prehension. These, too, differ exceedingly in form, according to their requirements, being sometimes short, round, and thick, sometimes long, thin, and pointed; and some tribes make considerable use of these members in securing their prey, as we shall hereafter see.

Their organs of voice, too, are very various; some most melodious, charming man by their continual and often exquisite song; others harsh and unmusical; notes they have of alarm, whereby they signify to one another that danger is at hand; notes of distress, whereby they proclaim the pain or terror they feel; notes of love, whereby they show their affection; notes of communication, whereby they signify their intentions to each other and act in concert, and so continue their migrations on the darkest nights without danger of parting company. The notes of the different species, too, are as various as are their forms. Some are able to imitate those of others; but seldom do they step beyond their own limits, for each is content to communicate with his congeners in the language peculiar to its own species.

Such, then, is an outline of the faculties of birds. The subject is one which might be pursued to an unlimited extent, until such a knowledge of their anatomy was gained, that, like Buffon and Cuvier, of late time, and Professor Owen, of the College of Surgeons, of our day, from seeing one single bone we might be able to describe accurately the whole bird to which it belonged, and its habits, though of a species never hitherto seen. To such an intimate acquaintance, however, with the structure of birds we shall not probably aspire. Our present purpose has in view only a *general* consideration of their formation and faculties; but we have seen enough to prove to us how admirably birds are formed for the position they hold in the scale of Zoology. Their bodies light and buoyant, furnished with wings enabling them to pass rapidly through the air; provided with air-cells, as an additional assistance to them; endowed with astonishing powers of sight, hearing, and smell; possessed of organs of voice as varied as they are remarkable; and with many other faculties not inferior to these, the feathered tribes claim a high position in the scale of

created beings. We see in their formation the hand of a bountiful Creator; in their endowments the wisdom and goodness of Providence displayed. A knowledge of their structure, and an insight into the wonderful organs with which they are supplied, cannot but raise them in our eyes, as worthy of deeper investigation and closer attention than they usually receive; and raise us at the same time, as should be the case after all our researches into the pages of nature, 'from nature's works up to nature's God.'

'Thus the men

Whom nature's work can charm, with God himself
Hold converse : grow familiar day by day
With His conceptions ; act upon His plan,
And form to His the relish of their souls.'

ON THE BEAK.

I now desire to call special attention to the beaks of birds, than which nothing in their whole structure appears to me to be so perfect, so suitable to the end for which they were formed, so interesting and worthy of close examination. I have cursorily alluded to them in a former page, but I would now devote a short space to a more close examination of these very useful organs, which are generally the implements or tools wherewith their owners supply themselves with their every-day food.

Every bird is furnished with a beak, composed of two parts, the upper and lower mandible, formed of horny substances ensheathing the jaws. It is analogous to the lips and teeth of quadrupeds; it is (as I before stated) seldom employed in mastication, and its chief employment is in taking the food on which the bird subsists; but as the nature of that food varies so much, according to the habits of the different species, so does this organ vary extremely in form as well as in size, and so presents one of the most distinguishing features for ascertaining the proper position in classification which the bird is entitled to hold; indeed, if we examine the beak alone, this is quite sufficient to indicate at a glance the order and tribe at least, if not the family and even genus, to which the specimen belongs. But now, however varied

in form, in size, in consistency, and in capabilities they may be; however diverse in appearance, however perfect or imperfect, proportionate or disproportionate, graceful or ugly, they may seem; if we examine with attention the uses for which they were respectively formed, and to which they are daily applied, we shall see that they all unite in partaking of this one common attribute, that they are all (each in its separate capacity) the very best instruments that could be devised for accomplishing their several ends, and that nothing can be conceived more appropriate for attaining their peculiar objects. Differ, indeed, they do in appearance from one another; various, indeed, are their powers, but varied, too, is the work for which they were formed. Should we provide ourselves with the same instrument if we went forth to procure game, or to reap corn? Should we arm ourselves in the same manner if we wanted to catch fish and to gather fruits? The absurdity of such a thing is apparent. And just so it is with the beaks of birds; they are the tools or instruments provided for them by the All-wise and bountiful Creator, the very best tools for their respective wants, and which have often guided the mechanic to the precise form of the implement best suited to his purpose.

We shall do well first to examine the beak as peculiar to the several orders and tribes.

Now the *Birds of Prey* live entirely on animal food; when they have pounced on their victim on the ground, or struck down some hapless bird on the wing (with the foot though, be it remembered, and not at all with the beak, as is so often erroneously supposed), the beak is wanted for tearing apart and seizing piecemeal the prey. To this end what can be more adapted than the strong, short, hooked beak, which is one of the characteristics of this whole order? It is of nearly equal breadth and height at the base, moderately compressed, or flattened sideways, towards the end; and is furnished with a remarkable tooth-like projection in the upper mandible, the tip being curved downwards, three-cornered and very sharp. With this powerful instrument the vulture can unrip the carcase of the fallen and

putrid animal; the eagle and falcon can tear in pieces the hare or fawn; the osprey, the fish; the hawk, the small birds; the owl, the mouse; and nothing can be conceived more applicable for such work.

The *Perching Birds* come next; and their habits being more peaceful and quiet, and their food being of a different nature, we shall find here no need of the powerful hook which we have seen to be so useful to the Raptorial order. And yet as the perchers include an immense number of families whose habits are exceedingly various, and whose food is very diverse, it is clear that the beak which would be most suitable for one would be wholly inappropriate to the other; on that account we shall find the beaks of this order varying from one another very much.

I have already observed in a former page that the first tribe takes its name, *Dentirostres*, from the tooth or notch near the extremity of the mandibles; but the members of this tribe live almost entirely, or at any rate chiefly, on insects, worms, and such-like food; we may see them hawking in the air, searching in the grass, looking keenly under leaves and seizing them the instant they appear; for this purpose no strong beak is necessary, but as the living prey which they seize struggles violently to escape, what can be more suited for a firm hold than the soft beak furnished with a tooth such as I have described above, and which belongs to this tribe? Moreover, the accurate Selby has observed that 'the bill, too, is generally lengthened, so as to defend the face from the struggles of their prey, which is always taken by the aid of this member, or, where it is short and broad, the base is furnished with stiff, projecting bristles, or having feathers that answer the same purpose of defence.*' With this notched beak the shrikes find no difficulty in seizing their prey; the fly-catchers can hold the insects they have caught; the thrushes can retain the worm which they have drawn out of the turf; the warblers, the titmice, the wagtails, and the pipits can take their insect food without chance of its escape.

The second tribe of this order also derives its name, *Coni-*

* Selby, 'Illustrations of Ornithology,' vol. i., p. 138.

rostris ('conical-beaked'), from the formation of the beak of all those families which compose it. Instead of the tooth which characterized the last tribe, here we have no tooth, but a short, straight, conical beak, about as broad as high at the base, compressed towards the end, and acute. Birds of this division live chiefly on grain and seeds of different kinds, the nature of which food is generally hard, and requires a strong bill to take it; the soft beak of the former tribe could never endure the work that has to be done by these powerful little fellows; sometimes they break down the hardest seeds, sometimes they even crack the stones of different kinds of fruits, in order to procure the kernels inside; for such work, and for pulling seeds from pods and grain from husks, can we conceive anything more appropriate than the conical form of these strong yet short pointed beaks? With these the larks and buntings can thrive in the stubble; the finches can gain a supply of the seeds of a thousand plants; the starlings and the whole family of crows can support themselves with grain, when other food cannot be found for these insatiable and omnivorous birds.

We come now to the third order of perchers, the *Scansores*, 'climbers.' These do not derive their title from the form of their beak; but we shall find it not the less remarkable, or less peculiarly adapted to their habits. The nature of these birds is to climb about trees, buildings, and other places, grasping firmly with their peculiar feet, supporting themselves with their bristly tails, thrusting their beaks under and into the bark, into the fissures and rotten wood of decayed timber, and such places, in search of their insect food. But to this end what can be more adapted than the form of their beak—long, conical, angular, and wedge-shaped at the point? And, in addition to this, some families are furnished with very long tongues, capable of great extension, armed with a horny point, and copiously supplied with a tenacious mucus, wherewith they transfix and convey to their mouths such insects and larvæ as they have discovered. Sometimes in their ascent they tap the trees with their beaks to induce the insects to come out, and to test the soundness or hollowness

of the wood, their instinct always telling them where their food is likely to be found. At other times we may hear them from a considerable distance hammering and digging at the tough bark, or see them scattering the chips on all sides by their repeated strokes, as they are busy in dislodging their concealed prey; others again may be seen peering and prying into every cavity, probing every fissure with their sharp, curved bill, leaving no crevice or fissure untried. For all these purposes with how admirable an instrument are they provided!—how exactly suited to their wants! With this the woodpeckers can remove the bark till they can reach their victims, the nuthatches can split open the nuts which they have previously fixed in some crevice; the little creeper can pick out his insect prey from the bark.

The fourth and last tribe of perchers again derives its name, *Fissirostres* ‘wide-billed,’ from the formation of the beak. The members of this division, like the last, are almost wholly insectivorous; but, unlike them, they feed more or less on the wing. Many of this tribe are remarkable for their wonderful power of flight, soaring high in the air, skimming over the water, and darting here and there the livelong day with the most rapid evolutions imaginable. As they feed so much on the wing, we find them provided with a very short beak, much depressed, as if flattened downwards, and of a triangular form; the tip sharp and furnished with a slender notch; but their width of gape is very great, enabling them more readily to seize their prey, as they shoot through the air, and the edges of the upper mandible are armed with a row of bristles of immense assistance to them when feeding on the wing, by increasing the means of capture with the mouth. The swallows, the nightjars, and the bee-eaters are examples of this peculiarity, and of the absence of much beak where so little is required.

We have now reached the third order, *Rasores*, ‘Ground Birds,’ which live upon grain and various kinds of seeds and berries. This forms their principal food, though occasionally they will devour insects and sometimes buds and green leaves; and therefore we shall be prepared to see, though not so strongly exempli-

fied, the short, strong bill adapted to the hard nature of their customary diet ; the upper mandible is often considerably arched, the edges overhanging and the tip blunt. Birds of this order, however, do not always possess a bill capable of very great exertion. In some cases, as in the pigeons, it is rather slender and weak ; in all the other families it is stronger. But yet, perhaps, taken alone, it seems scarcely so well adapted as the preceding ones to the grain-eating habits of the bird. But if we push our inquiries farther, we shall find these ground-birds furnished with a peculiar repository for their food, whither it is conveyed whole by the beak. This repository is called the crop ; it is globular and is nothing more than an enlargement of the ' œsophagus,' or gullet, lying, when distended, equally on both sides of the neck. As, then, the ground-birds are furnished with this peculiar crop, to which the food is conveyed, it is clear that the beak belonging to this division is amply sufficient for the purpose to which it is applied, and greater strength and solidity would be superfluous.

The next order, '*Grallatores*,' the 'waders,' commencing with the water-birds, procures its food chiefly from the water, and this food is partly animal, but also in a great measure vegetable ; the customary haunts of the members of this order are marshes and swamps, the banks of rivers and lakes, or the seashore. They are usually provided with long legs, enabling them to wade into the mud and water in search of food ; they are at the same time furnished with long necks, by which they are enabled to reach such food as they have found. Suited to this habit is their bill, whose general characteristic is long and slender, but as the different families of this order obtain their food by various means, so their beaks differ to a certain degree ; some are straight and sharp-pointed, acting as a spear to transfix their prey, as in the family of herons ; some are curiously arched, rounded throughout the whole length, as in the curlews ; others are rounded at the point, and provided with most sensitive nerves, enabling them to discover and seize their prey, when thrust into the soft mud, as in the snipes—all have the same admirable facility and adaptation for searching and procuring food in wet

and swampy spots, which are the especial habitat of the whole order of waders.

We come now to the last order, '*Natatores*,' the 'swimmers,' whose name bespeaks them as denizens of the ocean and lake. Remarkable for their facilities of swimming and diving, and for their powers of submergence often for a considerable time, many families of this order procure their food entirely in the water. For this purpose the beaks of some are armed with sharp hooks or teeth, as in the mergansers; some are straight, sharp, and compressed, as in the divers, auks, and gulls; others again, which rarely dive and in diet are graminivorous as well as granivorous, are furnished with very broad and much depressed mandibles: all are peculiarly formed for holding securely their food, which is frequently of a slimy and slippery nature.

We have now run rapidly through the several orders and tribes, paying attention to the general formation of the beak in each, and have seen how strong a resemblance usually pervades all the families contained in them; we cannot fail to have observed at the same time how admirable in every case was the construction for attaining the desired end. There are still some particular species which exhibit so remarkable a peculiarity in this organ that I am unwilling to pass them by.

One of the most curious is the *Crossbill*, a bird familiar to most persons, as it occasionally, though not periodically, visits us in considerable numbers. Its name at once points out what some persons (and these naturalists of eminence, including the zealous but often inaccurate Buffon) have been pleased to call its natural defect, but which is now pretty generally considered a most admirable provision of nature. These birds inhabit extensive forests of pines and firs, the seeds of which form their chief food; but to arrive at these, a peculiar instrument is necessary. To this end, the mandibles (which in young birds in the nest are of the ordinary form) become elongated and cross one another at the tip to a considerable degree; in some specimens the upper mandible is curved to the right, the lower to

the left; in others this order is reversed. In either case, by means of these beaks, and by the lateral motion of the mandibles (which is peculiar to the crossbills alone of all birds), they are enabled, by insinuating the points between the scales of the pinecones and by the powerful lever they possess in their singular bill, to wrench open the scales without difficulty and so obtain the fruit. With this strange instrument they are no less adept at splitting apples and pears for the sake of the enclosed pips. It may readily be conceived that to work so strong a bill, the muscles attached to it must also be of proportionate power and size, and these are the cause of the large, heavy, and somewhat awkward appearance which the head presents.

Another bird remarkable for its peculiar beak is the *Avocet*. This is a water-bird, one of the waders and belonging to the family of snipes. Its haunts are the sea-shore, and its food consists of worms and aquatic insects, which it procures from the soft mud and sand, for which it often wades to a considerable depth. For obtaining these it is furnished with a beak most appropriate, though very singular in form: it is very long, very slender, thin, considerably curved upwards, and especially towards the tip, very flexible and pointed, and looks exactly like a thin piece of whalebone; and its mode of feeding is by scooping the soft oozy mud with the flat and upturned beak. From this singular construction the *Avocet*, which was once common on our shores, received the provincial names of 'Scooper!' and 'Cobbler's Awl Duck!' though now, alas! it is very seldom met with at all. Bewick says that the places where it has been feeding may be recognised by the semicircular marks left in the mud or sand by their bills in scooping out the food.

The *Turnstone* is another singular bird, of the same order as the last, but very different in habits. Instead of the soft muddy sands frequented by the *Scolopacidæ*, these birds delight in the rocky and gravelly shores of the ocean. Here they procure their food, consisting of marine insects, molluscæ and crustaceæ, by turning over the stones with their beaks, to get at the food

lurking beneath them ; from which practice they derive their name. Perhaps it would be impossible to conceive an instrument more beautifully adapted for this purpose, being strong, very hard, quite straight, and drawn to a fine point, and forming altogether a very powerful lever.

Again, the *Spoonbill*, as its name implies, presents a remarkable formation of beak. This is also a wader, and a member of the family of herons ; its haunts are chiefly pools of water on the sea-shore, and its food consists of small fishes, aquatic insects, sand-hoppers, etc. To obtain these, and when caught to hold them fast, the adult spoonbill is armed with a beak, very long, broad, and thick at the base ; thin, and very much flattened towards the extremity, where it is rounded and shaped like a spoon or spatula. As a further means of enabling it to hold its slippery prey, the inside of this weapon is studded with small, hard tubercles, and is rough like a file. Bewick adds that the beak flaps together not unlike two pieces of leather. It is curious that in the young birds (which do not come to maturity and assume the adult plumage till the third year) the beak is soft and flexible, not so large as, and without the roughness so conspicuous in, that of the adults.

Another and very remarkable peculiarity in the same organ is presented by the *Shoveller*, or as it is provincially styled, the 'Broad-bill.' This duck feeds chiefly in shallow water, or marshes, lakes, rivers, and muddy shores : its food consists of grasses and decayed vegetable matter, as well as worms and insects, and to detect and separate these from the mud and the water in which they are contained, the beak is singularly adapted. In shape this instrument is long, broad, depressed, the tip rounded like a spoon, and terminated by a small hooked nail ; internally the mandibles are furnished with rows of thin, comb-like bristles ; these seem to be very susceptible of feeling, and enable the bird to select the nutritious and reject the useless food, whilst this beautiful instrument, forming with the tongue a perfect sieve or strainer, retains only what is fit for sustenance. It was commonly supposed by naturalists that the beak

of the young of this species when first hatched was dilated like that of the adult bird, and was therefore as broad as the body, and quite out of proportion to the size of the duckling. Further investigation has, however, proved this to be erroneous; and as the young of the crossbill and the spoonbill described above, so the young of the shoveller when first hatched presents no peculiarity in the beak.

There are several other birds presenting very singular beaks, and each exactly suited to the habits of its owner, but to describe them at length would occupy too much space. That of the woodcock and snipe, to which I have slightly alluded above, deserves close attention, as being most delicate and beautiful. It is extremely long, the point of it dimpled, soft, spongy, and cellular, and exhibits great sensibility; it is repeatedly thrust up to the base in the soft mud by the sides of springs or in water-meadows, and, so susceptible is it of the finest feeling, that this sensitive organ can detect the prey of which it is in search the instant it comes in contact with it, though it is necessarily out of sight.

The *Hawfinch*, on the other hand, which lives upon the seeds of the hornbeam and the kernels of haws and stone-fruits, is armed with a massive and horny beak, capable of cracking the strongest shells, and of inflicting a severe bite, as I once experienced, by offering my boot to a specimen which I had wounded; and it was astonishing with what pertinacity the powerful little fellow held on, and again and again returned to the charge.

The handsome but rarely seen *Hoopoe* stalks about in moist places, with his head erect and his long curved beak searching for worms and insects—just as Ovid described him so many centuries ago:

‘Prominet immodicum pro longâ cuspidè rostrum.’

The *Puffin*, with his singular and gaudy-coloured, but powerful and sharp-edged bill, burrows out deep holes in which it breeds.

The *Oyster-catcher*, with his straight, long, wedge-shaped bill, is enabled to wrench open the oysters, mussels, and shell-fish which form his food, to detach them from the rocks to which they adhere, and to scoop them out of their shells.

The *Cormorant*, with its long, straight, powerfully-hooked bill, can kill its finny prey by the squeeze it is enabled to give.

The *Petrels*, with their compact and hooked bills, can break the skin of the floating whale, and gorge themselves with blubber to repletion.

Such are some of the many forms of beak displayed by the British birds. From this we can judge (as Yarrell remarks) what 'singular modifications of this organ nature sometimes exhibits, as if to show the many diversities of form which can be rendered applicable to one purpose.' Man, with all his boasted mechanical skill, would fail to contrive implements so perfectly adapted to the end for which they were devised; some fitted to tear in pieces the yet warm and quivering bodies of the recently killed prey; others to rip up and consume the putrid carcase; some fitted for devouring insects and worms, some for breaking up hard seeds and grain; these slender, light, and pliant, suited to the gentle uses to which they are applied; some adapted for securing and holding a slippery prey, others supplied with organs for discovering that prey when out of sight. There are many other instances of this varied form and varied appliance, but we need no more to prove their diversity, their excellence, their perfection.

Before I conclude this part of my subject I will just call attention to the extraordinary superstition entertained in this country, and especially in Scotland, not many years since, in regard to long beaks. One cannot very clearly see the connection between a long beak and a goblin; nor is it easy to say whence such an idea could have arisen; yet such was the common belief, and without attempting to give any reason, everybody knew well enough that a long beak portended no good. Sir Walter Scott alludes to this; and Yarrell tells us that the Highlander will pray to be preserved from 'witches, warlocks (or wizards), and aw lang-nebbed things.' But this superstition is not peculiar to

Great Britain, for to this day most of the birds exposed for sale in the markets at St. Petersburg and elsewhere are first deprived of their beaks, and thus some of the rarest specimens are irremediably mutilated.

These and many other equally absurd fictions relating to birds it is the part of the ornithologist to overthrow; to do which we have but to bid men look into the page of nature; and the more we read it, the more truly shall we learn to appreciate the wonderful works of God.

ON THE FEET.

No less remarkable as suited to their several requirements, no less various, and therefore no less characteristic of the family to which they belong than the beaks, are the *feet* of birds. These are so perfectly framed for the various uses to which their respective possessors must apply them, and differ so very widely in construction one from another, that a glance at the foot will generally point out to the observer what the habits and what the nature of the bird must be.

All birds resemble one another in this particular up to a certain point—viz., in that all are bipeds, and the legs which support their feet are invariably composed of three parts; these are, the *thigh*, which is very high up, very short, and quite out of sight; the *leg*, or ‘*tibia*,’ which inexperienced observers are apt erroneously to call the thigh; and the *instep*, or ‘*tarsus*,’ which is as often falsely called the leg. It is this last part (the ‘*tarsus*’) which alone is much seen, the remaining parts being usually concealed by the body and the feathers of the bird. Beyond this point of general structure, in which the legs of all birds participate, and in which they also resemble the human leg (though the extreme length of the instep and the shortness and concealment of the thigh have caused very general errors on the subject), they differ from one another in many ways; thus, some are extremely long, others are exceedingly short; some are quite bare of feathers, others are entirely clothed with them; some are plated, as it were, with scales, others are smooth; some are thick and

strong, others are light and delicate ; but all harmonize exactly with the feet with which they terminate, and these present still greater points of variety than the legs. The foot of a bird, unlike that of a quadruped, is never composed of more than four toes ; this is the most general number, and of these the first is usually directed backwards, though in some cases the fourth is also associated with it. There are other families which have but three toes, and in that case all of them are directed forwards, the first or hind toe being the one deficient. Again, there are birds which have but two toes ; but as none of these last occur in this country, we need not stop to consider their peculiarity. And again, the toe may be united by a membrane, and that either entirely, or in part ; or they may be wholly unconnected ; but they are always terminated with claws, which present the varieties of long and short, straight and curved, sharp and blunt ; but these, together with many other points of difference, and the reasons of them, and the suitability of the exact form of foot with which every bird is provided, we shall more clearly see as we go on to consider the orders and families in rotation.

The 'Birds of Prey' present a great general similarity in the formation of the foot. It is always strong and muscular, furnished with four powerful toes, and armed with claws more or less hooked, and often of very formidable size, strength, and sharpness. In the family of vultures the talons are not so much displayed, as the habits of these ignoble birds require no weapon for striking a blow to obtain their food, and no powers of grasping for bearing it away in their feet to their young. Content with the putrid carcase of some fallen animal, these unclean birds stuff themselves with carrion, and carrying it in their claw to their nests, there disgorge the unsavoury mess. But the falcons have by their own prowess to secure their living prey, and so, in addition to very powerful limbs and great muscular strength, are provided with sharp and generally much curved claws, enabling them to strike down and hold securely the victims they have seized. Like the carnivorous quadrupeds, these rapacious birds can pounce so fiercely and with such exceeding violence with

their formidable talons, as generally at one blow to disable their prey. It is invariably the claw of the hind toe by which this severe stroke is effected, and for this purpose the beak is never used at all, though many people have erroneous impressions to the contrary. Rushing down with the velocity of lightning, and with closed pinions, the falcon makes its deadly swoop from above on the selected prey, and striking with the hind toe in darting past, inflicts the deadly wound in a most masterly manner, seldom missing its aim or failing in the stroke. Sometimes, too, the back of the unfortunate victim is seen to be deeply scored throughout its whole length, while not unfrequently the skull is completely riven and the brains dashed out by the amazing impetus of the blow. But should the aim be by some mischance incorrect, then rising again and sailing round in circles, and so getting higher and higher at every turn, the falcon again prepares for a charge, while the unhappy bird whose life is so endangered seems instinctively to know wherein its best chance of escape lies, and perceiving that an attack can only be made from above, soars as high as its strength enables it. Seldom, however, does the manœuvre succeed, and the second swoop of the aggressor rarely fails to send the quarry headlong and lifeless to the ground. For inflicting such a wound, no more perfect instrument can be conceived than the falcon's foot, so strong, hard, and muscular, with claws so sharp, powerful, and curved. With these weapons they can not only provide themselves food, but with the same instruments can grasp and carry it off to their eyries, though it be of considerable weight. The nature of the prey, too, so obtained and borne away varies not a little, according to the genera comprising this extensive family; for fish, flesh, and fowl are all attacked by these rapacious birds. The eagles can master a full-sized hare or a lamb; the osprey will plunge into the river, and emerge again with a quivering salmon firmly clutched in its talons; the true falcons, the hawks, the buzzards, and the harriers, content themselves with the smaller birds and quadrupeds, and some species vary their diet with reptiles; but they all seize and bear off their prey with

their feet. The third and last family of the *Raptores*, viz., the owls, hunting in the dusk of evening and the gray twilight of morning, adopt a different course from their diurnal brethren of prey; stealing on noiseless wing round the enclosures and over the meadows, they drop suddenly and without warning of their approach on the mouse or other victim, which they bear away in their feet. Their legs and toes are usually covered with downy feathers up to the claws, assisting them in their silent movements, and strong enough to carry off any victim which they may seize. In all these carnivorous birds, can anything more perfect be conceived than the feet with which they are provided, more fitted to their respective requirements, more thoroughly adapted to their wants?

The second order of birds, the 'Perchers,' brings before us quite a different form of foot, but one no less applicable to the habits of the species which compose it; nay, by many the form of foot herein displayed is considered the *most* perfect, and perhaps if any degrees of excellence can exist, where all are exactly fitted to their respective uses, the mechanism of the foot of the 'Insessores' may strike us with the greatest admiration. The tarsus of all these birds is usually bare of feathers, and the general character of the leg and foot is slight and slender; the number of toes is invariably four, the hind toe being always present: in some species the claws are very long, but in general they as well as the toes are short, and thus best formed for perching. When, then, we look at these light and delicate legs and feet, 'the skin reduced,' as Buffon well describes it, 'till it is nothing more than a bony needle,' and then observe the size and weight of the body they have to support, is it not astonishing with what ease and steadiness a bird can perch upon a bough, and balance and uphold itself in that position, even in a high wind?—is it not marvellous how, with the head reposing under the wing and one leg drawn up under the body, it is entirely supported on the other; and resting on so slight a fulcrum, falls asleep, without the least danger of losing its balance? It is the admirable formation of these delicate

members that enables the feathered race to rest with ease in a position in which other animals could not support themselves for a minute ; and of which formation the true perchers afford so excellent an example. The natural position of a bird's toes is not, as with men's fingers, stretched out and open, but the very reverse ; it requires an effort in the bird to spread open its toes, just as it does in a man to close his fingers. Hence, when it rises on the wing and flies through the air, the foot is doubled up under the body, and the toes immediately contract, and only unbend again when about to seize the bough of a tree ; hence, again, when it perches on a spray, the toes, previously opened for the purpose, grasp it by their natural flexion, and firmly clasp the support on which they have alighted. This is a very excellent adaptation of peculiar structure to the required end, but in addition to this there is a most admirable piece of internal mechanism, which I cannot better describe than in the words of Bishop Stanley : ' Connected with the thigh-bones and leg, a set of muscles run down to the very extremity of the toes, so contrived and placed that, when by pressure downwards the limb bends, these fine muscles are pulled in, and therefore contract the toes, thus making them grasp more firmly whatever the bird is resting upon ; just as if a set of fine strings ran over pulleys to certain hooks, and were acted upon at the other end by a weight or pressure, and thereby made to draw in the hooks.' Such, then, is the wonderful power given to perching birds, whereby they can hold themselves securely even in sleep on so slender a support. This faculty is shared in by the whole order ; but as the families and genera which compose this extensive division are so numerous, and obtain their food in such a variety of ways, it is clear that there must be considerable varieties in the development of their feet. The tribes which dwell among the boughs of trees, now hanging with their heads downwards, now hurrying along the underside of the branch, will require a foot somewhat differently formed from those which run on the ground and perch on the topmost spray. Still, in so vast a number, it will be impossible in this place even to touch upon the

points in which they vary; but as throughout the entire order there is so considerable a similarity of structure in this particular, it will not be necessary for the due exposition of my subject to enter into further details upon it. We have said enough to show how worthy is the construction of their feet to give a name to the whole order, as *Insessores* or 'Perchers.'

In the *Rasores*, or 'Ground-birds,' we shall see a formation of foot widely differing from both the above orders. These are a harmless and quiet race, never preying upon other creatures, but eating berries and grain, and such food as they can find upon the ground; and they are subject to frequent attacks from carnivorous birds as well as quadrupeds. Their flesh, too, being very palatable, man is not the least of their destroyers; but with so many enemies from which to escape, their flight is laboured and heavy, and they are unable to protract it to any great distance. Providence, however, which leaves no creature without some means of defence, has provided for the ground-birds a suitable remedy in their remarkable powers of running; for this end such feet as those which I have shown to belong to the above-named divisions would be little adapted; in lieu of which they have frequently but three toes, the hind one being altogether omitted, or, if present, it is always very small and considerably elevated. All the toes are very short, and excellently adapted for running, not only for swiftness (though that is often very great), but also for long continuance and protracted exertion; moreover, they are provided with limbs of great muscular development, as well as with short and blunt claws: thus the members of this order, when alarmed, run from the supposed danger at their utmost speed, and endeavour to conceal themselves under the thickest cover at hand; and it is only when hard pressed, and other means of escape fail, that they rise on the wing with considerable exertion, and fly heavily away.

We come now to the two orders of Water-birds, and in each of these we shall see the feet and legs adapted precisely to the habits of their possessors. The *Grallatores*, or "Waders," first claim our notice. They seem to be a connecting link between

the true land and water birds, partaking somewhat of the nature of each. Generally incapable of swimming, and therefore unable to go into deep water, they are formed for passing a great portion of their time on land; but yet, as all their food must be procured from the water, or from wet and marshy spots, they haunt the vicinity of lakes or streams, or the seashore; and, as a combination of both elements, delight in fens and swamps, where they can wade about, or stand motionless, fishing for prey. For such an amphibious nature, and such dabbling habits, how well fitted are their legs and feet; the tarsus of extreme length; the tibia frequently bare of feathers to a considerable distance above the tarsal joint; the toes always divided, but very long, and usually slender, and of which the third and fourth are frequently united by a membrane; all present admirable facilities to these birds for indulging their wading and fishing propensities; for as the great length of leg suffers them to walk in water of some depth, without wetting their plumage, so the wide-spreading form of their foot enables them to stand and run on soft and doubtful ground, without sinking in. Thus, like the stilts and flat boards on which the fenmen of Lincolnshire have for ages been accustomed to traverse their swamps, so the long legs and spreading feet of the waders are the instruments with which nature has provided them for the same purpose.

Widely different from the last described, but no less perfect, and no less adapted to their peculiar requirements, are the feet of the *Natatores*, or 'Swimmers;' these dwell in and on the water; at one time on the surface, floating over the waves, at another far below, diving for food or for safety. Many species belonging to this order are quite incapable of walking on land, and are but scantily provided with wings of much avail for prolonged flight; their chief means then of moving about are by swimming and diving, which they do to perfection. All the divers and auks present a grotesque and clumsy appearance on shore: even the ducks cut but a sorry figure as they waddle over the grass; but place them in their own element, let them once reach the water, and their awkwardness becomes elegance,

their clumsiness is transformed into the greatest activity. To enable them to move about on the water with such ease and such celerity, they are supplied with legs and feet very much resembling the paddles used in Indian canoes: their thighs are placed very far back, in some instances almost at their tails; their legs are very flat and extremely thin, like the blade of an oar; their feet are broad and large, and completely webbed, the toes connected together with membranes up to the nails; with these they strike the water with considerable force, and thus their bodies are impelled forwards with speed; and as the boatman, in rowing, *feathers* his oar after each successive stroke, and in order to offer as small a surface as possible to the resistance of the air and water, presents the thin knife-like edge of the blade, while he draws it back for the next stroke, but while pulling it through the water presents the broad blade as a means of obtaining a good purchase for his pull—just so is it with the feet and legs of the swimming birds; at every stroke the broad flat leg and the expanded webbed foot give a hearty thrust; but in withdrawing them again, preparatory to repeating the thrust, the thin edge of the leg is presented to the water, and the toes are drawn together, and closely folded up, presenting as little resistance as possible, till they are spread out again for the next stroke. With these admirable provisions for moving at will on the waves all the swimmers are supplied, but as some families are more expert in the water, and less able to leave it for the shore or the air than others, there are considerable variations in the exact formations of their feet: thus, some have only three toes; others have four, but frequently three only are webbed, the fourth remaining free, and articulated high up on the tarsus; others again, have a pendant lobe or membrane, depending from the hind toe, while some have all four toes completely webbed together. According to these different formations, so their powers of swimming and diving are increased or lessened; but all enjoy those faculties to a considerable extent.

Such, then, are the general characters of the feet, as applicable to the five orders. Though those of certain individual species

will in some cases be seen to vary from this description, it will on the whole be found to be typical of the division to which it refers. Thus we see the birds of prey armed with feet and claws which form the most powerful weapons for striking down and carrying off their victims. The perchers provided with so exquisite a piece of mechanism as to enable them to seize, balance, and support themselves on a branch with ease. The ground-birds furnished with limbs so strong, muscles so powerful, and feet so adapted for the purpose, as to make them seek safety in running when beset by foes. The waders, though often unable to swim, raised high out of the water in which they seek their food by the length of their legs, and enabled by their spreading toes to run lightly over water-plants and the softest mud without danger of sinking in. The swimmers supplied with feet and legs serving them for oars and rudders, whereby to impel forwards their bodies on the waves, or to seek their food far below the surface of the water. These are all instruments so exactly and so perfectly adapted to their respective uses, that we can conceive nothing more applicable; and they are plain and easy marks to us for ascertaining the general habits and classified position of any bird we observe. Our examination of the subject might well stop here; but, before concluding this paper, I would call attention to a few remarkable instances of structure in regard to the feet, as displayed by some particular species.

The *Osprey* alone, of all the family *Falconidæ*, lives entirely upon fish, and the nature of its prey being therefore different from that of its congeners, it requires and is furnished with feet peculiarly fitted for seizing and holding securely the slippery denizens of the deep. In the first place, in lieu of the long feathers which commonly clothe the thighs of the falcon race, short ones are substituted, which leave more freedom for action in the water; then the outer toe is reversible, and can at pleasure be turned backwards, so that, as Yarrell tells us, it is the custom of the bird to 'seize the prey across the body, placing the inner and outer toes at right angles with the middle and hind toes; and, digging in the claws, to hold the fish most firmly by four

opposite points.' Moreover, the soles of its feet are remarkably rough, and covered with protuberances, while the talons are very much curved, sharp, and strong, that of the outer toe being the largest, which is contrary to the usual custom; and all these peculiarities tend to the holding with greater security the slimy victims on which it lives.

The *Nightjar*, which feeds at twilight, presents another very peculiar formation of foot. This is small and weak in proportion to the size of the bird, but is remarkable for the claw of the middle toe, which is particularly long and serrated, or pectinated, on its inner edge, and resembles a comb with seven or eight teeth. Now the food of the nightjar consists of moths, but especially of fern-chaffers, beetles, and such late flying insects, the legs of which are often terminated with hooked claws, to detach which from the wide gaping mouth, and from the bristles with which the upper mandible of the beak is fringed, this comb-like claw is probably appended to the foot; I say *probably*, for much difference of opinion has existed with reference to its use. Gilbert White, and others after him, thought they could perceive the bird put out its short leg while on the wing and deliver something into its mouth, and thus accounted for its use, that it enabled the bird to hold more securely in its foot the insect it had caught; but for such a purpose it certainly seems but very ill calculated.

The *Swift* furnishes another instance of remarkable structure of foot. As it passes the livelong day in unceasing and rapid flight, it requires no great development of leg and foot; thus the tarsus is exceedingly short and thick, so short as to render the bird incapable of rising from a flat surface, and therefore it never alights on the ground. For rest and for incubation it retires to the eaves of steeples and towers, to the perpendicular walls of which, and to the face of cliffs, its foot is well adapted to cling; thus it consists of four toes, all of which are directed forwards, and are armed with very hooked claws, and quite divided, and which give it the appearance of belonging to a quadruped rather than a bird.

The *Woodpeckers* are also furnished with feet most suitable to their climbing habits. Each foot is provided with four toes, arranged in pairs, two directed forwards and two backwards; these afford an immense support, and as they are very strong and terminate with hooked claws, it may be conceived what useful instruments they must be to birds whose lives are passed in climbing about the trunks and branches of trees; indeed, very similar in form are they to the iron crampions which the Swiss chamois-hunter affixes to the soles of his feet when about to scale the precipices of the Alps and climb among the dangerous chasms of the glacier.

Again, the *Avocet* is provided with feet of singular construction. This bird is a wader in every sense, deriving its food from the softest mud at the estuaries of rivers, to support it on which no ordinary feet would suffice; we see the toes, therefore, united for a considerable part of their length by a concave membrane, not wholly webbed, for the bird is incapable of swimming to any distance, but semi-palmated, and connected far more than those of any other species in the order; the tarsus, too, is long and slender: the tibia naked for two-thirds of its entire length, so that it can wade into water of considerable depth, in search of food.

No less singular in the appearance of its legs and feet is the *Black-winged Stilt*, or *Long-legged Plover*; either name at once points to the remarkable and apparently disproportionate length of its legs, on which its body seems raised up above the water, as if on stilts. It is almost needless to add that this bird, too, obtains its food by wading in muddy creeks and shallows on the shore.

The *Coots* and *Phalaropes*, which compose the small family *lobe-footed*, claim our attention last. I have before alluded to them as the connecting-link between the true waders and swimmers, and their feet certainly present a peculiarity, partaking of the form which is characteristic of both those orders. Thus, though the toes are not wholly united by a connecting membrane, yet they are furnished laterally with it to such a

degree as almost to answer the same purpose. This membrane, so extended, forms what are technically called 'rounded lobes;' hence their family name; and with such curious feet these birds seem as active on land as they are in the water—running, walking, even climbing trees, wading, swimming, and diving with the greatest ease.

Thus the feet of birds, though with a certain general similarity of structure, differ one from another in a variety of ways. As their habits and manner of life vary exceedingly, and as they are constituted to occupy no less than three elements—earth, air, and water—we see every individual furnished with such means of locomotion as best suit its own particular sphere. Had the lordly eagle, pouncing on its quarry, but the foot of a partridge wherewith to inflict his wound, starvation must be his lot; or had the pheasant to run from danger with the feet of the diver, slight, indeed, would be its chance of escape. The heron, if supported on the legs of a hawk, would certainly be drowned in fishing for food. The rook would rest but insecurely on the bough of the elm, if it clasped its support only with the feet of the plover. But now, supplied with such instruments as their respective pursuits require, all are enabled with ease to obey their own peculiar instincts, and fill the place allotted to them in nature.

I have now brought to a conclusion my preliminary remarks on the general structure, and a few of the more prominent attributes of the feathered race; and perhaps I ought to apologise to my readers for the length to which these remarks have run. I trust that on the whole they have not been uninteresting, and to some, perhaps, they may pave the way to a clearer understanding of the life history of the several species which occur in our county, which we are now about to consider; while I feel sure that all of us who examine these particulars with care and consideration must be led thereby to admire the perfection of the works of the Creator, and the wondrous means by which His ends are reached. I cannot better close this part of my subject than in the words of

the poet who was so accurate and so admiring an observer of the various works of God :

'Let no presuming impious railer tax
Creative Wisdom, as if aught was form'd
In vain, or not for admirable ends.
Shall little haughty ignorance pronounce
His works unwise, of which the smallest part
Exceeds the narrow vision of her mind ?
As if upon a full proportioned dome
Of swelling columns heav'd, the pride of art !
A critic-fly, whose feeble ray scarce spreads
An inch around, with blind presumption bold,
Should dare to tax the structure of the whole.
And lives the man, whose universal eye
Has swept at once th' unbounded scheme of things,
Mark'd their dependance so, and firm accord,
As with unfaltering accent to conclude
That *this* availeth naught ? Has any seen
The mighty chain of beings, lessening down
From Infinite Perfection to the brink
Of dreary *nothing*, desolate abyss !
From which astonished thought, recoiling, turns ?
Till then alone let zealous praise ascend
And hymns of holy wonder, to that Power
Whose wisdom shines as lovely on our minds
As on our smiling eyes His servant sun.'

CHAPTER II.

FALCONIDÆ.—THE FALCONS.

‘So when a falcon skims the airy way,
Stoops from the clouds, and pounces on his prey ;
Dash’d on the earth the feather’d victim lies,
Expands its feeble wings, and flutt’ring dies.’

P. WHITEHEAD : *The Gymnasiad*, Book 3.

HAVING in the Introduction treated of the *general* structure and the classification of birds, and the *particular* characteristics of the various orders and tribes, with especial reference to the beaks and feet, which generally point out with sufficient clearness their habits and consequent position, I come now, without further preface, to describe in order the *families* into which those orders and tribes are subdivided, and to give some short account of each individual species, which, as a resident, a periodical or an occasional visitant in our county, has come under my observation.

I have already shown that the first Order, ‘Birds of Prey,’ consists of three families, the Vultures, Falcons, and Owls. Of the first of these (*Vulturidæ*) no member has ever been recognised in this county ; and, indeed, it is only from the very rare occurrence of a straggler or two on our shores, probably driven out of their course by strong and adverse winds, that the vultures have of late obtained a place amongst British birds, for they are essentially inhabitants of tropical countries, and to such neither Great Britain in general, nor Wiltshire in particular, can by any means claim to belong. And yet it seems strange that with such immense powers of flight, and abounding, as they do, within a few hours of Great Britain, they should not more frequently visit us, more especially in summer. Even the short-winged warblers

and other diminutive migrants of comparatively feeble wing, cross the seas and visit us annually; and yet the two vultures which have earned a place in the British list by their rare visits, viz., the great 'Griffon Vulture' (*Vultur fulvus*), and the 'Egyptian Vulture' (*Neophron percnopterus*),* both of which I have seen abounding in North Africa, and not uncommonly in the South of Spain, very seldom diverge from their own districts so far as to touch on these northern regions, though they love to soar and sail in circles for hours at a great height above the earth, and to float on motionless wing without effort. Better perhaps, for them and for us that they keep their distance from our shores; for them, because, invaluable as they are from their habits in tropical countries, where the whole system of drainage is absolutely unknown, and where they delight to gorge themselves on putrid substances, they would soon starve in civilized England; for in this highly favoured land, where Urban and Rural Sanitary Authorities, Inspectors of Nuisances, and other such high-sounding titles meet us at every turn, what business would the vultures find to do? and how much out of their element they would be! Better, too, for us, and we need not regret their absence, for they are birds of such filthy habits that their presence is certainly not agreeable to the olfactory senses, and their near approach is by no means to be desired. Let none, however, despise these most useful scavengers, which are deservedly held in high esteem in their native countries, and protected as such by the inhabitants; for as the storks in Holland and Germany, and the dogs in Constantinople and the East, so in Egypt and South America the vultures, arriving in vast numbers from all parts of the heavens, may be seen clearing away the offal and the garbage to which they are in some mysterious manner attracted, and which would otherwise poison the atmosphere. Indeed, but for their invaluable aid, I do not know how

* *Neophron* is derived by the Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union (in the list which they compiled in 1883, and which I shall hereafter refer to as the B. O. U. list) from *νέος φρήν*, 'childish in mind,' so called from the bird's having 'the front of the head naked.' See Eyton's 'Rarer British Birds,' p. 3. And *percnopterus*, 'dusky winged,' from *περικνός πτερόν*.

the inhabitants of the undrained cities and villages of the east and south could exist.

Neither should we condemn their cowardice, as we watch a vulture of large size and imposing aspect, with bald head and naked neck, and forbidding beak, driven away from a savoury carcase by some impertinent hooded crow—a very giant giving place to a pigmy. It is not the nature of the vulture to attack any animals, or to fight, or to resist. He is but fulfilling his destiny in the sphere assigned to him, as, to his own mortification, he withdraws from the coveted banquet which he had just begun to enjoy, on the arrival of some bold but puny self-invited guest, biding his time till other more fierce birds or beasts have satisfied their appetites, when he in turn gorges himself to repletion, and then, with drooping wings and widespread tail, basks in the blazing sunshine. At such times they are not pleasing objects, but, on the contrary, disagreeable and even disgusting; but it is otherwise as we watch them soaring on outstretched wing high in the air, now advancing in wide circles, and ever scanning the ground below with piercing eyes, constantly on the look-out for some savoury morsel. In their own lands, too, their numbers are astonishing; and it is wonderful to see them collect from all parts of the heavens when one of their fellows has detected some choice carrion, and his descent upon it has been descried by others from their exalted position, far beyond the reach of human sight.

The second family, 'Falconidæ,' embraces the Eagles, Falcons, Buzzards, Harriers and Hawks, of all descriptions; and each of these genera is represented by one at least, and some by several species, which from time to time, with more or less frequency, may be seen within the borders of Wiltshire. Most of them, however, are becoming scarcer every year, driven away by incessant persecution, and some of them seem to have altogether abandoned the localities they frequented but a few years ago. So much is this the case, that to see a hawk on the wing, though he be of the commonest species, is not now the every-day sight that it was only thirty years ago. To meet with this great family

in abundance, I must again conduct my readers to Lower Egypt, where the vultures are so numerous, and there kites, hawks, buzzards and harriers, swarm to such a degree that the air seems alive with them; and on one occasion, from a commanding position on one of the minarets of Cairo (the lofty tower and the clearness of the atmosphere enabling the eye to take in a very wide area), I counted above a hundred individuals of this Order in the air at the same time. The Falconidæ, in common with all other birds of prey (and in this again they resemble the carnivorous quadrupeds), are monogamous, or live in pairs; they seldom drink, but during the heat of summer delight to wash themselves: they usually swallow part of the fur and feathers of their victims with their food, but this and all other indigestible parts, as bones, etc., they afterwards disgorge in large pellets, or castings, by the mouth, and they will often skin animals and pluck birds with the greatest dexterity. In the whole family of Falcons there is a very remarkable difference in size between the male and female, the latter being (contrary to what we see in other kinds) by far the largest and strongest; and from the fact of the male being usually a third less in size than its mate, it generally received the name of *Tiercelet* or *Tiercel*, as a Tiercel Peregrine, a Tiercelet Sparrow-hawk, meaning the males of those species.* They are divided into the long-winged or 'noble,' and the short-winged or 'ignoble,' as they were respectively denominated in the good old days of hawking: the long-winged, or true falcons, were those most highly prized and most frequently reclaimed; and there are a few plain points of difference by which they may be easily distinguished from their more ignoble brethren. Thus, in the beak of the true falcon we shall find a prominent tooth in the upper mandible, and a corresponding notch in the lower one; while in the short-winged genera we shall see instead of the notch a small festoon, or marginal lobe,

* Shakespeare uses the word, corrupted into *Tassel*, in the famous balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet* :—

'O, for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!'—Act ii., scene 2.

as it is styled. Again, in the true falcons, the *iris*, or coloured circle surrounding the pupil of the eye, will be always seen to be dark; while in the ignoble birds the irides are universally bright yellow. And again, in flight, the true falcon soars to a great height, and descends with a swoop upon its prey, while the short-winged pursue it in a direct line near the earth; but both display considerable strength, boldness, and activity, and of both I am proud to enumerate a goodly list as belonging to this county. Doubtless in olden time, when every gentleman and lady also had a cast or two of hawks, our wide open Wiltshire downs were much resorted to for the noble sport of falconry, and called forth such commendations for remarkable suitability for the sport as were bestowed on it some years since by one of the few genuine falconers remaining in the kingdom, Mr. Pells, when he exercised, on the downs above Lavington, the royal falcons, six magnificent Peregrines, the property of the hereditary Grand Falconer, the Duke of St. Albans. Hawking has long since gone by, and the hound has usurped the place of the falcon; but it must have been a goodly sight to see a hawking-party equipped for the field: prancing steeds bearing gallant knights, and palfreys carrying ladies fair; the falconer with his stand of hawks, and each falcon bearing a silver bell on her foot, and capped with a gay hood, surmounted by a plume. Then when the open down was reached and the game was flushed; what excitement to watch the unhooded hawks start in pursuit, the rapidity of their flight, their graceful soaring in circles above their victim, the sudden pounce, the deadly swoop, the terrific blow; what galloping (and that somewhat blindly and dangerously, with eyes directed upwards) to come up with the falcon, which has 'bound' to its victim, and fluttered with it to the earth; what enticing with the lure, what caressing it when recovered and safely hooded once more. But these days have gone by, and though our downs remain inviting to the sport, and the falcons and hawks range over them in considerable numbers, they are looked upon no longer with favour, but are persecuted, hunted, and destroyed by every gamekeeper and

sportsman—no longer the honoured, the petted, and the prized, but the special objects of vengeance, the marked victims of the gun and the snare. And yet, though no longer trained for the chase, but hunted down by the preserver of game as his most deadly foes, who can forbear to admire the symmetry and strength of body, the boldness, the courage, the sagacity, of this whole family? Who can withhold admiration at their noble bearing, their velocity of flight, the keenness of their sight, the gracefulness of their evolutions in the air? But as I am not writing a panegyric on falcons, but only a plain history of them, I will proceed at once to enumerate the species which have occurred in this county.

1. THE WHITE-TAILED EAGLE (*Haliaeetus albicilla*).

First and foremost in the ranks of the Falconidæ stands the lordly eagle, no less the king of birds than the lion is allowed to rank monarch of quadrupeds. The strength and courage of this genus so commended it to the heathen poets that they made it the attendant of Jupiter, and declared that alone of the feathered tribes it could brave the thunderbolt, or gaze with fixed eye at the sun's dazzling orb; for the same reasons the Romans, Assyrians and Persians adopted it as their standard in ancient times, and it forms the crest or emblem of monarchy in Russia, Prussia, Austria, France, and other empires of modern days. Its longevity, too (for it has been proved to live above a hundred years), and its love of solitude, combine to give it dignity and majesty; so that in appearance and habits, as well as by general consent, it is allowed to be a 'right royal bird.' In Great Britain, the cliffs of Scotland and Ireland and the wildest parts of our sea-coast are the abode of the eagles; and there, on the most inaccessible rocks, and on the edges of the most dizzy precipices, they place their eyries, and from thence they sally forth in quest of prey, and goodly and ample and of great variety is the stock of game, in addition to an occasional lamb or fawn, with which they supply their young, as the rocks adjoining their

nest have often testified, converted during the breeding season by these insatiable marauders into a well-filled larder.

Of the different species of eagles, the 'Golden' one (*Aquila chrysaëtos*) is generally considered the first, as it is the boldest and most active, as well as the largest; and I had hoped to have enumerated it among the birds of Wilts, in consequence of a notice which appeared in the *Berkshire Chronicle* and the *Zoologist*, in January, 1847, to the effect that a fine specimen of this species had been killed by the gamekeeper at Littlecote, who discovered it feeding on a dead doe, and so gorged with venison as to be unable to fly off. On inquiry, however, I learnt from Mr. Popham that the species was mistaken, and that it was the 'Cinereous' or 'White-tailed' (not the Golden) eagle, which was killed in his park. The confusion seems to have arisen from the unwonted size of the specimen, its length being 37 inches, and its breadth from tip to tip of the extended wings 8 feet, a very unusual magnitude for this species. There is, however, in addition to the fulvous or golden plumage of the one, and the white tail of the other (whence their specific names), an un-failing mark of distinction by which these two species of eagles may be distinguished at all ages, which I will give in the words of Mr. Yarrell: 'In the foot of the Golden Eagle each toe is covered with small reticulations as far as the last phalanx, then with three broad scales. In the foot of the White-tailed Eagle the reticulations are confined to the tarsus, the whole length of each toe being covered with broad scales.' But the Golden Eagle is a very much rarer bird so far south, and indeed is almost unknown in these latitudes; and I am inclined with the late Mr. Knox, the talented author of 'Ornithological Rambles in Sussex,' to regard with considerable suspicion the announcement in local papers, which of late have frequently caught my eye, of the occurrence of the *Golden Eagle* in the neighbouring counties of Somerset and Berks. But though I have no authentic instance of the Golden Eagle as a voluntary visitor to Wiltshire, I had oftentimes the pleasure of seeing a magnificent specimen of this bird in confinement at Spye Park,

which my friend Major Spicer brought with him from Scotland ; and very noble and very fierce he used to look in the large space allotted him for a residence ; nor was it safe for any stranger to approach very near the iron bars of his abode. Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey,* than whom there can be no better authority, says that, active and strong as he is, the Golden Eagle cannot grasp with his foot so firmly as his white-tailed congener, but seems rather more fitted to seize small animals on the ground, and there hold them to eat on the spot ; and he adds that in warm bright weather eagles are inactive, but when the day is wild and boisterous they wheel continuously through the sky, and appear to glory in the tempest. I have in my possession the foot, which I picked up from the road in Norway, in 1850, of what must have been in life a splendid specimen of the Golden Eagle. Doubtless this foot had been cut off by the captor of the bird, and accidentally dropped on its way to the authorities, who, on its production, would pay the premium granted by Government for the destruction of such birds of prey ; in the same spirit as, we are told by Montagu, that, in order to extirpate the Golden Eagle, there is a law in the Orkney Isles which entitles any person who kills an eagle to a hen out of every house in the parish in which it is killed.

It is interesting and refreshing to learn, as I do from the Rev. A. P. Morres, who appears to have excellent authority for the statement, that the Golden Eagle in Scotland is not by any means the rare bird whose speedy extermination has been prophesied by some ; for there are from sixty to eighty of this species now breeding in that country ; whereas of the Sea Eagle, which has been generally supposed to be greatly more abundant, there are now but twenty nests. It may seem strange and even incredible to some that such a bird census can be taken with any accuracy ; but to those who are familiar with gamekeepers and their habits, and are aware of the importance attached to an eagle's nest, whether its owner desires to protect or destroy it,

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 291—305.

such intimate knowledge of their numbers will be readily understood. The English is a close translation of the scientific name: *halicæetus* being derived from ἅλς + αἰτός, 'sea eagle,' and *albicilla* 'white-tailed.'

The White-tailed Eagle, or Erne, compared with the Golden Eagle, is—as Sir R. Payne-Gallwey points out—as a vulture to a hawk; indeed, while the latter is so comely, and puts on such a lordly air of nobility, the Erne is somewhat vulture-like in shape and in aspect. As with that 'ignoble' bird, its plumage, too, is often ragged and untidy; the ends of the wing-feathers, and above all the tail, are rarely perfect, generally bruised and discoloured, and often much worn. This seems to show that it frequently rests and feeds on level soft ground, such as borders the sea. It will also, on occasion, feed on carrion, which the nobler bird would disdain to touch. In France it is known as *Aigle Pygargue* or *l'Orfraie*; in Germany as *Fisch-adler*; and in Sweden as *Hafs-Örn*, 'Sea-Eagle.'

In addition to the example of the White-tailed Eagle, or Erne, given above, I was informed by the late Rev. G. Marsh, (and further details have been kindly given me by Lord Suffolk,) that a splendid specimen of this species was caught in a trap, on December 11th, 1841, by his Lordship's gamekeeper in Stonehill Wood, part of the old forest of Braydon: it was a female, and for ten days had previously been observed by the keeper soaring very high in the air, and it committed very great devastations amongst the game; consequently a gin was set for it, and in this it was caught, and when first found by the keeper was but little injured. Its fierceness, however, prevented its being taken alive, for the man dare not remove it from the trap till he had killed it. It is now preserved at Charlton; and a grand bird indeed it is, and well deserves to stand, as it does, at the very head of the feathered tribes of Wiltshire. There is, also, a brief notice in the 'Report of the Marlborough College Natural History Society,' for the half-year ending Christmas, 1867, to the effect that 'a White-tailed Eagle was shot in Savernake Forest in 1859;' but no further details are

given.* In addition to these I have another record of the occurrence of the Eagle in Wiltshire, and that is an extract from the *Salisbury Journal*, bearing date as long ago as the middle of the last century, kindly sent me by Mr. Waylen. It is to the effect that 'one summer evening an eagle was observed sailing towards the summit of Salisbury Cathedral; he reposed there all night, and early in the morning set sail northwards.' Nor is that the only occasion on which the spire of Salisbury Cathedral has been so honoured. In the year 1828 or 1829 a similar case occurred, of which a highly respected Rector of a Wiltshire parish was an eye-witness, and within the last few weeks has furnished me with the particulars. My informant was, at that time, a young boy at the celebrated school kept by Dr. Radcliffe at Salisbury, and he describes the house and school buildings, which have long since disappeared, as entered from Castle Street; and his bedroom as over the large and lofty school-room, and its windows as giving a view of the upper part of the spire, uninterrupted by the neighbouring houses. It was on a summer evening, at about five or six o'clock, that an eagle, said to have come from a northerly direction, took its place on the grand perch it had selected, on the vane above the spire. The night chanced to be that of a full moon, and the sky was cloudless. Just before bedtime my informant came into possession, for the first time in his life, of 'Lord Byron's Tales,' which were printed in good bold type, so that he was able to read them easily by the light of the moon; and now, after an interval of nearly sixty years, he recollects reading for several hours, seated on the window-seat of his bedroom, but frequently raising his eyes to look at the great bird on the weather-cock of the spire. A plot, it appears, was made by some to shoot the eagle with a rifle-ball, and a party went up for that purpose to the 'eight-doors,' or in other words to the place where the base of the spire rests on the tower; but happily their endeavours were baffled by the large ball which projects itself below the cross; and early in the morning the eagle floated away southward, unharmed.

2. THE OSPREY (*Pandion haliaëtus*).

This fine species generally lives altogether on fish, and to seize its slippery prey with its powerful talons it hesitates not to plunge into rivers and lakes, on the borders of which it may therefore be looked for. I have described its remarkable conformation of foot, so exactly fitted to this purpose, on a previous page. So its plumage, too, and especially on the under parts of the body, is not composed of long feathers, such as we generally see in the other members of this family, but is close and firm, like that of the waterfowl. Hovering over the waters, with an undulatory motion of wing, no sooner has its eagle-glance discovered a fish near the surface, than down it dashes with the velocity of an arrow, and bearing its quivering and slippery but firmly-clutched victim away in its feet, retires to some secluded rock, where, unmolested, it can devour it at leisure. So deep are its talons embedded in the fish, that it seldom cares to relax its hold till the fish is almost consumed, picking out the flesh from between its toes with great dexterity. Frequently, however, the poor Osprey is not suffered to enjoy its hard-earned prize in peace, for the last-named species, the White-tailed Eagle, not fitted itself for plunging into the sea, but liking to vary its diet of flesh and fowl with an occasional fish, sits on some rock or bough, a patient but interested spectator of the sport, watching the Osprey's manœuvres, and eager for its success; then, no sooner has it made a successful pounce, and risen from the waters rejoicing in its prey, than down comes the Eagle in pursuit, and gives instant chase. Its superior strength and speed usually bring success, and though the poor 'fish-hawk' will not surrender its booty without an effort, but rises in circles higher and higher, yet, encumbered with its burden, it is no match for its assailant, and is at last compelled to drop the fish, which the Erne, with astonishing quickness, manages to seize before it falls into the water, and bears off with a scream of victory and triumph. 'Possibly'—says Montagu—'the Osprey was formerly trained for hawking of fish, as we find by an Act passed in the reign of William and Mary persons were prohibited at a certain

period of the year from taking any salmon, salmon-peal, or salmon-kind, by *hawkes*, racks, gins, etc.' Of all birds none has a wider range than the Osprey, for it is found in nearly all parts of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. From China, Japan, and India in the east; by Palestine, and the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, to the West Indies and America, to the west; from Scandinavia, Russia, and Siberia, in the north; to Egypt, North Africa, and even the Cape of Good Hope, in the south, this cosmopolitan seems equally at home, but selects a suitable season for its visit to each, and never winters in Great Britain, as Professor Newton points out.* America, however, seems to be its stronghold, and there it congregates for breeding in vast numbers, just as rooks do in this country; and of this the American ornithologist, Wilson, gives many interesting particulars. Its general colour is brown above and white below, with a white crown to its head; legs, pale blue. In allusion to the rapidity with which it darts upon fish, it is called by the Italians *Aquila piombino*, or 'Leaden Eagle;' and in Hampshire and Sussex it is known as the 'mullet hawk,' from its partiality for that fish. In Spain it is the *Ayuila pescadora*, or 'Fishing Eagle;' in Portugal *Aguia pesqueira*; in Italy *Aquila pescatrice*; and in Germany, *Flusadler*, 'River Eagle;' in Sweden *Fisk Ljuse*; and in France *Aigle Balbusard*. Our term, 'osprey,' is as if 'osfray,' from *os* and *frangere*, 'bone-breaker,' in allusion to the bird's strength; and for this derivation I have the high authority of Skeat. Notwithstanding the scarcity of large sheets of water in this county, this bird has been often killed in different parts of it, and not unfrequently within the last few years. Mr. Rowland shot a very fine specimen at Ramsbury, near the river Kennet, about A.D. 1855, at a piece of water in the occupation of Sir R. Burdett; and at the adjoining fishery, belonging to Mr. Popham, that gentleman informs me he has also met with and killed it. The Rev. G. Marsh had one in his collection which the keeper obtained in Draycot Park in 1830, and was, when seen, preying on a rabbit (contrary to its usual habits), and was very

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 80.

poor; and another, a very fine one, was killed at Brinkworth, near Malmesbury, in August, 1852. I also learn from Mr. Stratton that two were killed some years ago in the neighbourhood of Warminster; and in the summer of 1856 a fine male specimen, now in the collection of Mr. Rawlence, of Wilton, was caught at Longleat by means of a spring trap set under water and baited with a large trout. On October 16th, 1872, as I learnt from the *Field*, since corroborated by the keeper, a fine Osprey was shot at Fonthill, which measured four feet nine inches across the wings. On October 19th, 1881, two Ospreys were killed at Seend, one of which came into the possession of Mr. Penruddocke, of that place, and was preserved by Mr. Grant, of Devizes. It was a large specimen, and measured across the extended wings four feet eight inches; length, one foot eight inches; weight, three and a half pounds. And on October 14th, 1882, two others were killed at Wilton Park, as I was informed by Mr. Swayne, of that town, who also called my attention to the remarkable coincidence of two Ospreys having been killed in the same park just one hundred years previously, as recorded in the *Salisbury Journal* of October 14th, 1782. And the last whose capture in this county I have to record, was a fine specimen, shot by the keeper at 'The Broad,' Ramsbury, on September 26th, 1883, as Sir F. Burdett kindly informed me, and is preserved at the Manor House.

3. THE GYR-FALCON (*Falco gyrfalco*).

Such was the specific name by which all the magnificent white falcons were known, which occasionally visited Great Britain, until Mr. John Hancock, after comparing more than 150 specimens—some of which may be remembered as a splendid group in the First Great Exhibition of 1851—came to the conviction, which has since been adopted by most of the leading ornithologists of Europe, that there are three distinct species bearing this title, two of which are known to have occurred in Britain, viz., the 'Greenland falcon' (*Falco candicans*), and the 'Iceland falcon' (*Falco islandus*). The former is the whitest of the two, the ground-colour of each

feather being white with dark markings, while in the latter the ground-colour is dark, with light markings thereon; or, in other words, in the Greenland bird, at all ages, the prevailing colour is white, while in the Iclander it is dark, as has been admirably set forth by Professor Newton.* Very nearly approaching to the eagles in size, and by far the most rare, as well as the strongest and most valuable of the falcons trained for the chase, are these White Falcons, whether Greenland, Iceland, or Scandinavian, which is the third species, in reality the true Gyr-Falcon, but which is not known to have visited England. The prevailing colour of all of them is white, more or less spotted with brown; but each year diminishes the dark spots, so that in very old specimens the bird assumes a plumage of almost perfect whiteness, from which constant variations in colour have arisen the many conflicting opinions as to the identity of the several species. They are natives of the most northern latitudes, and, though nowhere numerous, have, from their excessive value, often tempted falconers to their capture on the inhospitable shores of Greenland, Iceland, Lapland, and Norway. Indeed, so highly were they prized in bygone days, that the King of Denmark reserved for his own use all that were found in his dominions, and sent his falconer annually to Iceland to obtain a fresh supply; and so rigid was this game law, that the penalty of death was the result of an infringement of it, by destroying one of the royal birds. In this country, and in more modern times, no less than £1,000 have been given for a well-trained *cast* (or couple) of these falcons, which were used for flying at the larger kinds of game—herons, cranes, wild geese, etc. Much doubt has existed as to the origin of the specific appellation 'Gyr;' it is by some said to be derived from the German word *gyer*, a vulture, from a supposed resemblance in this splendid falcon to that ignoble bird, or from its being of a vulture size; but others, apparently with more reason, attribute it to the wide gyrations which this species, above all others, makes before its stoop, which on all hands is allowed to be remarkably grand, rapid, and daring. It is very

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 39.

seldom that the Gyr-Falcon makes its appearance in England, though in Scotland it is not very infrequent; but I place it among the birds that have occurred in Wiltshire without the least hesitation, on the authority of Mr. Benjamin Hayward, of Easterton, than whom no one in the county has devoted more attention to, or has had greater experience of, the whole family *Falconidæ*, as an out-door observer and accurate naturalist. From him I learnt that he saw this fine, and, when once known, unmistakable species in the neighbourhood of Cliffe Hall, at a place called Ramscliffe, on the 9th December, 1842; but at the time, having never seen or heard of the Gyr-Falcon, he mistook it for an albino variety of the Peregrine, and marvelled at its beauty and size. Farther inquiry, however, proved to him beyond a doubt that it was a genuine Icelfander. In France it is *Faucon Gerfaut de Norwége*; in Germany *Islandische Falke*; in Italy *Sparviere bianco di Moscovia*; but in Norway *Jagt-Falk*, 'Hunting Falcon,' and often called *Rip-Falk*, 'Ripa (or Ptarmigan) Falcon,' from its special pursuit of that bird.

4. PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*).

Hitherto I have recorded the occurrence of species, all of which have been only occasional and very rare stragglers in the county; now I come to one which is comparatively abundant, and may be met with quite as much, if not more, in Wiltshire than in any other part of England; our wide open downs being, as I before remarked, so admirably adapted to its habits. From its greater abundance, as well as from its size and strength, the Peregrine has been principally trained for falconry, and, among the few who still pursue that noble sport, this is the species usually kept for the purpose. It is, moreover, a docile, tractable bird, and repays the trainer's care and attention by its remarkable courage, strength, and activity in the chase, and no less peculiar teachableness and obedience to his call. It received the specific name of 'Peregrine' on account of its immense geographical range; its wonderful powers of flight, both as regards speed and endurance, enabling it to traverse vast distances in an extremely short space

of time, and scarcely a country in the world exists in which the Peregrine has not been noticed by naturalists. Colonel Montagu, speaking of this bird, with which he must have become very familiar when residing in Wiltshire, computes its flight to be not less than one hundred, or perhaps one hundred and fifty, miles an hour. He says that the female, when a yearling, was termed a 'Red Falcon,' and the male a 'Red Tiercel;' and, when thoroughly trained and docile, they were called '*Gentil*,' or '*Gentle hawks*.'* When I penned my account of its occurrence in Wiltshire, just thirty years ago, I was enabled to say that in this county we might almost call it abundant. Indeed, so frequently was it seen, that I then deemed it scarcely necessary to particularize localities of its capture or occurrence. At that time I used to see it quite frequently on the Roundway Downs, on the All Cannings Downs, and on the downs between Marlborough and Devizes. Notices, too, were sent me of its occurrence in almost all parts of the county, and Mr. Withers, the able bird-stuffer, of Devizes, had usually one in his hands. Mr. Stratton, of Gore Cross Farm, above Lavington (who is a great lover of falcons, and watches them keenly), assured me that his farm was seldom without one, and that no sooner was one shot or trapped, than another made her appearance in its place; and as a proof of their abundance, I extract the following interesting notes of his success with these birds from a register kept by Mr. B. Hayward :

Jan. 1, 1836.	! Peregrine (a Falcon) caught at Ramscliffe.
March 28, 1842.	Another (a Falcon) caught at ditto.
Dec. 30, 1842.	Another (a Falcon) at Ramscliffe.
Dec. 8, 1849.	Another (a male), weight 1lb. 6ozs.
Nov. 9, 1850.	Another (a male), weight 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ lb.
Jan. 22, 1853.	Another (a Falcon), weight 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.

The above extract proves two interesting facts—the plentifulness of the species in that locality, and the difference in size between the female (called par excellence *the* Falcon), and the male (called the Tiercel, as above described). But now they have become very

* Supplement to Ornithological Dictionary.

much more scarce, at least in North Wilts, as I know by my own experience, and it is now quite a rare thing with me to see a Peregrine on our downs. The Rev. A. P. Morres is more fortunate in the south of the county, for he says that for the last fifteen years or so, not a year has passed without his having noticed it once or twice in that immediate district, and he adds, and doubtless with good reason, that the lofty spire of the cathedral, round which he has seen four Peregrines soaring at one time, offered an irresistible attraction as a secure resting-place, whither it would carry its prey to devour it without fear of intrusion; and where it is stoutly affirmed by some, though denied by others, that it has been known to nest. Lord Pembroke was so good as to inform me that a year or two ago, when the Peregrine Falcons were building on the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, one of his keepers more than once saw them attack the herons; the heron, at least on one of these occasions, dropped on to the ground, and there stood at its full height, with its beak pointing straight upwards, like a large spike, and the falcons, not daring to touch him in that position, swooped down to the ground on one side of him. Probably the heron was pretty close to the ground when so attacked, and was able to get down to the earth before the falcons could stoop; but on no occasion did the keeper see the falcons succeed in killing a heron. His lordship adds that he has been assured by an old servant on the estate, that before his time Peregrine Falcons used to build in the park at Wilton, until they were at length driven away by the ravens.

Though certainly become far more scarce than it was thirty years ago, I should mislead if I were to imply that it is by any means a rare bird in Wiltshire even now. Indeed, with such an array of occurrences as I have now lying before me, and from almost all parts of the county, I cannot call it rare, though it is to be remembered that every appearance of this noble bird makes an impression on the observer which he does not readily forget, and is generally chronicled by somebody. Thus, to take a selection from various districts: The Rev. G. Powell informed me that he had obtained a magnificent specimen on January 21st,

1862, which was killed at Kingston Deverell; Mr. Grant, in January, 1872, reports that a pair had been observed at Avebury and Beckhampton, attracted by large numbers of pigeons which frequented the farms there, and that one was shot by Mr. Wentworth, a fine old female, nineteen inches in length, and measuring three feet six inches across the wings. In the same year, 1872, early in March, one was killed at Collingbourne, as I was informed by the Rev. T. A. Preston. Major Heneage possesses a specimen shot at Compton Bassett, in 1866. Lord Nelson mentions one in his possession killed at Trafalgar. Mr. Morrison's keeper reports several killed at Fonthill. Lord Arundell writes me word that they are not unfrequently seen and have been killed at Wardour. 'The Marlborough College Natural History' Reports speak of it as taken in that district in 1870, 1876, and 1878. Mr. G. Watson Taylor tells me it visits Erlestoke, and the last reference to it in my note-book is of a pair seen by Mr. A. B. Fisher, of Potterne, on the downs at Horton, in December, 1885. But to sum up all, Mr. Grant has furnished me with a list of no less than thirty-five specimens which have been sent to him within the last twenty-four years for preservation, a small portion of which were killed in parishes of North Wilts, at Seend, Poulshot, Avebury, Alton Barnes, Stowell, etc., but by far the largest portion from Salisbury Plain and the villages below it; no less than nine having come from Amesbury, five from Erlestoke, four from Lavington, and others from Shrewton, Chitterne, Tilshead, Erchfont, Netheravon, etc., proving, as I said above, that this species is far more common in South than in North Wilts.

The boldness of the peregrine is so great, that it will wait upon the sportsman, and no sooner has he sprung a covey of birds than down comes the Falcon, despite the shooter and his dogs, singles out a partridge for herself, fells it to the earth with one deadly stroke of the foot, and bears it off in triumph; a manœuvre which she will repeat day after day, and frequently more than once in a day. Mr. Stratton tells me that he has himself witnessed this, and Mr. Selby gives a pleasing account of it in his 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' as does Mr. Knox very fully

in his interesting work on 'Game Birds and Wild Fowl.' I learned from the Rev. G. Marsh that in the south of the county the keepers call the Peregrine by the provincial name of 'Trammel Hawk.' In France it is *Faucon Pèlerin*; in Germany *Wander-Falke*; in Italy *Sparvierè pellegrino*; in Spain *Halcón*; in Portugal *Falcão*; and in Sweden *Pelegrims-Falk*.

5. THE HOBBY (*Falco subbuteo*).

This beautiful little falcon is in every respect like a diminutive Peregrine; and in proportion to its size (which seldom exceeds a foot in length) vies with its congener in strength, speed, activity, and endurance. It is a periodical summer visitant to this country, arriving in April, and departing again in October, and I believe is rarely seen in the northern counties of England; it loves thick plantations and woods, and at the time of incubation usually takes possession of the deserted nest of the Magpie or Crow; its food consists of insects as well as small birds, in taking which it displays great adroitness; it was formerly trained to fly at larks and snipes, the former of which constitute its favourite game in its wild state; hence arose one of its old specific names, *alaudarius*; with less apparent reason, I am told that its provincial name in Wiltshire is the 'Rook Hawk.' Our word 'hobby' appears to be derived from the old French word *hobereau*, from *hober*, 'to move from place to place' (Skeat): not a very satisfactory derivation; as neither is the specific name *subbuteo*, which the B.O.U. Committee interprets to signify 'something like a buzzard.' More appropriate is the German *Baumfalke*, or 'Tree Falcon,' for it is essentially a bird of the forest. In Italy it is *Falco Barletta e ciamato*; in Spain *Alcotan*; in Portugal *Falcão tagarote*; in Sweden *Lark-Falk*, 'Lark Falcon.'

Mr. Harting* says the Hobby may be distinguished from the Merlin or Kestrel when flying, by its narrow pointed wings, and slender form; and adds that it chooses for its prey swallows and martins, as well as larks. It is a late flying bird, and may

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 5, quoting Meyer's 'Illustrations of British Birds.'

be seen on the wing even after dusk on a summer evening. It has been taken in many parts of the county, and I believe it to be somewhat sparingly distributed annually throughout our enclosed districts. I have also received many instances of its nesting and rearing its young in various localities; thus Mr. Hayward has taken two young ones from a deserted crow's nest, in August, 1839; and from the same tree in which the Hobbies had reared their young the previous year; this was in the neighbourhood of Lavington, where he has subsequently seen them almost annually. Mr. H. C. Forward, of Boreham Road, Warminster, thought that the Hobby bred somewhere in his neighbourhood in 1860, as a male, female, and three immature young were shot between his house and Heytesbury. I learn from Lord Nelson that it has been killed at Trafalgar; from Sir H. Meux that a pair were shot at Dauntsey about three years ago; from Mr. Herbert Smith that it has been observed lately at Bowood; from Mr. Gwatkin that it was killed at Tilshead in Feb., 1884, and from Mr. G. Watson Tayler that it visits Erlestoke. Mr. Rawlence has a specimen taken on Lord Bath's property in Wiltshire, while Mr. Stratton says they return regularly every summer to the enclosures in the vale below him; the Rev. G. Marsh used to speak of them as not uncommon in the woods of Wilts, and has repeatedly had the young brought to him both in the neighbourhood of Chippenham, and at Winterslow, near Salisbury, and they have bred in the woods at Christian Malford; moreover, I am aware of two separate localities to which these birds now return annually to breed, though, for obvious reasons, I think it better not to describe them too minutely. Of later years the Rev. A. P. Morres is able to say that in the immediate neighbourhood of Salisbury it is not uncommon; nay, he might well call it a frequent visitor; he generally notices it in his own parish of Britford more than once during the summer; while Mr. Tyndall Powell, of Hurdcott House, a keen observer of birds, has remarked on the regular appearance of several Hobbies in the months of September and October, as they waited on some dense flocks of sand martins, which congregate at that period from all

parts to roost in the withy-beds, prior to their autumnal migration. In North Wilts Mr. Grant records one shot at Bromham, in 1871; and the Rev. E. H. M. Sladen another killed at Alton Barnes, about 1870; while Mr. Grant's list comprises seventeen specimens which have come into his hands in the flesh within the last twenty-four years; and it is instructive to find that the localities in which they were taken are very much the same as those where their larger congeners, the Peregrines, most abounded. Thus five came from Amesbury, three from Everley, and single specimens from Woodborough, Netheravon, Enford, Pewsey, Erlestoke, Potterne, Roundway, Seend, and Poulshot, whence a nest containing three well-fledged young birds was sent to the Zoological Society, London, on June 25th, 1866.

6. RED-FOOTED FALCON (*Falco rufipes*).

Very similar to the last species both in appearance and habits is the Red-footed or Red-legged Falcon, or Orange-legged Hobby, as it is variously called; the principal distinguishing characteristics being the red colour of the legs and feet (as its specific name implies), and this distinction exists in both sexes and at all ages, though, in almost all other respects, the male and the female, the young and the adult differ widely from one another; like its congener described above, it prefers wooded and enclosed districts, and feeds on beetles and other insects as well as small birds, and has the same length of wing, and consequent rapidity and endurance of flight; it is, however, extremely rare in this country, its native haunts being the steppes of Russia, and the eastern portions of the Austrian dominions. Like its congener the Hobby, it may be seen on the wing until late in the evening, whence it is generally known by Continental Ornithologists under the name of *vespertinus*, and in Malta as *spagnolett ekhad* or 'vespertine.' It will frequently alight on the ground, and will run with great ease and celerity; and in Southern and Eastern Europe, where it abounds, it may sometimes be seen in large flocks. Those who are familiar with it in its own home describe it as emerging towards evening from the shady forest which it loves, skimming like a swallow

over the plain and over the waters, and catching locusts, dragonflies, and other insects, which it sometimes transfers to the mouth with the foot, while on the wing.

Scarcely twenty instances are recorded of its appearance in Britain, but of these, one is described in the *Zoologist* for 1843 as having occurred at Littlecote Park, near Hungerford, in 1825; it was seen by a countryman to be pursued and struck down by a raven, when he went up to it and caught it on the ground before it recovered; and, according to his account, it laid an egg after its fall, which was broken. The peculiar markings of the hawk struck the author of the communication, who bought the bird of the countryman, and not being able to identify it with any of the English hawks which he knew, he made a drawing of it, sufficiently accurate to recognise it by: it was fortunate he did so, for the bird, which was very wild and untameable, escaped after a few days' captivity, and was probably killed, as it had one wing clipped; subsequently, his memory being aided by the drawing, he recognised it as an Orange-legged Hobby, when he saw that bird at the Zoological Gardens. More satisfactory because more undeniable are the pair now in Mr. Rawlence's collection at Wilton, which were shot in a plantation on the downs at Kingston Deverell, near Warminster. These are the only instances which have come to my knowledge of the occurrence of this very rare Falcon in Wiltshire. In France it is *Faucon a pieds rouges ou Kobez*; in Germany *Rothfussiger Falk*; and in Italy *Falco barletta piombina*.

7. THE MERLIN (*Falco aesalon*).

This beautiful little Falcon, not much bigger than a blackbird, is so bold, so active, and so strong, that it has been known to strike down a partridge at a blow, though twice its own size and weight. It was formerly much esteemed for falconry, and was trained to fly at woodcocks, snipes, and larks. In speaking of the Peregrine, I have shown how that bird would accompany the sportsman to the field and select a victim from the coveys when sprung, neither terrified by man, dog, or gun, as described by Mr. Knox and others.

That same able writer gives a similar very interesting account of a Merlin which regularly attended him when he was out snipe shooting in Ireland, in order to get a share of the game. It seemed to have no fear of his gun, but would follow him at a little distance and watch the birds that he fired at; if they were killed by the shot the Merlin never meddled with them, but seemed to consider them the lawful share of the sportsman; if, however, any bird was wounded and partially disabled, it instantly pursued and caught it, and carried it off. At first there was but one, but subsequently a second—a female—joined it, and they regularly made their appearance as long as the sportsman continued in the neighbourhood. Sometimes, at the very commencement of the day's sport, the merlins might not be there, but the first report of the gun was generally sufficient to summon one or both of them to the scene of action, and a wounded snipe, however slightly touched by the shot, had no chance of escape from their united efforts. First, one would rise above it in a succession of circular gyrations (for he was unable to ascend in such a direct line as the snipe), then he would make a swoop, and if he missed, his companion, who in the meantime had been working upwards in a similar manner, would next try her luck, and in this manner they would pursue the quarry, until the persecuted bird, unable to ascend higher, or any longer avoid the fatal stroke, was at last clutched by one of the little falcons, when the other would hasten to 'bind to it,' and all three descend together into the bog. After a performance of this sort an hour would occasionally elapse before the return of either of the merlins, sometimes more, sometimes less, but they never seemed willing to give up the sport until at least three snipes had fallen to their own share. The Merlin is often called the 'Stone Falcon,' from its habit of perching on a large stone in the open country, which it frequents; for the same reason it is called in France *Le Rochier* and *Faucon de Roche*, in Germany *Stein Falke*, and in Sweden *Sten-Falk*. Its more correct name in France is *Faucon Emérillon*. Bewick supposed it did not breed here, but Selby, Yarrell, and others prove it does so, at any rate

in the northern and midland counties, where it places its nest on the ground, not on trees or rocks as Temminck says.* Meyer remarks that when on the wing it may be distinguished from the Hobby by the greater length of its tail in proportion to the wings and by its more robust form.

With us it is a winter visitant, arriving in October, and leaving us in the spring. I have on several occasions myself seen it at Yatesbury, where it frequented a splendid old yew tree in the churchyard, and I have notices of its occurrence in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, 1837; Chippenham, 1840; Devizes and Warminster, 1850; while Mr. Stratton told me it was a constant visitor on the Downs at Gore Cross, and that he caught no less than three specimens from one stump on his farm; he told me also that he has been astonished at its amazing boldness and dexterity in pursuit of starlings, chasing them, singling one out, and as certainly bearing it off in triumph. Mr. Rawlence, too, has Wiltshire specimens in his collection. Of more recent date than the above notices, the Rev. A. P. Morres speaks of it as not uncommon in the neighbourhood of Salisbury; and Mr. Tyndall Powell, of Hurdcott, mentioned no less than four specimens as coming under his notice in the winter of 1877; and in a letter recently received from him, he says, speaking of last autumn (1886), that it was an extraordinary year for Merlins in the Broad Chalk Hills, for that he had himself shot two hen birds and one male, and had seen many more; adding, that the hills and ravines of that particular district appeared to him to be a favourite retreat for all kinds of hawks. In North Wilts, Mr. C. A. Sladen recorded one shot at Alton Barnes, December 27, 1871. The Marlborough College 'Reports' notice one caught in the college grounds in September, 1872; one shot near Ramsbury in January, 1875; and another at Marlborough in April, 1881. Mr. Gwatkin records two killed at Tilshead, one of which fell to his own gun in Oct., 1881; the other was taken in Feb., 1884. Mr. G. Watson Taylor says it visits Erlestoke; and to sum up all, Mr. Grant's list comprises one received from Mr. H. E.

* Selby, 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' vol. i., p. 51.

Medlicott, of Potterne, and nine other specimens, all of which were taken in the immediate neighbourhood of Devizes—from Poulshot, Rowde, Bromham, Potterne, Roundway, Seend, and Erchfont—so that we may claim this sprightly little hawk as fairly common in Wiltshire. The word ‘merlin’ is supposed by Skeat to be derived from the French *merle* and the Latin *merula*, ‘a blackbird.’

8. THE KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*).

The most common, the most harmless, and the most persecuted of all the Falconidæ is the elegant Kestrel: it abounds in vast numbers throughout the county, and one can scarcely cross the Downs in any direction without seeing it hovering in the air, with wings rapidly quivering and tail outstretched, and with head invariably turned to the wind—from this habit it has derived the two provincial names of ‘Windhover’ and ‘Stonegall,’ or ‘Standgale.’

Professor Newton* says that in the southern counties of England its numbers receive an increase in autumn, supplied, doubtless, from the north; and there are districts in which it is wholly unknown, or but seldom seen, in winter—so that in Britain it partially migrates, while in many other countries it does so unmistakably. But even the Kestrel, the only familiar hawk remaining to us in any numbers, is very much diminished within my recollection. Where I used to see half a dozen in a morning’s ride on the Downs forty years ago, I scarcely see one now. But if I find these birds more scarce at home, I saw them literally swarming in Egypt, where you meet them at every turn, and where they were once honoured by the ancient Egyptians with divine honours, as the emblem of Horus, Re, or the Sun, and several other gods; their bodies, with those of the sacred Ibis, preserved as mummies, and their figures admirably portrayed in the hieroglyphics and cartouches. I also found it in great abundance in Portugal and in Spain, where Lord Lilford—our best authority for birds of that country—declares he has

* Fourth edition of Yarrell’s ‘British Birds,’ vol. i., p. 80.

seen from 300 to 400 on the wing at the same moment.* In Palestine, again, I have noticed it as extremely common; and there Canon Tristram says it breeds in colonies, ten or twenty pairs occupying the same ruins, and sometimes sharing the recesses of the caves which are tenanted by the Griffon Vultures.† In Sweden the Kestrel is known as *Torn Falk*, or 'Tower Falcon,' so called because, alone of the hawk tribe which breeds in Scandinavia, its habit there is to make its nest in old ruins and towers.‡ For the same reason it is *Turmfalke* in Germany, and *Falco accertello o di torre* in Italy; but in France *Cresserelle*; in Spain *Cernicalo*, and in Portugal *Francelho*, and sometimes *Peneireiro*, 'Hoverer.' It may easily be distinguished from the other members of the family by the prevailing rufous fawn colour, which is common to the plumage of both sexes. It preys almost exclusively on mice, of which it destroys an incredible quantity, dropping upon them suddenly from above, but occasionally varies this diet with coleopterous insects, reptiles, and small birds. Of cockchafers it seems especially fond, and it will eat them while on the wing; seizing one in each foot, and then transferring it to the mouth, in like manner as the Hobby above described, and as the elegant 'Swallow-tailed Kite' (*Nauclerus furcatus*) is reported to do in Guatemala, when it chances to fall in with a swarm of bees;§ but I think it has very rarely been known to molest a young partridge or pheasant, or commit the smallest trespass on game; nevertheless, it is a hawk, and as such is the enemy of the indiscriminating gamekeeper, who can see no difference in the Kestrel and Sparrow-hawk, but looks upon both as his mortal foes, and traps and destroys them accordingly. There can, however, be no question that the Kestrel, far from being injurious, confers the greatest benefit on man, ridding him of thousands of field mice, which are destructive alike to the farm, the garden, the orchard, and the plantation.

The specific name *tinnunculus* is defined by the B.O.U. Committee to signify 'with a shrill sharp voice, or bell-like

* *Ibis* for 1865, p. 175.

† *Ibis* for 1865, p. 259.

‡ Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 263.

§ *Ibis* for 1860, pp. 240—243.

(i.e., monotonous) note.' And Harting says that the name 'kestrel' signifies the *peasant's* (or serving-man's) hawk; *coistrel*, perhaps from the Latin *coterellus*. Shakespeare mentions 'coystril' in *Twelfth Night* [Act I., Scene 3], and 'coystrel' in *Pericles* [Act IV., Scene 6]. In olden time a hawk's nest was protected by laws enacted in the reigns of King John, Edward III., Henry VIII., and Elizabeth; and indeed the kestrel and the barn owl are the greatest destroyers of mice, both the 'long-tail'd field mouse' (*Mus sylvaticus*) and the common 'meadow mouse' (*Arvicola agrestis*).* The Kestrel in this country generally makes use of a crow's nest for breeding purposes; but Mr. F. Stratton reported to me that on one occasion he discovered that it had taken possession of a hen's nest, which was placed in a trough only six feet from the ground, and had deposited five ruddy eggs in this singular nursery. This was in 1877, at Gore Cross Farm, in the parish of Market Lavington.

Like many other species of the true falcons, it prefers adopting the deserted nest of the magpie, or other large bird, to building a nursery for itself. Though some may always be seen, Mr. Waterton (who had a great liking for this hawk, and has defended it most perseveringly in his charming 'Essays on Natural History') expresses his conviction that by far the greater part migrate in autumn to more southern lands; and in this he is fully supported by Mr. Knox, who has bestowed much attention on the point, and, dwelling on the coast of Sussex, has had admirable opportunities for observing the migration of birds.†

This closes the list of the true Falcons, which have always been considered as more 'noble' than the others. We now come to other genera, and we shall see that their habits, as well as their make, differ in many respects from the above.

9. GOSHAWK (*Astur palumbarius*).

I introduce the goshawk as a bird of Wilts on the authority of the Rev. A. P. Morres, who gives good and substantial evidence from the mouth of Captain Dugmore, a gentleman who seems

* 'Sketches of Bird Life,' p. 9.

† 'Birds of Sussex,' pp. 52—64.

specially qualified to pronounce an opinion, that while hawking in the meadows near Salisbury, the tame goshawk on his wrist showed by its manner and cry that a wild bird of the same species was at hand; and having his attention thus aroused, he clearly saw a wild Goshawk flying in a straight course high over his head, and he added that he had no doubt as to the bird's identity, since he was so very familiar with it from constantly hawking with the same species. Moreover, I see no reason why the Goshawk should not occasionally visit us, seeing how common it is in Germany, where I have fallen in with it more than once; and how capable it is of prolonged flight. More satisfactory is my second instance, for my neighbour Major Heneage informs me that a handsome specimen of this species was shot by his eldest son at Compton Bassett in September, 1885. It derives its generic name *astur*—so the B.O.U. Committee informs us—from ἀστὴρ, 'a star,' as if a 'starred or spotted hawk;' and doubtless the specific name *palumbarius* is derived from its supposed penchant for *doves*, and so in Sweden it is called *Duf Hök*, or 'Dove Hawk;' and in Italy *Sparviere da Columbi*; but in France *L'Autour*. Professor Newton tells us that 'gos hawk' means 'goose hawk;' and that, though equal in size to the largest of them, it is inferior in powers to the falcons, but is the best of the short-winged hawks. The generic name *Astur* in Spanish and Portuguese became *Azor* or *Açor*; and when the Azores were first visited, this species of hawk was so abundant there that the islands were named after them, and have retained the name to this day. The Goshawk is a heavy bird and flies low, taking its prey, in a great measure, from the ground. It is of sluggish, indolent habits, unlike its near relative the Sparrow Hawk, and will sit for hours on the branch of a tree waiting for its victim. Nevertheless, it is, as Seebohm says, nothing else than a giant Sparrow Hawk.

10. SPARROW HAWK (*Accipiter nisus*).

The short-winged Hawks (of which this is our commonest species) take their prey in a different manner from the long-winged or true Falcons. Instead of rising above it in circles, and then stooping

with wonderful velocity and force, they pursue them on the wing, as a greyhound would a hare, gliding after them at great speed for a short distance, even dashing after them through woods and thick plantations. But should they fail to come up with their quarry, they are unable to prolong the chase, and so abandon it and await another chance. Of all the short-winged Hawks, none is more bold, active, and destructive, especially in the breeding season, than the Sparrow Hawk. There are many interesting accounts of its wholesale plunder and insatiability in destroying young birds and game at that time, but the most extraordinary that has come under my notice is that published by Mr. Knox, who counted the following victims laid up in store in their nest for the half-fledged young: 'Fifteen young pheasants, four young partridges, five chickens, a bullfinch, two meadow pipits, and two larks, all in a fresh state.' From such well-known voracity and penchant for game, I can scarcely hope that the Sparrow Hawk will be spared by the gamekeeper, though at the same time he deserves our respect and admiration for his bravery and skill: but at any rate let his sins be visited on his own head, and not on the inoffensive insectivorous Kestrel, which is so often made to suffer for the misdemeanours of another. The Sparrow Hawk prefers birds to quadrupeds, and thus we see it furnished with long and slender legs, and toes (especially the middle one) remarkably elongated, and these are admirably adapted for grasping and penetrating the dense plumage of its victim. The female, flying low, and skimming over the ground with great swiftness, often seizes the partridge and the pigeon, with no gentle stroke, while her diminutive partner is content to pick off the sparrow or the finch from the hedge, or even the rickyard, whither his boldness will lead him undismayed. Sometimes the Sparrow Hawk will condescend to devour insects, and Mitchell, in his admirable account of the 'Birds of Lancashire,' recounts how it has been seen to catch crane-flies with the foot, and transfer them at once to the mouth, after the manner of the Hobby and Kestrel mentioned above.

In none of the whole family is the difference in size between

the male and female so conspicuous as in this species, and as the difference in colour is also great, no wonder that they should often be mistaken for distinct species. In this country it is sparingly met with throughout, nowhere very numerous, and nowhere entirely wanting, though the more wooded and enclosed parts are its favourite haunts. But it is not by any means so common with us now as it was thirty years ago. The scientific name *Accipiter* is from *ἀκκυπέτης*, 'swiftly flying'; and *Nisus* was the mythical king of Megara, said to have been changed into a Sparrow Hawk. In France it is *L'Épervier*; in Germany *Die Sperber*; in Italy *Sparviere da Fringuelli*; in Sweden *Sparf-Hök*; in Spain *Gavilan* and *Cernicalo*; and in Portugal *Gavião*.

11. THE KITE (*Falco milvus*).

Though once the terror of the poultry yard, and the admiration of the naturalist, this graceful bird is now, alas! almost (I fear I must say *quite*) extinct in this county, and I much doubt whether many individuals, unless stragglers, are to be found south of the Tweed or east of Wales; and yet but a very few years since they were not uncommon in our homesteads and woods. The Rev. G. Marsh has seen them at Winterslow, and once possessed a tame bird which was taken young in Clarendon Woods. Mr. Hayward, when a boy, saw a nest of them at Lavington. The Rev. G. Powell informed me that on Feb. 3, 1864, a fine male bird was killed at Longleat, and that he had seen it in the flesh; and Rev. A. P. Morres records another shot at Kingston Deverill, and now in the collection of Mr. Rawlence, of Wilton. In the report for 1867 of the Marlborough College Natural History Society, it is stated that a pair built for some years at a certain spot on the farther side of Martinsell. Mr. Stratton tells me that two nests have been taken, to his knowledge, by people now living in his neighbourhood, one at Fiddington Down, the other at West Lavington. At Lydiard Millicent, the seat of Lord Bolingbroke, there was a tree, which very probably still exists, called the 'Kite-tree,' and here Kites bred from time immemorial, and here they were always to be seen in the spring a few years ago.

There is also a wood lying between the villages of Erchfont and Potterne still known as 'Kite-wood,' which doubtless was originally so called because it contained a tree on which the Kites annually made their nest, for the bird was common enough sixty years ago, and most old people can recollect something of the 'forky tailed' Kite or Glead. Personally I have never been so fortunate as to see one wild in England, though I have more than once met with it in Germany; and possess a magnificent specimen which I brought from Hospenthal, on the St. Gothard Pass, in Switzerland, as long ago as 1839. It was very easy to be distinguished from all others of the Falconidæ, by its long and much-forked tail, and by its graceful gliding motion, whence its provincial name 'Glead'; and it delighted to soar in circles, and to sail on almost motionless wing. Though it would occasionally seize a chicken or a duckling (as the henwife knew to her cost) rats, mice, leverets and other small quadrupeds composed its principal prey, and when it did take a bird it was generally one of the gallinaceous order, for the mode of seizing its victim, by pouncing upon it on the ground, differed from that of most of the preceding species. But though so elegant and graceful, the Kite was not remarkable for courage; a hen has been often known to beat off the intruder from her chickens, and, indeed, it was selected as the quarry at which to fly large falcons in olden times, and from the sport it thus often afforded to royalty, are derived the continental names it still bears, *Milvus regalis*, *Milan royal*, in France; *Milano real* in Spain. In Germany it is *Rother Milan*; in Italy *Falco con la coda bifurcata*; in Portugal *Milhafre* and *Milhano*; and in Sweden *Glada*. Though small in bulk and light in weight, the Kite is, in reality, a large bird, exceeding two feet in length, and five from tip to tip of the extended wings.

Howard Saunders, who has had good experience of its breeding habits in Southern Spain, says the nest is always fantastically decorated with dirty rags, bones, bits of old shoes, etc., and though now out of date, unhappily, in England, Shakespeare's warning is still of practical value in Spain, 'Where the kite

builds, look to lesser linen' ['Winter's Tale,' Act iv., Scene 2]. I have the excellent authority of Professor Skeat that 'kite' signifies 'the shooter,' from the Teutonic root *skut*, 'to shoot,' or 'go quickly.'

12. COMMON BUZZARD (*Buteo vulgaris*).

Known in Sweden as *Orm Vräk*, or 'Snake Vrak,' I presume from its partiality for reptiles; not uncommon in the wooded districts of Germany, where I have seen it more than once, perched on the lower branch of a tree, this large handsome species, like that last described, is not now the common bird it once was, and which its specific name implies. At one time it abounded in our woodland districts, but now it is rarely to be met with. The Rev. G. Marsh told of one which was brought to him from Draycot Park, in 1840. Mr. Stratton has occasionally seen the bird as it passed over or rested in his locality, but states that it does not remain there. Mr. Hayward had often observed it on Fiddington Common some years since, but of late years seldom saw it. More recently I have notices of its occurrence in this county from Rev. A. P. Morres, who possesses one killed at Pomeroy, near Bradford, in 1865; another from Mr. Rawlence, killed on the property of Lord Bath in Wiltshire; another from Mr. Ernest Baker, of Mere, of an immature specimen, supposed by him to be a bird of the year, shot at Maiden Bradley, October 14th, 1876, by one of the Duke of Somerset's keepers, who saw it kill a leveret, and set a trap and caught it almost immediately. The Marlborough College Reports speak of several specimens observed in 1865—of one shot at Overton Dell by Mr. Price's keeper, October 22, 1875, and of another seen at Everley in 1878. Lord Arundell informs me that one was shot at Wardour when the tenants were out pigeon-shooting some time since. Lord Nelson reports that he has a specimen which was killed at Trafalgar. Major Heneage has one shot at Compton Bassett in 1844; Mr. G. Watson Taylor tells me that it visits Erlestoke; Mr. W. Stancomb, jun., that it is seen on the downs above Baynton; and finally, Mr. Grant reports specimens which have come to him from Roundway

Down in 1860 and 1861, from Seend in 1866, from Easterton in 1867, and from Hillworth, Devizes, in 1875.

Like all the other species of this genus, it has a slow flight, an indolent, lazy, heavy aspect, and a timid disposition. It preys upon small birds, quadrupeds, and reptiles, which it will strike upon the ground, but which it does not care to pursue, and often it will stand motionless for hours on the bare limb of some decayed tree, watching the accidental arrival of a victim. Its legs and feet are comparatively short and strong, as we generally find to be the case with those genera or species which prey on quadrupeds in preference to birds. In France it is much sought for during winter for the sake of the flesh, which is esteemed delicious in that country; and I was much amused at Marseilles on one occasion when, on passing through the market, I was importuned by an old lady, who presided over a poultry stall, to purchase a bird of this species, whose plumpness she pointed out, and whose excellence for the table she vehemently asserted. But I was not tempted, for the taste of an Englishman differs in some respects from that of the Gaul.

The name *buteo* is interpreted by the B.O.U. Committee to signify 'the crier-out'; and from this is derived the English word 'Buzzard,' and the French *buse*, which has come to be applied in anything but a complimentary sense to a dolt and a fool—I presume on account of the dull, heavy appearance of the bird. *Mause Falk* ('Mouse Falcon') is the very appropriate German name, for the mouse forms the chief staple of food to this most harmless, useful species. In Spain it is *Pella*; and in Portugal *Tartaranhão*.

13. ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD (*Buteo lagopus*).

Though rarer as a species than the last, this has been occasionally met with in various parts of the county. In 1854 two were seen in the neighbourhood of Ogbourn, one of which was killed by Mr. Godwin, of Brimslade. The Rev. G. Marsh possessed one which was taken in the parish of Brinkworth, at Somerford Common, in 1839, and reported it as very rare there; indeed, that was the only

specimen which had come under his notice; but I have notes of another killed near Wroughton; one caught at Overton in 1866; one, as I learn from Mr. Grant, killed at Erlestoke in January, 1882; which measured 4 feet 5 inches in breadth of extended wings, 21 inches in length, and weighed $2\frac{1}{2}$ pounds; and several of these 'feather-legged buzzards,' as the keepers aptly described them, were shot at Fonthill some years since. The Rev. A. P. Morres reports that in December, 1876, five of this species were seen in a large wood at Fonthill, four of which were trapped; and he adds that Mr. Rawlence possesses a specimen in his collection which was killed on the Longleat estate, near Warminster. Mr. Ernest Baker, of Mere, in November, 1876, fell in with it while shooting, and had good opportunities of watching it, though it was too wary to come quite within gunshot. Its heavy flight proclaimed it at once to his practised eye as a Buzzard, and when it afterwards pitched on the downs he was able to examine it at leisure, when its tail, apparently white, and the very light under-parts, caught his attention. It was subsequently seen near the same spot by several persons, one of whom came close upon it while engaged in devouring a rabbit. On January 1st, 1880, one was killed on the estate of Sir T. Fraser Grove, at Ferne, near Salisbury, as recorded in the *Zoologist* for that year, page 143. On January 2nd, 1881, a very fine specimen was obtained on Corton Down, close to Boyton, as I was informed by the Rev. G. Powell; and Mr. Rawlence tells me that in 1882 a pair of these birds hatched out five young ones near Tisbury, all of which he believes were killed, and some of them stuffed and preserved in the neighbourhood; one of which (an adult bird, and a very fine specimen) is in the possession of Mr. J. R. Read, of Berwick Farm. This evidence of the breeding of this species in Wilts is the more valuable, because it is stated by Professor Newton that nearly all the Rough-legged Buzzards which occur in the British Islands are in immature plumage, which in this species, as in so many of the true falcons, differs from that of the adult by the transverse instead of longitudinal markings of the lower parts.*

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 118.

In habits, food, and mode of obtaining it, this species much resembles the preceding, but may easily be distinguished from its congeners by the feathering of its legs down to the toes, whence its specific names, both English and scientific, *lagopus* signifying 'footed like a hare.' The French, too, neatly style it *Buse gantée* and *Buse pattue*, and the Germans *Rauhfüssiger Busard*. In Sweden it is *Fjösbent Vräk*. In the general soft and downy texture of the feathers of this and the preceding species, as compared with the plumage of the true Falcons, and also in the habit common to both of them of seeking their food late in the evening, may be noticed peculiarities indicating an approach to the Owls.

14. AFRICAN BUZZARD (*Buteo desertorum*).

The announcement given in the *Ibis* of a specimen of this splendid Buzzard, till then a stranger to Great Britain, having been killed in this county, enables me to add this bird to our Wiltshire list; and I do so with singular satisfaction, as I became very familiar with it in Egypt, and brought home several fine specimens. It is of much larger size and stronger build than either of our home Buzzards, and bolder and more fearless of man, so that it was easy to approach within gunshot, and any number might have been secured. The unique occurrence of this bird in England is recorded in Gould's 'Introduction to the Birds of Great Britain,' and in the *Ibis* for 1876, page 366, and for 1878, page 118; where it is stated that one of this species in immature plumage was killed at Everley, in Wiltshire, in September, 1864; and this is the first instance recorded of the arrival in the far west of this inhabitant of eastern and southern lands, Africa and India being its true home.

15. HONEY BUZZARD (*Pernis apivorus*).

Very different from all other members of the Falconidæ, both in habits and the prey it seeks, is this elegant bird. Though universally styled the 'Honey' Buzzard, honey forms no portion of its food, and it is not for this that it searches out the nests of bees

and wasps, scratches away the bank in which they are placed, and tears out the comb. The larvæ, or immature young, are the objects of its diligent search, and these it devours with great greediness, picking them out and demolishing them without any regard to the anger or the stings of their owners. The scientific name it bears declares this habit clearly enough, and it would be well were the English specific name exchanged for the 'Gentle' Falcon (as has been suggested), the word 'gentle' signifying the nymphæ of wasps, bees, etc., as the readers of honest old Isaac Walton well know. The present name of 'Honey' Buzzard is apt to mislead. In Sweden it is more correctly called *Bi Vräk* or 'Bee Vräk.' Montagu observed that it used to frequent a lake daily for the purpose of preying on the large dragon flies (*Libellulæ*), which it seized with its talons, and took them from thence with its beak. But though so partial to young bees and wasps, these do not form the entire food of this large bird; indeed, it would be difficult to satisfy a voracious appetite with such delicacies. Rats, mice, frogs, and small birds, all go to fill its capacious craw. However, it makes its appearance in this country only in the summer, when its favourite food is to be found, arriving from warmer countries and migrating in large flocks, of which Lord Lilford was once an eye-witness, when he saw several hundreds of this species crossing the Straits of Gibraltar *en route* from Spain to South Africa, on the return autumnal flight in September, 1856.*

In order to defend its head from the stings of the insects it robs, all the vulnerable parts between the beak and eyes are clothed with close-set, scale-like feathers, and these seem to act as a helmet of mail, proof against the weapons of its innumerable assailants, whose vengeance its wholesale attacks are sure to excite. In addition to this generic character, wherein it differs from all others of the same family, the tarsi are reticulated and the claws only partially curved. These are plain marks of distinction, but in plumage it presents a most extraordinary variety, scarcely two specimens being found to resemble each

* *Ibis* for 1865, p. 177.

other. Mr. Fisher, of Yarmouth, has taken great pains to compare different individuals, and to trace the remarkable change of plumage to which this species is liable; and he shows, with considerable probability of correctness, which the subsequent observations of others have amply corroborated, that the younger the bird the darker its plumage, which every year increases in whiteness from the almost uniform dark clove brown of the immature bird, to the almost perfect whiteness of the adult. When it has the ash gray plumage on the head, it has often been called the 'capped' Buzzard. It is of a gentle, kind, and amiable disposition, and may easily be domesticated, and soon becomes attached to its owner: Mr. Knox (who had a good opportunity of observing it) says it resembles a gigantic Cuckoo, and has a humble subdued look about it, quite sufficient to distinguish it from the more martial members of the family, and that its gait was different also; instead of the hop of the Sparrow Hawk or the leap of the Falcon, and the erect attitude of those birds, its mode of progression was a rapid run, after the fashion of a Lapwing, the head being at the time partially depressed.* This confirms the statement of Willoughby, which has been copied by Buffon and Vieillot, that the Honey Buzzard 'runs very swiftly, like a hen,' as was shown by Mr. Gurney in the *Zoologist* for 1844, page 492. I have several authentic instances, on which I can rely, of the occurrence of this rare bird in Wiltshire; one of these was seen at Roundway Park about A.D. 1847, and was shot by the keeper in the act of destroying a wasps' nest: Mr. Withers, who preserved it, told me that he took about a dozen wasps and larvæ from its stomach. Another, a young one, at about the same date, was killed at West Lavington, at Mr. Beckett's, and came into the possession of Mr. Hayward, at Easterton. Mr. Rawlence has a specimen killed on Lord Bath's property in this county. Another, as Sir T. F. Grove informs me, was trapped by his keeper at Ferne some ten years since, and is now in the hall there. Lord Nelson has a specimen which was killed at Trafalgar. Lord Arundell recol-

* 'Birds of Sussex,' pp. 139-148.

lects one being shot at Wardour many years ago. Sir H. Meux reports one shot in the West Woods near Marlborough in 1855; and Mr. Grant tells me of one shot at Lavington Sands in October, 1882, whose weight was 2 lb., length 21 inches, and breadth of wing 4 feet 1 inch.

The name *Pernis* is interpreted to be a corruption of *Pternis*, from *πέτρα*, 'the heel,' and to signify 'long-heeled.' In Germany it is known as *Wespen Buzard*, 'Wasp-Buzzard,' and in France *Buse bondrée*.

16. MARSH HARRIER (*Circus æruginosus*).

The Harriers differ from the Buzzards in their more slender and elegant form, their longer and more naked legs, and especially in the distinct ruff of close-set feathers which surrounds their face; their flight, though not swift, is light and buoyant, and they are able to continue it for a considerable time. From their habit of sweeping over the surface of the ground, at no great elevation above it, and in this manner hunting for game like dogs, they have derived the generic name 'Harrier.' Professor Skeat, however, says they are so named from 'harrying or destroying small birds;' and it is certainly true that though their prey consists chiefly of small quadrupeds and reptiles, they will occasionally take birds as well. Yarrell adds that a remarkable trait in the whole genus is, that the males, when adult, are all more or less ash gray in colour, while the females retain their original tints of red or brown. The Marsh Harrier is the largest of our three British species, being about 22 inches in length. Bewick, who places it erroneously among the Buzzards, gives it the provincial name of Harpy, as does Latham; and Buffon and Temminck designate it *la Harpage* and *Busard Harpaye*; but the definition of *Harpie* in Boyer's French Dictionary is *une femme criarde*, 'a noisy clamorous brawler;' and as the generic name *Circus* is derived by the B.O.U. Committee from *κρίζω*, 'to laugh,' I conclude this species must have enjoyed the reputation, whether deserved or not, of being somewhat vociferous; and such, I gather from Mr. Seebohm's account of it, it is.

Formerly it was not by any means uncommon in this county. Indeed, Montagu mentions Wiltshire as one of its haunts in his day; but now I seldom hear of its appearance within our borders. Nor has the Rev. A. P. Morres ever met with it near Salisbury, but reports three specimens—all from Wiltshire—in Mr. Rawlence's collection at Wilton, one having been obtained near Salisbury and the other two from Kingston Deverill, near Warminster. In North Wilts a fine example, measuring 3 feet 2 inches across the wings, was shot at Easton, October 25th, 1876, by Mr. Hunter, and was recorded by Mr. Grant, of Devizes; as was another, shot on the plain above Netheravon in August, 1869; one shot by Mr. Sargent, of Enford, in February, 1876; and one killed by Mr. Turner, park-keeper at Erlestoke, in August, 1878.

Its true home lies in the shores and islands of the Mediterranean. In the Ionian Islands and in Greece it is most abundant, as the snipe-shooter knows to his chagrin, for it constantly spoils his sport by disturbing his game. In Spain it is very common, as also in Malta, where it is known as *Bu-ghadam*, or the 'Father of Bones,' in allusion to its great osseous development, a title which it shares with all the other species of this genus known to the Maltese.* But in Egypt it literally swarms; of all the Harriers which frequent that paradise of rapacious birds, this is certainly the most common, and I shot a fine series, and could have obtained any number of specimens with the greatest ease. In Sweden it is called *Rödbrun Kärr-Hök*, or 'Red-brown Marsh Hawk;' in France, 'Busard de Marais;' and in truth it loves marshy districts and moors, from which it derives the English specific name 'Marsh' Harrier, and the provincial one of 'Moor' Buzzard, and here in a tuft of grass or rushes it makes its nest. So in Germany it is *Brandweihe* and *Wasserweihe*; but in Italy *Falco albanella con il collare*; and in Spain *Milano* and *Arpella*. In the fenny districts of England and Wales it was formerly very abundant, but now, even in its favourite haunts, it is becoming scarcer every day, and will

* *Ibis* for 1864, p. 46.

doubtless soon be exterminated, owing to the draining and reclaiming of waste lands, which, however profitable to the agriculturist, is annually destroying many of our most interesting birds.

17. HEN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*).

Far more common than the last, at any rate in this part of England, is the Hen Harrier or Ringtail; for Montagu in this country, and Temminck on the Continent, have both clearly proved, what is now universally acknowledged by ornithologists, that these two titles apply to the same bird, though to the two sexes, which when adult differ very widely both in size and colour. The male, to which alone the title of Hen Harrier was originally given, was so named from its supposed liking for fowls; it was also called the 'Blue Hawk' and 'Dove Hawk,' from its pearl-gray colour; whence also the scientific name *cyaneus*, from *κυανίος*, 'blue.' The female bore the title of Ringtail, from the bars of dark and light brown so conspicuous in her tail. Nilsson, the Swedish naturalist, declared that at a distance the old male might readily be taken for the Common Gull, "for both its flight, size, and colour are pretty similar." It is known in that country by the somewhat clumsy name of *Kärr Hök med Halskrage*, or 'Marsh Hawk with a Ruff;' in Italy as *Falco con il collare*, and in France as *Faucon à collier*, all of which are descriptive enough of the circular disk or collar which encircles the face of the female. But it is also, and more commonly, known in France as *L'oiseau Saint Martin*, though for what reason I cannot discover. Sometimes it has been designated as *La Soubuse*, or 'lesser Buzzard,' and sometimes as *Le Busard grenouillard* and *Falco ranivorus*, from its partiality for frogs. Either this, or *Falco montanus*, as some old authors called it, and the 'Mountain Harrier,' as Seebohm suggests, would be appropriate names, for the title it now bears ('Hen Harrier,') is generally quite misunderstood. In Germany it is *Halbweihe*, or 'Half-Kite; and in Malta *Bū-ghadam abiad*, 'the White Father of Bones,' for the reason given above in speak-

ing of the Marsh Harrier. In habits and haunts this species very much resembles the last, but it oftener leaves the marshes and fens in which it delights for commons and moors, and breeds in the thick furze covers on the open wastes. It is said to be a great destroyer of game, and to beat its hunting-grounds with regularity and at stated intervals, crossing them in various directions, day after day, and at the same hour of the day. It is still to be met with in Wilts, though, like its congener, yearly becoming scarcer. The Rev. G. Marsh had a pair in his collection which were killed in Clarendon Park in 1823, and stated that though not uncommon near Salisbury, he never saw them in the neighbourhood of Chippenham. Mr. Stratton often saw them on the downs above Lavington, and thought it probable they bred every year in the gorse near him, but as the gorse was being taken up, the bird would probably soon be driven away. On the same downs Mr. B. Hayward has in years gone by shot three specimens in one day, at a clump of trees called Ashington Pennings, and another was killed at Market Lavington by Mr. Stagg. Mr. Rawlence has specimens in his collection killed in this county on the property of Lord Bath. Of later years the Rev. A. P. Morres has met with both male and female in his own parish of Britford, and has often observed them on the downs near him, as well as in the neighbourhood of Stonehenge; and has heard of others as seen near Cranbourn Chace. Also a fine specimen, which proved to have been shot, was picked up dead on some fallows near Salisbury. In North Wilts it has, though rarely, been noticed on Roundway Down; and one was shot at Beckhampton by Mr. Wentworth about the year 1871. The Marlborough College Natural History Society's Reports mention one shot in Savernake Forest in 1862, and six said to have been seen together at Clench Common in 1864, one of which was procured. Lord Nelson has a specimen which was killed at Trafalgar. Mr. W. Wyndham shot one at Langford in October, 1857, and Mr. Grant's list comprises in 1862 one from Bratton; in 1865 specimens from Netheravon, Amesbury, and Figcheldean; in 1872 one from Bullford; and in 1882 one from

Everley which measured 19 inches in length and 3 feet 6 inches in breadth across the extended wings.

18. MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus Montagui*).

So called from the worthy ornithologist whose residence in this county we are proud to boast; who did so much for natural history, and who devoted so much attention to the genus we are now considering. In gratitude for his indefatigable researches, and in compliment to his acute discrimination, which unravelled the confusion prevailing among the Harriers, and ranged them under three species, which the diligent investigation of half a century has since proved to be correct, the Ash-coloured Harrier (as he himself named this species, which he first discovered to be distinct from the two others) has been named by all the continental authors '*Circus Montagui*' and '*Le Busard de Montagu*,' and by our own '*Montagu's Harrier*.' It may be distinguished from its congener, the Hen Harrier, with which it had hitherto been confused, and to which it bears a great resemblance, by its comparative lightness, though at the same time greater dimensions, both in length and stretch of wing; by its more distinct ruff of feathers encircling the head, and by its greater elegance and slimness of form. It is also known to the scientific world as *C. cineraceus*, or '*Ash-coloured Falcon*,' being in fact the name which was given it by its discoverer, and in Spain is known as *cenigo*, meaning '*of the colour of ashes*.' In Sweden it is *Mindre Kärr Hök*, or '*Lesser Marsh Hawk*.' In all other respects, as regards its habits, haunts, food, etc., it is quite similar to the last-named species; but of late years it has been proved by several naturalists that it occasionally varies its diet with the eggs of small birds, those of the thrush, skylark, and willow wren having been discovered in its stomach. Several instances have reached me of its recent capture in this county; one (now in the late Mr. Marsh's collection) was killed by Mr. Wightwick's keeper in 1841, at Somerford Common, described as a very wooded district; another was caught in a gin at Wans, about 1855, and (in confirmation of what I have stated above respecting

its occasional food) I learn from Mr. C. Wyndham that it was attracted to the trap by an egg set there for a magpie. Another is reported by the Rev. A. P. Morres as a fine female killed in 1873, close to Salisbury, by the head keeper of Clarendon; and the same gentleman calls attention to the greater prevalence of this species, in comparison with its congeners, in the localities which suit it best—viz. the wide tracts of open, broken ground, covered with heath and gorse, intermingled with marsh, which may be met with in the New Forest. The Rev. G. Powell announced one shot by Mr. G. Lopes' keeper at Greenhill in 1885. Mr. G. Watson Taylor tells me it has visited Erlestoke; and Mr. Tyndall Powell writes me word that a pair of old and two young birds, now preserved at Hurdcott, and other young birds preserved at Sutton Veny, were taken from his rabbit warren above Fifield Bavant, and that they had their nest in the gorse where they were shot and trapped. He also adds that he occasionally sees hawks there which he cannot absolutely recognise, but which he believes to be birds of this species. In proof of its abundance in districts congenial to its habits, I will quote Professor Newton, who states, on the authority of M. Barbier Montault, as given in the *Revue Zoologique* for 1838, that in the department of the Vienne, near Loudun, he has seen it, at the close of the breeding season, not merely by hundreds, but by thousands, the birds collecting towards evening to roost in company; and it may be observed of this species as of the preceding, that it seldom, if ever, perches, but passes the night on the ground among rough herbage or heather. In Mr. Rawlence's excellent collection at Bullbridge House is an interesting case of these birds, comprising a pair of adults and three young, not a week old, two of which are white and the third blue—all procured within the county on property belonging to Lord Bath.

I will now bring this long chapter on the Falcons to a close with one more extract from the register of Mr. Hayward, who has discovered the following interesting facts from personal observation: 'Hawks do not moult their wing and tail feathers

as do other birds—and this is a wise provision of Nature—otherwise, during the season of moulting, they must starve; but now they moult but one feather on each wing at a time, and when a feather drops from one wing, the corresponding feather on the other wing drops out within seven hours. This is, without doubt, for the sake of equilibrium; then, as the new feathers come up and are grown, another pair in like manner falls out, and so with the tail.' Mr. Hayward also observes that 'hawks, in fighting, would score one another's backs with their talons at a swoop, to avoid which catastrophe the one attacked invariably turns over and presents her feet to the assailant.'

CHAPTER III.

STRIGIDÆ—THE OWLS.

IF the *Eagle* enjoyed distinction as the favourite of Jove, and its plume was sought for by the North American Indian, and by the Highland chief in Scotland, as a mark of nobility; or if the *Hawk* was held sacred by the Turks and Egyptians, and had respect shown to it alive or dead, and is still found embalmed in the mummy pits on the borders of the Nile; not a whit behindhand is the *Owl* in honour, consecrated by the most learned nation of old to their tutelary Deity, the Goddess of Wisdom. And, indeed, there is a great deal in the appearance, character, and habits of this bird to warrant such a distinction: there is such a remarkably wise expression in its face, it has such a dignified look, its movements are so deliberate, grave and solemn, that we are ready to agree with the Athenians, and to set down the Owl as the very emblem and personification of learning. And yet again, when we examine the bird, and observe the large facial disk, or ruff of feathers encircling the face, giving it the most grotesque appearance; while peeping forth from this circular fringe and almost buried in it, projects the short strong hooked beak: when we observe the large staring eyes, glaring forth so solemnly from their ruff, and the head so large and apparently so out of proportion, the figure before us is at once so grave and so ludicrous, so dignified and so grotesque, that we are in doubt whether to put it down as a very wise or a very foolish bird. But apart from its appearance, very interesting is the whole family of owls, and well worthy of observation: plunderers though they are, and living by what they can murder,

and that, too, not openly and by day, as the Falconidæ, but skulking along on noiseless wing in the silence and darkness of night; they are clever fellows, too: aye, and noble withal, and much to be respected; then how sagacious they are, and how much they know: to be sure, if you look at one in broad daylight, when the sun dazzles and confounds him, he cuts but a sorry figure; but so would a man, were his powers of vision so keen and so sensitive. But observe him when the shades of evening have fallen on the earth, how cunning, how thoughtful, how active he seems now, yet not restless or hurried in his movements, but deliberate and calm. All day long he will sit in his snug dark retreat, dozing away the hours of dazzling sunshine, to him so insupportable, snoring and dreaming as owls only can do; but no sooner has the sun gone down and twilight begun, than out comes the owl from its lurking-place; gliding along in silence; hunting over the fields; dropping on a mouse, which any vision less keen would fail to discover; bearing it off to its nest; and returning again to its hunting-ground; and thus ridding mankind of a vast number of this most destructive of little four-footed vermin. Now, to enable the owls to effect this in the twilight, and even the dusk of night, they are furnished with several attributes peculiarly adapted to their requirements: thus their powers of sight and hearing are remarkably acute, as I have before observed; and in addition to this, their plumage is so soft and downy, and their wing feathers in particular so pliant, that in striking the air they offer the least possible opposition, and move along noiselessly, with a slow, gentle and uniform motion; in which respect they differ widely from the flight of other birds, the flapping of whose wings may be heard often at a considerable distance.

But though of such signal service to mankind, and though enjoying such a reputation for wisdom, the poor owl is not looked upon with a friendly eye; on the contrary, it is now, and always has been, regarded with superstitious feelings by the inhabitants of this as well as other countries: without doubt its habits of seclusion by day, its spectre-like and noiseless movements by

night, and its solemn appearance are the principal cause of this popular error: then its frequent lurking-place, the church-tower; its haunts, the churchyard and the neighbouring meadows: its ghostly and silent flittings; its wild, unearthly and dismal shriek, coming suddenly on the belated peasant, combine to startle and terrify him into the belief that something ominous has occurred, and lead him to think that the owl bodes no good, and knows more than he ought, and portends calamity: and this idea is greatly strengthened by the strange pleasure which the bird seems to evince in singling out and hooting at the window of the sleepless and fever-racked invalid, a greeting ever dreaded as the unfailing forerunner of death, but which was only a scream of surprise, with which the bird testified its perception of the light burning in the sick man's room, and to which it was attracted from its hunting-fields. Thus the ignorance of man has from time immemorial attributed evil to the owls, and caused them to be regarded with suspicion and superstitious horror, and consequently to be persecuted in every way; and were it not for their habit of keeping close to their hiding-places during the day, and only emerging with the declining light, they would probably soon be exterminated from our island, without any regard to their real harmlessness and the immense benefit they confer on man.

It is very rarely indeed that an owl is seen abroad when the sun is shining, but should one from any cause be driven or tempted from its retreat during the day, it is attacked on all sides, mobbed, persecuted, and pursued by a host of small birds, screaming and chattering and scolding, who, knowing its helplessness at such a time, and seizing the opportunity, rejoice to take the common enemy at a disadvantage, and worry him with great gusto.

Like their diurnal brethren of prey, owls reproduce the indigestible parts of the animals they have swallowed, as fur, feathers, bones, etc., in large pellets or castings, many bushels of which may be seen at the foot of the hollow tree, or the bottom of the ruined ivy-covered tower, which they have selected for their abode. Like the hawks, too, they live in pairs; but rarely

drink ; carry off their prey in their feet, for which their sharp claws are well fitted, and, like the buzzards and harriers, beat their hunting-grounds in regular order, near the surface of the earth. Indeed, if we look back to the family of falcons, we shall see in many respects a gradual approach to the owls in the genera last described, these marks of similarity becoming more and more apparent as we advance. Thus the Buzzards, though essentially belonging to the Falconidæ, possess a heavy form, an indolent appearance, plumage soft in texture, downy and loose, flight easy and buoyant, but not swift, and (as the American Naturalist Wilson says), ‘ they are often seen coursing over the surface of the meadows long after sunset, many times in pairs ;’ in all these points they betoken a decided approach to the owls, which, however, becomes yet more marked in the intervening family of Harriers, for in addition to all the above-named points of resemblance in flight, plumage, and appearance, these birds possess the form of beak, and the peculiar and distinct disk of close-set feathers, surrounding the face, for which the owls are so noted—add to this, that the skeletons of the harriers and the owls show a close affinity, as do their eggs ; and in both the large aperture of the ear is conspicuous. Thus the two families of diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey, the falcons and the owls, approach one another by gradual and almost insensible steps, so smoothly, evenly, and easily does nature pass from one link to another in her great chain, so gentle are the transitions from one genus to another.

The family of owls may be divided into two groups, those which possess horns, and those which have smooth heads : these horns or ears are simply two tufts of feathers on the head, varying in length according to the species, and which can be raised or depressed at the pleasure of the bird, according as it is actuated by sudden fear, rage, or excitement of any kind, or is slumbering in repose. There are seven species which I am able to enumerate as belonging to this county, the first two and the last of which are very rare, and only occasional stragglers, the remaining four being sufficiently common. Of the seven species

which we possess, four are with, the remaining three without, the above mentioned horns or tufts.

19. EAGLE OWL (*Bubo maximus*).

Hibou Grand Duc of the French; *Grosse Ohreule huhu* of the Germans; *Bufo*, and *Corujão* of the Portuguese; *Buho Grande* of the Spaniards; in Orkney known as the 'Stock Owl,' or *Katogle*—a name, doubtless, derived from the Norwegian *Kat-ugla*; in Sweden *Berg Uf*, or 'Mountain Owl.' I learn from the list of the British Ornithological Union Committee that *Bubo* is derived from $\epsilon\beta\omega$, 'to hoot,' and that from the root $\epsilon\omega\eta$, 'a cry;' and that from thence came *Byzantium*, 'the place of owls.' I also learn from Professor Skeat that *owl*, *ule*, *eule*, *ugle*, *ulula*, and the equivalents to these in most European languages come from *ul*, 'to hoot' or 'screech;' while with a prefixed *h* added for emphasis we get 'to howl.' I admit this fine species to our Wiltshire list on the authority of the Rev. A. P. Morres, who instances an authentically recorded and undisputed capture of a fine specimen at Handley Common, on the borders of the county. This bird was taken alive, and kept for some seven or eight years by Mr. Thomas King, of Alvediston, in this county, and about the year 1853 or 1854 passed into the possession of Mr. Hayter, of Woodyates. Whether it had escaped from confinement, or whether it was a genuinely wild visitor to our county, there is no evidence to show; but I am glad to admit it among the birds of Wilts, because of the admiration with which I regard this, the largest of the European owls, and because of its grand and majestic demeanour. It is, indeed, the king of owls, as all who have seen it alive in a wild state will testify; and as it steals along in buoyant and noiseless flight, so big and yet so silent, it alarms the belated countryman as something uncanny and foreboding no good. The first specimen I ever saw was in the hands of a peasant who had just shot it, and from whom I purchased it some forty-five years ago, in the wildest and most terrific of passes, at the entrance of the Via Mala, in the Canton Grisons, in Switzerland. The bird was yet

warm when I received it, and I spent the whole night in preparing the skin with fingers then unpractised, having, with no little difficulty and at the expense of much time, prevailed on an apothecary to sell me some poison for the purpose, but that not without the written authority of some medical official, whose scruples were not readily overcome. This bird had just swallowed a large rat whole, the tail of which yet remained in its gullet; and, doubtless, so heavy a repast would increase its natural sluggishness and indisposition to rise—*ignavus*, 'or idle,' being one of the specific names by which it is known to science—and made it an easier prey to the peasant who shot it. The last time I was in its company, though personally I did not see it, was in scenery of a very opposite kind, on the smiling and sunny Riviera, at Bordighera, in North Italy. We had ascended to the old ruined castle which is perched above the town, and the foremost of our party, who were some few steps in advance, flushed this monarch of owls from the ivy-covered wall, and were not a little startled at the sudden outburst of such a monster.

20. SCOPS OWL (*Scops giu*).

Very rarely indeed does this beautiful little bird make its appearance in England, and then only in the summer is a straggler occasionally seen, which has left the warmth of Italy and the shores of the Mediterranean for our colder climate. Its favourite haunts seem to be the hot countries near the equator, but every summer it is extremely common throughout Italy, and I found no difficulty in procuring a specimen at Genoa. It is a late-flying species, seldom leaving its retreat till after the sun has gone down below the horizon. It derives its scientific name *giu* from the Italian in that form, sometimes spelt *chiu*, and pronounced as the English letter Q, which very accurately expresses its note; and it repeats this plaintive melancholy cry, 'kew! kew!' or 'keeyou!' 'keeyou!' as Lord Lilford heard it in Spain, at intervals of about two seconds throughout the entire night, which becomes very monotonous

and tiresome to the listener. The colour of its plumage is difficult to describe, each feather being mottled, speckled, barred, and spotted, and pencilled with every shade of dark and pale brown and gray; and a remarkably pretty bird it is, and very diminutive, its total length being little more than seven inches. The head is furnished with two little tufts or ears, each tuft containing about seven feathers. Its principal food consists of insects of various kinds, but it will also occasionally prey on mice and other small animals. In Malta, where it abounds during the seasons of its migrations in February and September, it is sold in great numbers in the market, and is considered by the natives as excellent for the table.* The British Ornithological Committee doubt whether to derive the name *Scops* from *σκοπέω*, 'I look carefully,' which refers well enough to its habit of staring; or from *σώπτω*, 'I mock,' in allusion to its perpetual cry repeated all night long, to the dismay of the weary listener. Thirty years ago I had but one instance to record of its occurrence in Wiltshire, and that alas! is now destroyed, having been pulled to pieces by the grandchildren of its owner—it was killed nearly fifty years since in the south of the county, as I learnt from the Rev. G. Marsh. Now, however, I have two more instances, as recorded by Mr. Rawlence: one in that gentleman's own collection, which was killed near Kingston Deverell; and the other shot by Mr. E. Rawlence in the spring of 1873, in Wilton Park, and presented by him to the Earl of Pembroke. It had attracted attention some time previously by its peculiar and reiterated cry. It seems to have been almost frequently met with of late in the New Forest, but it is not at home in this country, and must feel sadly home-sick when it chances to encounter the cold and wet and fogs of 'merrie England.' I may add, that several other instances of its occurrence in various parts of the county have reached me, but on examination the species proves in all these cases to have been mistaken. In France it is known as *Hibou Scops*, or, *Petit Duc*; in Germany, as *Kleine Ohreule*; in Italy, as *Asiolo*; in Spain, as *Corneta*

* *Ibis* for 1864, p. 49.

and *Cu-cu*; in Portugal, as *Mochó pequeno*, 'the little horned one.'

21. LONG-EARED OWL (*Otus vulgaris*).

Conspicuous amongst its congeners from its long tufts or horns, which measure nearly an inch and a half in length, and from which it derives its genuine name *otus*, 'eared,' known in Sweden as *Skogs Uf*, or 'Forest Owl,' and elsewhere in Scandinavia—where it is very common—as *Horn Ugglá* or 'Horned Owl.' In France, *Hibou Moyen Duc*; in Germany, *Mittler Ohreule*; in Italy, *Gufó Minore*; in Spain, *Carabo*; and in Portugal, *Mochó*. This handsome species stands forth as a very type of the family of owls, so complete is the ruff of feathers surrounding the face, so large the orifice of the ear, so buoyant its flight, so thoroughly nocturnal its habits. As in the species last described, nothing can exceed the beautiful pencilled markings of its plumage, the darker shades of brown contrasting with the more delicate tints of the same colour, and the whole blending together and harmonizing with indescribable beauty. It frequents thick plantations during the day, and breeds very early in the spring, in our large woods, preferring the deserted nest of another bird to the trouble of building for itself. The young, if disturbed, are said to throw themselves on their backs, to hiss violently, to snap quickly with their hooked beaks, strike furiously with their sharp claws, and puff out their down like a turkey-cock. Mice and moles constitute their favourite food, but in addition to this, Montagu says that they will take small birds off their roost. The Long-eared Owl is indigenous to Wilts, and though but sparingly distributed throughout the county, breeds here annually. The Rev. G. Marsh possessed one killed at Gritnam Wood, near him, in 1840, and had seen it in the neighbourhood of Salisbury. Mr. Hayward and Mr. Stratton have seen it at Lavington, and Mr. Elgar Sloper, of Devizes, kept one alive, which was taken from the nest at Aldbourne in 1853, where there had also been a nest of these birds the previous year. Mr. T. Kemm, of the Manor House

Avebury, reports a nest with three young birds found by his son on April 10th, in a plantation on Windmill Hill, very close to the borders of my parish. Mr. Grant reports a nest taken at Figheldean, May 2nd, 1862, and I understand that it breeds annually near Marlborough. The Rev. A. P. Morres described it as common near Salisbury, more especially at Longford Park, no less than eleven having, on one occasion, been found congregated in a copse of yew trees, on the property of the Earl of Radnor, during some hard weather in winter. In like manner Mr. Powell, of Hurdcott, informed me that on November 29th, 1879, while shooting at Grovely, the sportsmen disturbed a flight of Long-eared Owls—estimated at no less than twenty birds—which seemed to fly out of every tree. The frost was very severe at the time, the thermometer marking no less than 16° of cold. Lastly I have a specimen in my collection, which I picked up dead beneath a larch tree in my garden, which was in beautiful plumage, and bore no external marks of injury, but was so emaciated that it appeared to have been starved to death. I have other instances of the occurrence of this owl at Erchfont, Hilmarton, Erlestoke, Everley, Stowell, Chitterne, Wilsford, and other places.

22. SHORT-EARED OWL (*Otus brachyotos*).

So far as my experience goes, quite as numerous as the 'Long-eared,' and well known to most sportsmen is this species, which arrives here in October, and leaves us again in spring. Unlike its congener, this owl never enters woods and plantations, and is generally said never to perch on a tree; while it is certain that it prefers the open common, the turnip field, the marsh, and the moor, amongst the long coarse grass of which it makes its nest. Mr. Harting, however, doubts whether it always keeps to the ground, and thinks it not improbable that it roosts in trees at night; and I may say, in corroboration of this view, that in Egypt I once picked up beneath a palm tree, from which it had evidently fallen, the dead body of a Short-eared Owl in perfect plumage,

though but a bag of bones with no flesh on them, so emaciated and starved it seemed. This is a remarkable parallel to a like case of the Long-eared Owl mentioned above. It will hunt readily by day, and this habit, together with the smallness of its head, and its general appearance, have procured it the provincial name of the 'Hawk' Owl; it is also called the 'Woodcock' Owl, from its arrival and departure occurring simultaneously with that bird. It preys chiefly on mice, and has been known to congregate in considerable numbers, when an unusual abundance of that destructive little quadruped has threatened to ravage a district. In like manner it will collect in flocks and follow on the vast armies of lemmings (which at times move in incredible numbers in some districts of Norway, where I once fell in with them on their migration), and prey upon those destructive little quadrupeds; though—from their astonishing numbers, with which the whole mountain side is alive—the havoc the owls make in their ranks must be almost inappreciable. It is a bold, pugnacious bird, and, when wounded, will spring at its assailant with great fierceness, leaving unmistakable evidence of the sharpness of its bill and claws. Its horns consist of but four feathers in each, so very little longer than the rest of the plumage on the head, that after death they are difficult to discover. I believe that it is when in repose, and while undisturbed, that this bird erects its tufts, and when startled or in fear depresses them; but there are conflicting opinions on the point. This species occurs frequently throughout the county, and is so often roused by partridge shooters in turnips, and from the long grass by the side of ditches, that it is needless to particularize localities of its capture. In France it is *Hibou brachyôte*, *Chouette*, and *Grand Chevêche*; in Germany, *Kurzöhrige Ohreule*; in Sweden, *Kort-örad Uf*; and in Spain, *Carabo*.

23. BARN OWL (*Strix flammea*).

We now come to the smooth-headed or hornless owls, unadorned with the feathery tufts which we have noticed as belonging to the foregoing species: first of these, and not

long since the most common of British owls, is the species now under consideration, the 'Barn' or 'White' owl, which rejoices in a great many provincial names, as the 'Church' Owl, the 'Hissing' Owl, the 'Screech' Owl, etc. In Sweden, where it is very rare, it is called *Torn Ugglå*, or 'Tower Owl;' and in Madagascar it is regarded as a bird of evil omen and malign influence, and is known to the natives as *Vorondolo*, or 'Ghost bird.'* At the Cape of Good Hope, where it is common, it is called by the natives *Doodvogel*, 'the Bird of Death,' and it is dreaded and hated by them accordingly. In France, too, it is known as *Chouette Effraye*, or the 'Alarming or Terrifying Owl.' In Germany it is *Kleinerkauz* and *Schleierkauz*, 'Veil Owl;' in Spain, *Lechuza*; in Portugal, *Coruja das Torres*; in Italy, *Alloco Comune é bianco*. The generic name, *Strix* is derived by the B.O.U. Committee from the word $\sigma\pi\zeta\omega$, 'to cry out sharply or shrilly;' the Latin, *strideo*, too, meaning 'to make a harsh sound,' is similarly derived. The specific name, *flammea*, alludes to the flame colour of the upper plumage; for though called *white*, and having a white appearance generally, as it is seen emerging from the church tower or barn, in either of which it loves to dwell, and hunting over the meadows on noiseless wing, yet when seen nearer, its plumage will be found to be more beautifully marked and more delicately pencilled than that of almost any other bird: the under parts are pure white, here and there slightly speckled with faint yellow; but the upper plumage, which is of a remarkable softness in texture, is of a dark buff or light yellow colour, the tips of the feathers, speckled and spotted with black, presenting a very pleasing appearance. The ruff in this species is very distinct, the mouth and gullet very wide, the ears extremely large, the wings very long and broad, and the flight very buoyant. It feeds principally on mice, of which it destroys an extraordinary quantity, and which it seizes and swallows at once, without any attempt to tear them in pieces with its claws; and

* See *Ibis* for 1862, p. 269, for an admirable paper on 'Birds observed in Madagascar,' by my friend, Mr. Edward Newton.

it is quite guiltless of touching poultry or pigeons, notwithstanding the prevailing opinion to the contrary, and the deeply rooted prejudice to the much maligned bird in consequence. It is, probably, still to be found in every village in the county, though its nocturnal habits conduce to screen it from the vulgar gaze: during the day it reposes with closed eyes in the retreat it has selected, but as twilight comes on it issues forth in silence, making no perceptible noise as it strikes the air with its woolly wings, but ever and anon screeching out its note of joy and wild and startling notes, as it has done since the days of Ovid:

‘Est illis strigibus nomen, sed nominis hujus
Causa quod horrendi stridere nocte solent.’

That they screech and scream horribly there can be no question. Gilbert White thought that they did not hoot at all; but further observations have determined that occasionally, though rarely, they do indulge in a howl which would not disgrace the Tawny Owl.* The hard breathing or snoring generally attributed to them seems to belong to the young birds alone, which give audible tokens of their somnolency as you approach their nursery. There is one remarkable habit in the nesting of this species related by Yarrell, Hewitson, and others, and of which the Rev. G. Marsh was on one occasion an eye-witness; viz., that it does not lay its full complement of eggs (usually four) in regular daily succession, but that, after hatching two eggs, it will lay two more, the latter being hatched in due course by the warmth of their elder brethren; while a third laying often ensues, which becomes hatched as the preceding, the same nest thus containing at one time young birds in three separate stages of advance towards maturity; an admirable provision of nature, as Hewitson remarks, whereby the old birds are enabled the more readily to supply the demands of their voracious progeny.

If Ulysses and Æneas are to be accounted especially fortunate in having their wanderings described by such able pens as those of Homer and Virgil, we may in like manner congratulate the ‘Barn’ Owl on having secured for itself the very able champion-

* Harting’s edition of White’s ‘Selborne,’ and his ‘Birds of Middlesex.’

ship of Mr. Waterton, who has laboured most assiduously, and with the power which he could so well wield, to defend this much injured, harmless benefactor of mankind from the persecutions to which it is exposed at the hands of the wanton, the thoughtless, and the ignorant. Mr. Waterton likewise induced this species to take up its abode in a place he had especially provided for its accommodation in a ruined ivy-covered retreat at Walton Hall, and here he delighted to watch its movements; and he declared that he was amply repaid for the pains he had taken to protect and encourage it by the enormous quantity of mice which it destroyed. From him we learn that, when it has young, it will bring a mouse to the nest every twelve or fifteen minutes, and that above a bushel of pellets or castings was cleared out of its retreat within sixteen months of its occupation of it, each pellet containing the skeletons of from four to seven mice; he also discovered, by constant and close attention to its habits, that it will occasionally catch fish by plunging into the water and seizing its slippery victim in its claws. As a boy I possessed one of these owls, which I kept in an aviary for a considerable time, and wishing to see its method of seizing a live bird, I one evening turned two sparrows into its apartment; of these it took no notice whatever, which apparent apathy on the part of my pet I attributed to the brightness of the evening; but great was my astonishment on the following morning to find one sparrow roosting quietly in a corner, and the other—bold as he was and resolved to the letter to take the bull by the horns—snugly domiciled on the top of the owl's head, actually nestling in the soft long feathers there, while the owl, good easy bird, sat on its perch quite unconcerned, though fasting for thirty-six hours. Macgillivray affirms that it is only to be seen in the enclosed and wooded parts of the country, but I can speak from experience that it frequents no less the wilder and bleaker districts, abounding indeed in all places; and taking up its abode indiscriminately in towers, barns, hay-lofts, ruined buildings, ivy-covered and hollow trees.

It has, however, I regret to say, very much diminished in

numbers within the last thirty years, and it is not now the very common bird it used to be in this county. Gilbert White instanced 'a large hollow pollard ash in Wilts, at the bottom of which vast quantities of pellets cast up by the birds were found;' and in my younger days few barns were without it, and great were the benefits it conferred on agriculturists in keeping down the numbers of the destructive field-mouse; but now the useful Barn Owls are shot and trapped by short-sighted, ignorant men, and the mice multiply in consequence. Gilbert White noticed that when owls fly they stretch out their legs behind them as a balance to their large heavy heads.

24. TAWNY OWL (*Syrnium stridula*).

Most plentiful of all the Wiltshire Owls is this species; for while the Barn Owl has greatly diminished in numbers, the Tawny or Brown Owl has certainly increased with us of late years. It is not, perhaps, so readily noticed as its white relation, for it possesses more retired habits, and loves the solitude of thick woods, and seldom leaves its lurking-place till night-fall. Neither is it quite so innocent as the 'Barn Owl,' for it does not always content itself with mice, rats, and moles, but sometimes preys on young rabbits and leverets as well. Moreover, I have known it make great havoc among the young unfledged rooks in my rookery, and great indeed is the commotion when the Tawny Owls make a raid on the nests of their sable neighbours breeding in the same plantation just over their heads. In Sweden it is called *Katt-Ugla*, or 'Cat-Owl'; 'for its head,' says quaint old Pontoppidan, 'is more like a cat's than a bird's.' In France it is *Chouette Hulotte* and *Le Chat-huant*; in Germany, *Nachikaute*; in Italy, *Strigge Maggiore*; in Portugal, *Coruja do Mato*, 'Plantation Owl.' In England it is known as the 'Wood,' the 'Ivy,' and the 'Brown,' as well as the 'Tawny' Owl. It is very clamorous at night, making the woods and meadows re-echo with its loud and melancholy hootings. Gilbert White declares that at such times its throat will swell as big as a hen's egg; and Waterton says that neither in Europe nor America has he ever

heard an owl utter sounds so much resembling the human voice as those which our Tawny Owl sends forth. That observant naturalist adds, 'Were you to pronounce the letter *O* in a loud and very clear tone of voice, and then after a short pause repeat the same letter in a drawling, tremulous accent, you would have a tolerably just idea of the hooting of the Tawny Owl. It will sometimes produce a sharp cry, which sounds not unlike the word "quo-ah"; both male and female utter this cry.' This species occasionally adopts the deserted nest of another bird, but usually lays its eggs in a hollow tree, on the soft bed of its pulverized castings. Hewitson says that, like the Barn Owl, it deposits its eggs at irregular intervals, the first being sat upon as soon as laid: the young of the same nest differ in consequence very much in size. Professor Newton says that 'for a considerable time the young, covered with a grayish-white down, are fed at home. They afterwards perch among the branches of trees near the nests, where the parents long continue to feed them, and until summer is far advanced the call of the owlets, sounding like the word "keewick," may be heard at intervals from the leafy shade.*' This I am in the best position to corroborate; for having kept one of these birds for some time in confinement, together with a Barn Owl and other birds, in an owlery which I constructed in my garden, I opened the door one summer's day and gave them their liberty, some ten or twelve years ago. The Barn Owl soon disappeared, but the Tawny Owl never left the plantation hard by, and, finding a mate, has annually bred in some ivy-covered trees within thirty yards of my house; and every day throughout the spring and summer, and oftentimes in autumn and winter too, I hear and see my favourite owls, old and young, as evening comes on; and so bold and fearless are they when the young birds leave the nest, that when on one occasion I was creeping quietly under the trees for a nearer view, I was startled by one of the old birds coming up noiselessly, and unexpectedly flying at my head and knocking off my hat, to my intense satisfaction; but a feat which they repeated more than once, and even scratching the face of

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 152.

the terrified and unsuspecting and certainly most unoffending postman, whose daily visits to the house were at that time not unattended with fear.

25. THE HAWK OWL (*Surnia funerea*).

In Swedish *Hok Ugglå*; in France *Chouette Caparacoch* or *Epervière*, 'Sparrow-hawk Owl'; in Germany *Sperbereule*, 'Sparrow-hawk Owl,' and *Habichtseule*, 'Hawk Owl.' This remarkable species, generally confined to the more northern parts of Scandinavia and high northern latitudes in America, has but very rarely come to the British Isles as a straggler. Indeed, but half a dozen specimens only are known to have visited us, and of these one was taken in Wiltshire, having been killed during severe weather, some thirty or more years since, by Mr. Long, then residing at Amesbury, and it was given by him to Mr. Rawlence, of Wilton, in whose collection it may now be seen. The Rev. A. P. Morres records that it was exhibited at the Zoological Society of London on April 4th, 1876, as being the only authentic specimen of the European Hawk Owl yet recorded as having been killed in England. As, however, Professor Newton mentions other examples killed respectively in Somersetshire, at Scaa in Unst, near Glasgow, and near Greenock, and as the Scandinavian and American birds are now, I believe, acknowledged to be precisely alike, I see no grounds for supposing that our Wiltshire specimen hailed from any other country than that which sent forth its fellows. Surely the birds which occurred in Unst, at Glasgow, and at Greenock have quite as much or more right to claim a European origin as that which was killed on Salisbury Plain. But whatever its native land, we esteem our Wiltshire bird as a visitor of no slight interest. My old school-friend, the late Mr. John Wolley, —the very prince of modern ornithologists, and whose untimely death naturalists have never ceased to lament—during his residence in Northern Sweden and Lapland for the express purpose of becoming acquainted with the birds of those countries, found this species extremely abundant in Lapland; and he tells us

that in its habit of flying much in the daytime—for it does not seem at all inconvenienced by brilliant sunshine—in its rapid flight, and in general appearance, it might easily be mistaken for a hawk at first sight, but on closer examination the large square head, which is its chief characteristic, and its general demeanour, pronounces it to be unmistakably an owl.* It is of a bold, fearless nature, little alarmed at the presence of man, ready to protect its nest against all intruders, and defending itself when wounded with remarkable courage and fury. The specific name *funerea*—literally ‘belonging to a funeral,’ and so ‘ill-boding’ and ‘dismal’—marks the opinion generally entertained in regard to this bird.

26. LITTLE OWL (*Noctua passerina*).

Rare in England, but very numerous on the Continent, especially in the warmer parts of it, is this diminutive species, scarcely larger than the blackbird. It is essentially nocturnal, being quite incapable of moving by daylight, hence its scientific name *noctua*, the ‘night-bird’; but as evening approaches it becomes extremely active, and shows great dexterity in securing its prey, which consists of mice, beetles, and small birds. Other names by which it has been known to science are *N. nudipes* and *N. psilodactyla*, both of which have reference to the absence of feathers on the feet, which are covered with bristles only. It is but rarely seen in Scandinavia, where it is only known as an occasional visitor under the name of *Sparf Ugglå*, or ‘Sparrow Owl,’ a mere translation of *passerina*. In France it is *Chouette Chevêche*; in Germany, *Kleinerkauz*; in Italy, *Civetta gialla*; in Spain, *Mochuelo*; and in Portugal, *Mocho*. In those latitudes it is reported to hunt by day, but it is obvious that even the most nocturnal of beings, and however impatient of sunlight, *must*, if it wanders so far to the north, find its prey by daylight or starve; for where the sun is above the horizon all night during the short but brilliant

* Fourth edition of Yarrell’s ‘British Birds,’ vol. i., p. 185. See, too, *Zoologist* for 1854, p. 4203; and Newman’s edition of Montagu’s ‘Ornith. Dict.’

summer (and for nearly three months I saw no candle and barely saw twilight in those charming countries) night and day are practically very much alike, and neither birds nor men seem to know when to work and when to sleep. Such, at all events, was the case with travellers, though most of them preferred to turn night into day in their long drives through the country, in order to avoid the torment (which none but those who have experienced it can in the least appreciate) inflicted by the hateful mosquito, more fierce, more venomous, more persevering, and of a larger size, as I believe, in northern Europe, than I have ever experienced it in Spain, or Portugal, or Italy, or other southern lands.

Rennie, in his edition of 'White's Selborne,' says, 'I recollect seeing in Wiltshire the remains of a specimen of the rare Sparrow Owl, *Strix passerina*, nailed up to a barn-door;' but more recently another was killed in the neighbourhood of Chippenham in 1838, and is now in Mr. Marsh's collection at Salisbury. Still more recently (though I have not the exact date) one was killed at Draycot, and came into the collection of Colonel Ward, then living at Castle House, Calne, in whose possession it now is. And quite lately Lord Arundel informs me that he has twice seen a small owl—but whether the 'Little' or 'Tengmalms Owl' he could not determine—in the shrubbery, and once in the thick wood near the house at Wardour, where Mr. Tyndall Powell, while pheasant shooting, also saw it in January of this year (1887), when, disturbed by the beaters, it flew out of some laurel bushes just before him.

This closes the list of the owls found in this county, and with the owls is concluded the account of the first division or *Order*, the Birds of Prey.

CHAPTER IV.

INSESSORES (*Perchers*).

DENTIROSTRES (*Tooth-billed*).

THE second great Order of birds, the 'Perchers,' contains so many species that, in order to avoid confusion (as I have before pointed out), it was found necessary to subdivide it generally into tribes, before descending to investigate the families which compose it; and perhaps we shall be prepared to examine these several families and their component species with the greater assiduity when we consider that it embraces not only those vast flocks of the finch and sparrow tribe which throng our yards in the winter, and those great colonies of the rook and crow tribe which surround our homesteads, but also all the warblers and small birds which fill our gardens, woods, and fields in the summer, whose active forms delight our eye, and whose varied notes charm our ear so continually; in short, so extensive numerically as well as specifically is this order, that I suppose I shall be within bounds when I say that almost all the birds (perhaps not less than ninety-nine out of every hundred) that usually come under our notice in this inland county belong to the Perchers. The first tribe of this Order is that of the 'tooth-billed' or 'notch-billed' (*Dentirostres*), and includes the principal insect-eating families of the Order, foremost of which stand

LANIADÆ (THE BUTCHER BIRDS).

I have before remarked what a connecting link the Butcher birds, or Shrikes, form with the last-mentioned family, the Owls; and, indeed, these may well be termed diminutive birds of prey, or falcons of the insect world, so fierce and savage is their dis-

position, so cruel and bloodthirsty are their habits, though, at the same time, their slender limbs and feet prove them to be true Perchers. They also merit the foremost place in the tribe Dentiostres, from the very marked and distinct tooth near the point of the upper mandible, rendering the beak a very powerful instrument for the destruction of small creatures. But, in truth, they partake both of the habits of the preceding raptorial families, and also of the next family, the Flycatchers: for, on the one hand, in addition to their savage sanguinary disposition, they reproduce castings formed of the elytra and other hard parts of coleoptera. On the other hand, like the Flycatchers, they often sit watching on the bare branch of a tree, or on a post or railing, whence their vision can extend over a considerable range, and whence they can dart after any passing insect or small quadruped or bird. They will often hover, too, in the air above the branch on which they are about to alight; and when sitting watchfully on a bough they will frequently jerk the tail; in both which last-mentioned habits again they much resemble the Flycatchers, to which they are in some measure allied. They prey on mice, small birds, grasshoppers, beetles, and other coleopterous insects;* and these they will impale (as soon as caught) on some thorn or pointed stake, which they thus convert into a temporary larder. For this strange and cruel custom no very satisfactory reason has been given; though some have attributed it to the greater facility it presents for tearing in pieces their prey, and this seems not improbable when we contrast their

* Sir John Bowring mentions among the curiosities of Spanish commercial legislation, 'a decree of the Governor of the Philippines issued only a few years ago, by which it was ordered that no vessel should be allowed to introduce a cargo from China or the East Indies, unless an engagement was entered into by the captain to bring to Manilla five hundred living Shrikes, a species of bird reputed to be most useful in destroying certain insects, which were at that time seriously damaging the crops. The difficulty of catching, caging, and keeping these birds does not seem to have embarrassed the Governor, however it may have puzzled the skippers. It may be unnecessary to add, that not one bird was ever brought to the Philippines, which is scarcely to be wondered at, since all were to be delivered *gratis*.' —*Quarterly Review* for April, 1862, p. 509, note to article on 'The Eastern Archipelago.'

slight limbs and feeble feet with the strong legs and sharp claws of the Hawk tribe, so conducive to this purpose. Others again assert that the insects so placed on the point of a thorn are intended as baits to attract other victims, and this is the opinion entertained generally, perhaps not without reason, by the American naturalists (who have better opportunities of studying their habits); for it is notorious that the shrikes will often kill and impale, apparently from sheer wantonness, destroying many more victims than they can consume, and leaving them transfixed on some thorny bush. They are extremely bold and strong, and will often attack birds as large as themselves. They are also very fierce, and when wounded will bite almost as severely as a hawk. They are the terror of all small birds, for whose nestlings they are ever on the watch, and these will sometimes band together to mob and drive them away, as they do the owl on occasions. The name they bear, 'Laniadæ,' sufficiently describes the habits of the family, *lanius* signifying 'a butcher,' from *lanio*, 'to cut or tear in pieces.' But, notwithstanding their fierce, cruel disposition towards all within compass of their strength in the furred, feathered, and insect world, towards their own young they show a strong affection, remaining with them the whole summer, until they all take their departure together, and becoming very clamorous and excited if any real or fancied danger threatens them. Their voices are also capable of great variation, and they are said to sing melodiously, qualities we should scarcely expect in so fierce a race. Moreover, they have a remarkable power of imitating the notes of smaller birds, by which means it is sometimes conjectured they allure them within reach, to their destruction.

I had the best opportunity of becoming familiar with the Shrike family while creeping day by day in a boat up and down the Nile in Nubia, when the sun shone his fiercest, and the sands of the boundless desert came down on either hand to the very banks of the river. Those banks were often fringed with the thickest of shrubs, and especially the *sont*, or 'thorny acacia,' and the 'camel thorns,' which were literally crowded with the

webs of caterpillars. Here the 'Masked Shrike' (*Lanius personatus*) abounded in great profusion; indeed, it was by far the commonest bird in that part of Nubia, and as long as I remained within the tropics, I must have seen twenty or thirty specimens in every day's walk. But though so numerous, they were most solitary, always alone, for I never saw two in company, nor two upon the same bush.*

27. GREAT GREY SHRIKE (*Lanius excubitor*).

Not very frequently is this, the largest of the British shrikes, seen in England, though I believe it has been noticed in this county quite as often as in any other. Montagu writes of this bird under the name of *L. cinereus*: 'It is rather a rare bird in England. The only two specimens I killed were in Wilts, on Nov. 15th and 22nd.' Yarrell mentions Wiltshire as one of the Western counties where it has been obtained. Stanley, too, speaks of this as one of its favourite districts; but, in addition to these, I have notice of one killed near Devizes, about A.D. 1845, and another at about the same time, shot by the keeper at Erlestoke; one in the Rev. G. Marsh's collection, taken on the road between Cirencester and Malmesbury in 1837; another in Mr. E. Sloper's collection, killed at Seend, Feb. 28th, 1840. Of later years one was shot in the neighbourhood of Calne, on Dec. 22, 1860, fluttering in a thorn bush, and engaged in battle with two wagtails, and came into the collection of Colonel Ward, then living at Castle House, Calne, who communicated its capture. Another, a female, was killed at Mere in 1847; and, within a few fields of the same locality, a male was shot on November 16th, 1880, both of which were brought to Mr. Ernest Baker, in whose possession they now are, and who kindly apprised me of their occurrence. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports mention one shot at Poulton, in that neighbourhood, on Nov. 20th, 1869. Lord Arundell tells me that it has been shot in the park at Wardour Castle. Mr. Grant records specimens from Melksham in 1861, from Marston, near Worton, in 1866, and from Seend

* 'Attractions of the Nile,' vol. ii., p. 221.

in 1875. Mr. James Rawlence informs me that a fine specimen was killed some years since by a friend of his in the parish of Martin, near Salisbury. The Rev. A. P. Morres records another killed at Mere in 1845, one seen at Upton Scudamore in 1875, and one which he secured for his own collection, shot at Bishopstone, near Salisbury, in the Easter week of 1876, on some willow trees that fringe the bank of a little stream running through that parish. Mr. Morres also records, and gives strong evidence in support of the assertion, that on one occasion this species was found breeding at Fisherton, near Salisbury, at the end of May or beginning of June, 1839, and describes the nest as built in the upright forks of a very strong thorn hedge, interwoven with brambles, and as being large and compact, composed of dry grass, moss, and small fibre roots on the outside, and lined with soft downy feathers, intermixed with a little hair; the eggs, four in number, of a pale ash colour, thickly marked at the larger end with spots and stripes, or blotches of a yellowish red colour; and the old birds as very fierce and noisy, flying round their heads and threatening to attack the depredators who were cutting out the nest, and all the while shrieking and screaming in their fury.* If Mr. Morres's informant was not mistaken—and there seems no reason to doubt his circumstantial evidence—we have here a record of the highest interest, inasmuch as this is almost the only instance known of the Great Grey Shrike breeding in England.† It is true that Selby, who, of all our authors on birds, seems to have most frequently studied this species alive in its wild state, says that it always chooses the winter months for its occasional visits to this country, and certainly within the last few years all those whose captures have been recorded have (with one exception to prove the rule) been seen between November and March. Its regular habitat seems to be the south-eastern portions of Europe, Russia, Turkey, etc. Its plumage is ash coloured above, white beneath, and a large and remarkable patch of black on the cheeks makes it unmistakable

* *Wiltshire Magazine*, vol. xviii., pp. 186—188.

† See *Ibis* for 1859, p. 331, for a British specimen of the nest of this bird.

to those who have seen it. It preys on mice and small birds, which it treats in the same manner as its well-known congener does its insect victims, fixing them on sharp thorns, and then pulling them to pieces. Nay, so strongly is this habit implanted in it by nature, that one of these birds kept in confinement would force the heads of small birds, with which it was fed, through the wires of its cage, and thus hang them up to be pulled to pieces and devoured at leisure. This we learn from Pennant, and the habit has been verified by Yarrell, Doubleday, and several others. It always destroys its victims, whether mouse, bird, reptile, or insect, by strangulation, previous to affixing them to a thorn or stake, in the manner described above. An ancient writer, in a treatise on 'Falconrie or Hawkinge,' considering this bird to be an inferior species of hawk, accuses it of alluring its victims to destruction in the following quaint passage: 'Her feeding is upon rattes, squirrells, and lisards, and sometime upon certain birds she doth use to prey, whom she doth entrappe and deceive by flight, for this is her devise. She will stand at perch upon some tree or poste, and there make an exceeding lamentable cry and exclamation, such as birds are wonte to doe, being wronged or in hazarde of mischief, and all to make other fowles believe and thinke she is very much distressed, and stands needfulle of ayde; whereupon the credulous sellie birds do flock together presently at her call and voice, at what time if any happen to approach neare her, she out of hand ceazeth on them, and devoureth them (ungrateful subtile fowle!) in requital of their simplicity and pains. These hawks are of no account with us, but poor simple fellows and peasants sometimes doe make them to the fiste, and being reclaimed after their unskilful manners, doe have them hooded, as falconers doe their other kinds of hawkes, whom they make to greater purposes.' I need hardly add that the writer of the above, in mistaking the shrike for a hawk, at the same time very much overrated its powers and mistook its habits, for it is notorious that so formidable an enemy does it prove to the songsters of the grove that no sooner is its voice heard than every other note is hushed,

and concealment is the only order of the day. In Spain it is known as *Alcaudon real*—‘the royal (or great) tailed one’; in Portugal as *Picanso*; and in France as *Pie-Grièche grise*—‘Grey speckled Magpie.’ In Sweden it is styled *Större Törn Skata*, or ‘Greater Thorn Magpie.’ In other districts of the same country *Var Fogel*, or the ‘Wary Bird;’ and in Germany *Wächter*, or the ‘Watcher,’ as, on the approach of danger, it warns other birds by its sharp cry. Hence, too, it derives its scientific name ‘Excubitor’ (sentinel) from the use to which it is put in Holland and Germany by the Falcon-catchers, who, taking advantage of its quickness in perceiving a hawk at a distance, and its alarm and loud screams thereon, make it a valuable assistant in their calling. I have the authority of Professor Skeat for saying that the name ‘shrike’ or ‘shrieker’ is derived from the shrill cry of all the members of this genus. The provincial name of ‘murdering magpie,’ in vogue in some parts, not inaptly describes its habits.

28. RED-BACKED SHRIKE (*Lanius collurio*).

Very well known to the inhabitants of Wiltshire is this bold and handsome bird, which frequents our woods every summer: it seems to favour only the Southern and Western Counties, and this is one of its most choice localities. Montagu speaks of it as ‘not uncommon in Wilts,’ and Selby as ‘well-known in Wilts;’ but, indeed, I have often noticed it at Yatesbury, as well as in many other parts of the county; and so has the Rev. G. Marsh, who says that, on the downs near Winterslow, he has very often heard it closely imitating the note of the Wheatear, which abounds there, but (he adds) he has never seen it preying on anything but beetles and other insects: this, indeed, seems to be its general diet, and humblebees, grasshoppers, and all kinds of flies are impaled on the bush it selects for the purpose. I fear it is become more scarce than it was: certainly I have not seen it for several years past. So, though I have not kept any accurate record of a species I used to consider common, I may quote some few particulars of its recent occurrence in Wilts. Thus, the Marlborough College Reports mention a nest with eggs

taken in that neighbourhood on May 27, 1872. I learn from Mr. Grant that one was killed at Coate, near Devizes, in 1870, and one at Erchfont in 1877. The Right Hon. E. P. Bouverie, of the Manor House, Market Lavington, writes me word that he used to see it last year (1886) on the road to Devizes. The Rev. E. Goddard generally sees it in summer on the road between Clyffe and Hilmarton, though he never sees it at Clyffe; and Mr. W. Stancomb, jun., sees it at Bayntun. The name *Collurio* is said by the B.O.U. Committee to signify 'hooded.' In Sweden it is known as the *Allmän Törn Skata*, or 'Common Thorn Magpie.' In France it is termed *l'Ecorcheur*, the 'Flayer'; in Germany *Der Würger*, the 'Strangler' or 'Garotter,' and *Der Fleischer*, the 'Butcher,' whence no doubt comes the provincial name in some parts of England, the 'flusher.' In Sussex it is known as the 'cheater' or 'cheeter.' It arrives in May, breeds here, and departs in September for Africa, where Le Vaillant has described it as common in winter. Once, however, Mr. B. Hayward met with one so late as December 4th, which in all probability had met with some accident, and been disabled from migrating with its brethren. The male and female differ greatly in colour; the former is easily distinguished from the Grey Shrike by its smaller size, and the chesnut red of its back and wing coverts: the female and young birds are reddish brown above, grayish white beneath, speckled and barred with brown: it is a strong active bird, and delights in thick woods and hedgerows.

There is a third species of Shrike, 'the Woodchat (*Lanius rutilus*), which very rarely has been taken in Britain, but I believe never as yet in this county, though I possess one in my collection which was killed in the adjoining county of Somerset, within a short distance of Bristol. Though, like the other Shrikes, watchful and wary at other times, it appears to lose all timidity in the breeding-season, and shows remarkable courage in the protection of its young, flying round the head of the intruder and shrieking out its indignation with piercing cries. In Malta, where it is the commonest of its genus, it is known as *Būghiddiem*, or 'the Father of Biters.*' This species is common

* *Ibis* for 1864, p. 59.

every summer in Holland, but, like its congener 'the red-backed,' retreats to Africa for winter quarters. In habits, too, it exactly resembles the preceding, but is easily distinguished from it by the rich chesnut red on the crown of the head and back of the neck.

MUSCICAPIDÆ (THE FLYCATCHERS).

These have also been termed 'Hawks among flies,' for on such alone do they feed, and very interesting it is to watch one of these active, quick-sighted little birds at its almost continual employment of providing itself food; indeed, it would seem that it has need of all its activity to satisfy the wants of itself and its nestlings, so diminutive is its prey, and so many victims are daily needed. Taking its stand on the extreme end of some bough, post, rail, or stone, the Flycatcher awaits the passing insect, which its quick eye can discern at a considerable distance, and then to sally forth after it, snap it up in its beak, and return to its former station, is the work of an instant. The most prominent characteristics of this family are the narrow compressed bill, with sharp tip and strong bristles at the base, and the small size of the feet.

29. SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa grisola*).

Very common indeed, and most regular in its arrival in the middle of May, is this little brown, sober-coloured, quiet bird. We may see it every day during the summer in our orchards, gardens, and fields; it does not arrive till late, for it awaits the time when the insects which compose its food, the whole race of flies and gnats, are in full vigour, and of these it clears off an incredible number. It has been accused of destroying fruit, especially cherries, but, I believe, entirely without foundation, owing to its unfortunate similarity to another little bird, the Greater Pettichaps, whose taste certainly does lie that way. The generic name *Muscicapa* signifies the 'flycatcher,' and the specific *grisola* 'gray bird.' In almost all European languages the name is similarly derived as with us—thus, in France, *Gobe-mouche*; in Germany, *Fliegen-*

fänger; in Sweden, *Flug-snappare*; in Spain and Portugal, *Papa-moscas*, etc.

It is strange that, like the Spotted Eagle (*Aquila navia*), this bird has derived its English specific name from the young bird in immature plumage, when each feather is tipped with a buff-coloured spot, for when it reaches the adult stage every trace of the spotted plumage has disappeared. It is known in different parts of the country as the 'Rafter' or 'Beam Bird,' an appellation it derives from the position so often chosen for its nest, the end of a beam or rafter in an outhouse; it is also called the 'Bee Bird,' from its partiality for that insect, as I have often seen to my vexation, when morning after morning the little marauder would take his stand on a wire-fence near my bee-houses and fly off to seize a luckless bee on its approach laden with honey, immediately returning to his station and repeating the process till his appetite was appeased. And that this is not one of the popular fallacies so common about birds, but that it does occasionally eat bees, which has been disputed by many, has been verified by Mr. B. Hayward, of Easterton, who not only saw one devouring several bees at the mouth of a hive, but afterwards proved it beyond a doubt by dissection. It has no song, and indeed no note whatever, but a feeble chirp very rarely heard at the end of the season. White of Selborne calls it 'the most mute and the most familiar of all our summer birds.'

30. PIED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa atricapilla*).

Very rare in this county, nowhere common, but not very infrequent in the Northern counties, is this handsome bird, often styled, from its plumage, the 'miniature magpie,' which term, indeed, sufficiently describes its black and white dress. In habits, food, nesting, and absence of song it very much resembles its congener. Mr. Hayward speaks of one killed at Lavington about the year 1850. The Rev. G. Marsh possessed one killed at Ford, near Chippenham, in 1837, but stated that he had never seen it alive. Mr. Withers, of Devizes, killed one near that town about A.D. 1843. Another was shot at Pertwood, near Mere, in May, 1872, and

came into the possession of Mr. Ernest Baker, as notified to me at the time by his brother, Mr. Thomas Baker, of Mere Down Farm. A fine cock bird was seen by the Rev. A. P. Morres, in his garden at Britford Vicarage, on May 1, 1879, which he described as so tame he could have knocked it down with a stone. On the same authority I learn that one was killed at Wilton—possibly the same bird—at or about the same date; that others have been obtained near Warminster, one or two or more every year, as the excellent bird preserver of that town, Mr. King, assured him; a pair near Salisbury, in 1860, by Mr. Norwood, of Fisherton; and one was seen by Mr. J. A. T. Powell, of Hurdcott House, in the spring of 1877. This species has also been trapped on several occasions by a birdcatcher on the downs of Martin, near Salisbury; and Colonel Ward has seen it on his lawn at Bannerdown, July 3, 1879. Mr. Algernon Neeld tells me he has seen it at Castle Combe; and Mr. Grant that one was shot on the downs above Erlestoke, on April 15, 1872. This is a goodly list of occurrences in our county for so rare a species. Perhaps it is becoming more common in these southern regions, passing on from the Lake districts of Cumberland and Westmoreland, which appear to be its summer stronghold in Great Britain; or perhaps its apparently greater prevalence here may be only the result of more widespread observation. For myself, I have never seen it wild in England. The literal meaning of *Atricapilla* is 'black-haired;' here, doubtless, it signifies 'black-headed.' On the Continent it is generally known as *Albicollis* ('white-necked'); and from this are derived its general Continental names, as in France, '*Gobe-mouche à Collier*;' and in Germany, '*Fliegenfänger mit dem Halsbände*;' but in Sweden it has the high-sounding title, '*Svart och Hvit Flug-Snappare*,' which in reality is no other than our trivial name 'pied,' or 'black-and-white Fly-catcher.'

MERULIDÆ (THE THRUSHES).

So well-known are many members of this family to the most unobservant, that I need say very little of their general charac-

teristics. Bold, handsome, and active, they are ever presenting themselves to our notice, while the voices of some species are hardly to be surpassed in volume and in sweetness. Their food consists of insects, snails, and worms, and also of fruits and berries, and it is not to be denied that they commit great havoc in the garden as the fruit ripens, though the mischief they then do is more than counterbalanced by the benefit they confer in the destruction of myriads of noxious insects and snails. Most of the species are migratory, if not from the country, yet often from one district to another, and in winter they assemble together in large flocks. Notwithstanding their apparent strength and activity, none of our winter residents seem to suffer more than the thrushes from severe cold; a very few days of snow suffice to render the fieldfares tame, and in a hard winter, first the redwings, and then the song-thrushes, die off in great numbers.

31. DIPPER (*Cinclus aquaticus*).

I rejoice to be able to add this species to my list of Wiltshire birds, and I do so with confidence, on the authority of Mr. Ernest Baker, of Mere, who writes on November 10, 1876, that a good specimen of the Dipper had that day been given to him, which was shot the previous day in the Mere stream, and that it was the only individual of its species which he had ever known as killed in this county. Since then, however, I have had a second notice of its appearance in Wiltshire, from Mr. Lowndes, of Castle Combe, whose agent, Mr. Watkins, saw it on the stream in the valley on that beautiful estate. It derives its name, *Cinclus*, 'tail-mover,' from the Greek κέλλω, 'to wag the tail.' Here it is the 'Dipper,' or 'Water Ouzel,' or 'Water Colley;' in Portugal it is *Melro Peixeiro*, 'Fishmonger Thrush;' and sometimes *Melro do Rio*, 'River Thrush;' in Spain, *Tordo de Agua*, 'Water Thrush;' in Sweden, *Ström Stare*, 'Stream Starling;' and, in France, *Merle d'Eau*. It is an especial favourite of mine, frequenting, as it does, the torrent or other rocky stream as it rushes over the stones in some mountainous district, generally in the midst of magnificent scenery; and in such districts I have become very familiar with it, in some of the upper valleys

of Switzerland and Tyrol, and, above all, in Norway. It is a compact, stout little bird, and as it stands on a boulder, in the midst of a torrent, will flirt its tail up and down, at other times carrying it erect, like that of the wren, which in some other respects it resembles, notably in the large dome-shaped nest it forms, and which is not infrequently placed in some crevice of a rock behind a cascade, in such a position that the water shoots over it, effectually protecting it from molestation. Its flight is quick and straightforward, much resembling that of the Kingfisher. As to the vexed question whether or no it has the power, denied to other birds, of deliberately walking off the stone on which it is perched into the water, and there running about and feeding as if on dry ground, searching for and picking out any small insects it can dislodge, as St. John and several other excellent naturalists assert, and others, with Montagu and Yarrell, as strenuously deny, I will not enter upon it here. I can only say that I never saw it practise any such feat, though I have watched it for hours on many occasions. It has also been the subject of much controversy as to whether it devours the eggs of the salmon and other fish spawn; and as it is not the habit of keepers and others to give the feathered race the benefit of a doubt till the accusation is proved, or to hold them innocent till they are proved guilty, the poor Dipper has been unrelentingly persecuted in consequence; but I believe the charge is wholly without foundation.

32. MISSEL THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*).

This is the largest of the whole family, and very handsome withal. It derives its name from its excessive partiality to the berries of the mistletoe. In winter these birds will congregate in large flocks of forty or more, when they are often mistaken for fieldfares. It is one of the earliest breeders, placing its nest in the fork of some tree, often in the most conspicuous position, and at this season it is as distinguished for its courage as at other times it is for its shy, retired habits. If any other bird approaches its nest, it vociferates in the loudest and harshest screams. Its song,

too, is very powerful, and it is the earliest as well as the largest of our British songsters, its notes being often heard above the gale in the month of February, amid the blasts of winter. It is common everywhere. In the south of the county, as in many other parts of England, it is called the 'Storm Cock,' from its habit of singing during the prevalence of a gale of wind and rain. The Rev. G. Marsh used to tell me that in his locality it was called the 'Screech Thrush,' while in Devonshire and Cornwall it is known as the 'Holm Screech,' or 'Holly Screech,' *holm* being the provincial name in those counties for the holly tree, whose berries form its favourite food; and each bird takes possession of his tree, keeping constant to it as long as there is fruit on it, and driving away all other birds with the utmost fury.* In Sweden it is known as *Dubbel Trast*, or 'Double Thrush;' and in Malta as *Malwitzan*, or 'Large Thrush;' but the Welsh call it *Pen y llwyn*, the 'Head' (or 'Master') 'of the Coppice.† In France it is *Merle Draine*; in Germany, *Mistel Drossel*; in Italy it is simply *Tordo Maggiore*; in Spain, *Charla*, 'the Chatterer;' in Portuguese, *Tordeia* and *Tordoveia*. The specific name, *Viscivorus*, from *viscum*, 'mistletoe,' and *voro*, 'I devour,' is simply a translation of Aristotle's name bestowed on this species, ἰζοκόρος. For the greater part of the year it is a lonely bird, and may often be seen amidst the clumps of trees in the open spaces of a park.

33. FIELDFARE (*Turdus pilaris*).

Very well known and very generally dispersed throughout the country is this regular periodical migrant to our shores, arriving from the north late in the autumn, and leaving us in the spring. We may see them in flocks in our meadows or on the tops of the leafless elms, and many a day's sport and much disappointment too do these wary birds afford to the schoolboy gunner. They retire to breed in Norway and Sweden, where I have found their nests in small colonies of eight or nine. Mr. Hewitson mentions a colony of two hundred nests, but I never saw any such number.

* Montagu's 'Supplement;' Rodd's 'Birds of Cornwall,' p. xxxvi.

† Harting's edition of White's 'Selborne,' p. 210.

Like the Missel Thrush, they are very bold and pugnacious in breeding-time, screaming, chattering, and darting within a few inches of my hat as I climbed to their nests; at other times they are remarkably shy. They are the last to arrive of all our winter visitants, seldom making their appearance till near the end of November, and they are the last to leave us in the spring. They come next to the Missel Thrushes in size, and are very distinguishable by the dove-coloured patch on the head and tail, and the bright spotted yellow on the throat and breast.

In one respect they differ from all their congeners, in that on winter evenings they assemble from great distances, arriving in flocks just before dusk at some favourite spot, and there *roost on the ground*, after the manner of larks, generally among heath and coarse grass and tall rushes, or even on stubbles. This is the more remarkable as they sit on trees during the day, and procure the greater part of their food from the hedges and bushes, and invariably build on trees, though generally not far from the ground.* The meaning of the specific word *pilaris* I cannot fathom, nor does the Committee of the B.O.U. help me. There is, indeed, a Latin word *pilaris*, 'of or belonging to a ball,' but I see no connection between that and this handsome thrush. Of the meaning of 'fieldfare,' 'a traverser of the fields or fallows,' there is no question. The word 'to fare,' meaning 'to travel,' is obsolete now, but we see traces of it, not only in 'fieldfare,' but in 'farewell,' *i.e.*, 'speed you well'; and the coach or railway *fare*, *i.e.*, 'the price of a ticket for travelling.' In Germany it is known as *Wachholder Drossel*, 'Watchman Thrush,' from the constant look-out it keeps against surprise; in France *Merle litorne*, and in Sweden *Björk Trast*, 'Birch Thrush,' but is more popularly known as *Snö Skata*, 'Snow Magpie,' the former part of the designation derived from the belief that when it appears in large numbers, hard, snowy weather is pending; the latter from its unusual length of tail, and the magpie-like chattering it constantly keeps up, particularly in the vicinity of its nest. For

* 'Birds of the Humber,' by Cordeaux, p. 21; *Zoologist* for 1885, p. 335; Harting's edition of White's 'Selborne,' p. 92.

the same reason, doubtless, it is called in Italy *Tordella Gazzina*, a magpie in Italy being known as *Gazza*. In Portugal it is *Tordo zornal*.

34. SONG THRUSH (*Turdus musicus*).

Generally distributed and permanently resident in all parts of the country, this favourite songster is well known to all. Few birds have sweeter notes, or indulge us with them oftener, and no nest is better known to the schoolboy than the clay-lined dwelling and spotted blue eggs of the Song Thrush. We may see these birds throughout the year on our lawns and in our gardens; but, if we take notice, we shall observe that periodically their numbers are sensibly increased by the arrival of many which have migrated either to other countries or to other districts; and at other times the thrushes seem to have almost deserted us. Indeed, Professor Newton goes so far as to say that in some parts of the island not a single bird can be seen from the end of November to the end of January.* Perhaps none of our songsters continues to pour forth its melodious notes so perseveringly as this species. From early spring to late autumn, with but little intervals of rest, from very early morning, long before daylight, even in the short summer night, and before any other warbler is awake, the mellifluous voice of the thrush may be heard in the coppice. So much is its superiority of song recognised in every country which it frequents—and this cosmopolitan bird ranges throughout northern as well as southern Europe—that the name by which it is generally known alludes to its vocal powers. Thus in France it is *La Grive*; in Portugal, *Tordo*, 'the Thrush'; and in Malta, *Malvitz*,† as if pre-eminently 'the Thrush.' In Germany it is, as with us, *Sing Drossel*; and in Scandinavia *Sång-Trast*, 'Song Thrush,' *Tal-Trast*, or 'Speaking Thrush,' *Nordisk Näktergal*, or 'Northern Nightingale,' and also *Natt Vaka*, or 'Night Watcher,' from its habit of singing all night in the lone and

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 266. See also an article by the same able author on 'The Migratory Habits of the Song Thrush,' in the *Ibis* for 1860, pp. 83—85.

† *Ibis* for 1864, p. 63.

desolate forests during the calm and light nights of the far north.* Notwithstanding this, our Song Thrushes are unmercifully persecuted by the gardener, being insatiable devourers of fruit, and they so provoke his malice that in his rage and thirst for revenge he overlooks the benefit they have conferred upon him all the rest of the year by the destruction of thousands of worms and insects. Moreover, the songs with which they enliven our shrubberies and gardens from early spring to the end of the summer, and such songs too, ought to plead something in their favour. They are great adepts at cracking snail-shells against a stone, to enable them to get at the contents, which they appear to relish above all things, and they return to the same stone which they have found to answer their purpose, so that broken shells scattered all around mark where they have been dining; and here, methinks, they unmistakably prove themselves the gardener's friend in a way which cannot be disputed. But all these benefits are forgotten when the fruit is ripe, and they crave a share as their just portion. The old English name 'Throstle' is doubtless from the German *Drossel*, and perhaps *Mavis*, by which it was also known of old, from the Spanish *Malvis*; or perhaps both derived from some older and forgotten word.

35. REDWING (*Turdus iliacus*).

Like its congener and companion the fieldfare, this bird visits us in the autumn, when the snows of its native country in the north render its home untenable and force it southwards. It arrives a few weeks before the fieldfares, but afterwards associates with those birds in flocks, when its smaller size and the conspicuous red of the under wing-coverts cause it to be easily distinguished. Though seldom heard in this country, it has a most melodious note, which is so highly prized in the north as to have procured for this bird the title of the 'Swedish Nightingale,' a title since usurped by the famous Jenny Lind. This fact of the surpassing powers of song of the redwing may probably be unknown to many, and seeing it only

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 288.

in the silent months of winter, and hearing then nothing but an occasional and rather discordant chattering, few have any notion of the loud and clear and exquisitely sweet note with which it enlivens the thickets and copses of Norway in a summer night, if, indeed, that can be called night where the sun merely approaches the horizon and ascends again, or at the most sets and rises within the hour; and where, during a three months' tour, I never saw a candle, but could see to read and write in the darkest of log-huts at any hour of the night. This, indeed, was the time and place to appreciate the song of the redwing; when we drove through the sombre forests in the night, as we frequently did to escape the excessive heat of the sun, which, scarcely ever being out of sight during the summer, does not suffer the air to get thoroughly cooled during the night, and strikes down almost as hot as I have felt it in Rome in May, or Naples in June, to the great advantage of the crops, but to the scorching of the mid-day traveller. Passing on in single file, each in his carriage, through the interminable forests, one of which we traversed for no less than 100 miles, while on the Swedish side it stretched out 50 miles on our left, with but one road for wheels throughout its length and breadth; scarcely meeting a human being in those vast solitudes, save only at the few posthouses, at long intervening distances; imagine all this, and it may be understood how full of enjoyment we found it to listen to the delicious notes of the redwing, poured forth in the wildest yet most harmonious strains from the tops of some of the highest trees around us. Indeed, the absence of the redwing would be a serious blank in Norway, and very sensibly felt by the inhabitants, who, being a remarkably primitive and simple people, unsophisticated and kind-hearted, never wantonly illtreat their birds or animals, but cherish and protect them, and are rewarded by the most unbounded confidence in return; birds which are wildest and shyest with us building close to the houses of the Norwegians, and not caring to move out of the way as you drive by. But if this long digression on the home of the redwing appears irrelevant to my subject on Wiltshire birds, I submit that the cause of its

introduction is the hope of inducing those who have thoughtlessly persecuted those poor birds, when they are driven by inexorable winter to seek shelter and food in our more genial climate, to stay their hand from such ruthless slaughter, and reflect that while it is thought here almost an act of sacrilege to destroy the nightingale and robin, the one so endeared to us by its song, the other by its confidence in man, the Swedish nightingale partakes of both these virtues, and, moreover, is quite harmless and innocent, seeking nothing from man's stores for its support, but frequenting the meadows during the open weather, where it feeds on worms, snails, and larvæ, and, when frost sets in, repairing (not to the rickyard and cornstack, but only) to the hedges, where the berries of the ivy, the hawthorn, and the holly supply its wants ; and, if unusually severe weather occurs, migrating (as is reported by naturalists) still further southwards, even to the shores of the Mediterranean. Montagu reports that vast numbers of these birds resorted to this and the adjacent counties in the hard winter of 1799, when, exhausted by long journeys, they were unable to prolong their travels, and deprived of food by a sudden fall of snow, they perished by thousands from starvation: Gilbert White speaks of their delaying their departure northwards till June, after the dreadful winter of 1739-40, and the cold north-east winds which continued to blow through April and May. Colonel Hawker, in his admirable 'Instructions to Young Sportsmen,' printed in 1838, and therefore now out of date, when everything relating to shooting has been changed, but yet for all that still a book of practical information and sound advice, says,* that when Redwings appear on the East Coast they as commonly announce the approach of the Woodcock, as does the arrival of the Wryneck that of the Cuckoo in the south. It is the smallest of the Scandinavian Thrushes, and it does not breed in colonies like the Fieldfare, nor is it so shy of the presence of man as that most wary bird. Mr. Cecil Smith says† it is known in Somersetshire as the 'Wind Thrush,' and declares it is hardier than the Fieldfare, because,

* Page 248.

† 'Birds of Somerset,' p. 64.

unlike that bird, it subsists in great measure on snails. Now snails must certainly be a nutritious diet; so at least an old parishioner of mine at Yatesbury, now deceased, used to declare, and, acting on that opinion, at some special season of the year, hunted in the banks near his cottage for the common garden snail, and prepared them for his dinner by frying them in the shovel! Notwithstanding its snail diet, however, I am so far from thinking that the Redwing is hardier than the Fieldfare that I believe it to be the first of all its congeners to succumb under prolonged frost: though it seems strange that both these species, bred in the far north of Europe, should be more sensitive to cold than those which are indigenous here. The Song Thrush, however, is almost as delicate, and one of the first to perish in very severe weather. It has often been reported as breeding in England, but every alleged instance has—so far as I know—on investigation proved to be a mistake, founded on confusion of the species.

In Germany it is *Rothdrossel*, 'Red Thrush;' in Portugal *Tordo ruivo*, 'Reddish-brown Thrush,' in distinction to *Tordo branco*, 'White Thrush,' as *the Thrush*, *Tordo*, is sometimes called; in Scandinavia *Rödvinge Trast*, 'Red-wing Thrush;' in Spain *Malvis*; and in France *le Mauvis*.

36. BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*).

'The ouzel cock, so black of hue with orange-tawny bill,' as that great observer of nature, Shakespeare, has described it, is so well known that I need say very little about it. In Sweden it is known as *Kol Trast*, or 'Charcoal Thrush,' and in Somersetshire as the 'Colly bird.' The gardeners know, to their cost, its penchant for fruit in the summer, and no devices of theirs will avail to scare it from the gooseberry and raspberry bushes, and the strawberry-beds, as long as any fruit remains; but it changes its residence with the season: as soon as wet weather sets in, the blackbirds may be found in the turnip-fields, where they find slugs and snails in abundance; and in hard weather the hedge-rows and thick bushes are its resort. It is of a shy and restless

disposition, and solitary withal, never seen to congregate with many of its species, and hurries off with a loud scream of alarm, and buries itself in the nearest bush the instant it is discovered: it has a fine full rich voice, with which it often favours us; and it is a matter of great dispute among connoisseurs whether the blackbird or thrush has the finest song, though I think most votes would be in favour of the latter; but yet the former has many stout partisans, and not without reason, for its notes are very melodious; it is also one of the earliest songsters we have. Blackbirds appear to be especially liable to exhibit variations in plumage, specimens continually occurring in pied and mottled garb, sometimes in pure white, though the name of the bird causes such a statement to sound contradictory. And here, perhaps, I may be allowed to make one or two observations on these albino varieties in birds, having examined the subject with great attention, and stated the result in a paper published by the *Zoologist* in 1853. I will not inflict on my readers the arguments by which I arrived at my conclusions, as they would be somewhat out of place here; suffice it to say, that I conceive that physical weakness either in the individuals themselves, or in their parents, one or both of them, is the radical origin of the varieties in colour so often seen; and that the natural and habitual functions of the bird are through debility so disarranged, as to have the effect of withdrawing the pigment or colouring matter from the growing feather, as it springs from the follicle sheath or capsule in which it is enveloped, and where it is nourished by juices in which the pigment is supposed to reside. There may be many exciting causes, such as peculiar food, sudden fear, extreme rage, etc., serving to develop this peculiarity in colour, or it may have existed from the nest, but in all cases I apprehend that constitutional weakness is the real root of the matter; and as bright well-marked plumage undoubtedly betokens good health and strength, so and on the same principles I conceive that an unwonted variety or absence of colour marks physical debility: and therefore I am no admirer of these anomalous specimens, but rather look upon them as miserable deformities and wretched abortions, the

offspring of weak parents, unfitted to rank with their fellows. I may add that I have collected authentic evidence of the existence of such varieties in no less than fifty-seven species of our British birds, in their wild state, and have no doubt that if further investigated it would be seen that such occasional deformities resulting from weakness do sometimes occur in *every* species of bird; though in those wearing the darkest livery (such as the Blackbird and the Rook) and therefore requiring a larger supply of pigment, such varieties will be found to be more frequent.

I have the authority of the B.O.U. Committee for stating that the specific name *Merula* is derived from μέλας, 'black.' Modified from the Latin, we have in French *Merle noir*, and in Spanish, *Mirlo*; and in Portuguese the word itself, *Merula*, but more commonly it is known all over the latter country as *Melro*, by the same strange transposition of letters as that in use amongst our Wiltshire labourers, where they commonly miscall pulpit, *pilput*—bishop, *buship*, etc.

37. RING OUZEL (*Turdus torquatus*).

Here we have another migratory species of Thrush, but unlike its congeners, the fieldfare and redwing, which come to us in the autumn and retire northwards in the spring, the Ring Ouzel comes to us in April, and retires again in October. It is, however, in this county but a bird of passage, passing on to more northern districts in the summer, and returning to more southern climes in the winter. It is easily distinguished from the blackbird by the absence of the bright yellow bill, and by the white collar or broad crescent-shaped ring round the chest, whence its specific names, Latin and English; in other respects, such as general appearance, shape, bulk, habits, food, etc., it resembles that well-known songster: it differs from it, however, in occasionally associating in flocks towards the beginning of autumn, and so migrating in company, but sufficiently resembles it to be called provincially the 'Mountain' and the 'Michaelmas' Black-

bird, alluding to the haunts it loves and the season when it appears on its way south. In Sweden it is known as the *Ring Trast*, or 'Ring Thrush;' and in Malta, as *Malvitz tas-sidra baida*, the 'White-chested Thrush.' In some parts of France it is distinguished as *Merle terrier*, or *Buissonier*, from its lowly placed nest, either on or very near the ground. In Portugal it is *Melro de papo branco*, 'Thrush of white throat.' I have seen it occasionally in Switzerland and the Tyrol, and very frequently in Norway, where in one especial locality, at the foot of the highest peak in that land of mountains, it would come every morning, and perching on the turf roof of an adjacent chalet, sing most melodiously, while its mate was sitting on the nest among some rocks hard by; but the spot it seems of all others to prefer is the copse on the sloping foot of a mountain, shelving down to some quiet tarn. I have never seen it alive in Wiltshire, nor has Mr. Marsh been more fortunate: I have, however, numerous records of its occurrence here. Mr. E. Sloper speaks of it as often seen in flocks of five or six, and of two being killed near Devizes in 1851; another (now in Mr. Marsh's collection) was killed at Compton Bassett by the Rev. A. Austin: it has often been taken in Clarendon Park. The Rev. A. P. Morres has met with it in his own parish of Britford, and on the downs near Salisbury, and also on those near Ebbesbourne; he also possesses a specimen killed at Odstock Copse in the spring of 1866 or 1867, and records another as seen in the garden of The Cliff at East Harnham the previous year: while a bird-trapper in his parish assured Mr. Morres that he not unfrequently trapped them on the downs. Mr. Baker generally saw it on the downs, near Mere, in its vernal and autumnal migrations. Mr. King reports that specimens were brought to him for preservation, nearly every year, from the neighbourhood of Warminster. Mr. Grant has supplied me with a list of thirteen specimens which have been taken in various parts of Wiltshire within the last twenty-five years; previous to which the late Mr. Withers assured me that scarcely a spring or autumn occurred but he saw and generally captured some on the downs near Devizes.

Besides the occurrences enumerated above, I have a very interesting communication from Mr. Isaiah M. Jupe, of Mere, dated May 19, 1858, in which that gentleman says: 'On the 12th of April, 1858, a man of this town (Mere) seeing what he considered a blackbird on its nest, shot it as it flew off, and on account of its ring brought it to me as a curiosity, and I immediately secured its nest and two eggs. The nest was in a thick thorn hedge, close to our Castle Hill; the eggs, in appearance, similar to a blackbird's, but smaller, and not so pointed; the nest also resembles the blackbird's.' Both bird and eggs were preserved. This is the only instance I have of the Ring Ouzel being known to breed in this county, though, from its great resemblance to a blackbird, it may easily be overlooked. Mr. Morres, too, heard rumours of a nest having been found near Bath, but could not obtain sufficient evidence to verify the statement. My friend, Colonel Ward, however, reported to me a Ring Ouzel, or 'blackbird with a necklace,' as one of his family styled it, as frequenting his lawn at Bannerdown, near Bath, July 3, 1879, when it should have been, and perhaps was, engaged in rearing its young brood. In the Marlborough College 'Nat. Hist. Soc. Reports,' there are several notices of the nest being found in Savernake Forest: in 1866, May 4 (p. 25); April 30 (pp. 62, 65, and 66); in 1868, May 4 (p. 94). It is, however, much more common in the wild mountainous and stormy districts of the north than in this county.

38. GOLDEN ORIOLE (*Oriolus galbula*).

This splendid bird, with its bright yellow and black plumage, so conspicuous from the striking contrast of the two colours, is a rare visitant in Britain, but once seen, it can never be mistaken: it is a denizen of warm latitudes, Asia and Africa being its proper habitat, and it is only occasionally that a straggler finds its way to our coasts, and then so attractive is its bright plumage that it cannot escape observation, and has no chance of avoiding capture or death. My first record of its occurrence in this county is of very many years ago, when two males were taken in the neigh-

bourhood of Tidworth. One was observed and killed in a small fir plantation, and carried to the Rev. F. Dyson, who, thinking it probable that the bird was not without its mate, immediately employed a man with a gun to search for and procure the female; the man, however, returned with another male bird, and it was conjectured that the comparative dinginess of colour in the female enabled her in the dark fir plantations to escape detection. The Rev. G. Powell announced to me the capture of a magnificent male in full golden plumage at Tisbury on May 1, 1862. Mr. Ernest Baker was so fortunate as to fall in with a fine male in perfect plumage on the western borders of the county, on May 9, 1870, as he was driving down a lane, and the bird flew on in front, perching from time to time on the top of the hedge, as if to display its brilliant plumage to an appreciative ornithologist: an unwonted piece of good-nature on the part of the bird, as it is generally of a most shy and retiring nature; to which I am in a position to testify, from the many hours I have spent in patiently watching for a view of the songster which I had heard and of which I had caught a passing glimpse, as it buried itself in the deep shelter of a lemon orchard at Mentone. The Rev. A. P. Morres records that in the spring of 1877 a pair was seen on some crab trees at Dinton, and that he was informed by Mr. Wyndham that they had been reported to have bred on Teffont Common, and had certainly been seen there more than once: and that another fine male was shot in an orchard near Mere in 1870, and is now in the possession of Mr. Osborne of Tisbury.

It is an inhabitant of the southern countries of Europe during summer, migrating from Africa about the middle of April, and establishing itself through all the northern coasts of the Mediterranean, and in all these countries it generally derives its name from the full, flute-like musical whistle for which it is famous—*Turiol* in Spanish, *Loriot* in French, and *Oriole* in English, being all supposed to represent the call-note of this remarkably handsome and melodious bird; but everywhere it exhibits the same timid, shy disposition, frequenting secluded groves, and feeding on fruits, berries, and insects.

The scientific name *Oriolus* is from *aureolus* 'golden,' and *galbula* signifies 'yellow.' In Spain it is often known as *Oropendola*, a word which appears to refer in the first syllables to its golden colour, and in the last to the pendulous nest which it forms beneath the branch of a tree.

CHAPTER V.

DETIROSTRES (Took-bills), and

SEVADAE (THE WAXBILLS).

The waxbills are a family of birds of warm and spring and summer months in the high or warm countries up below the tropics. They are found in the southern and the northern parts of the continent of Africa, the southern part of Asia, and the islands of the Indian Ocean. They are also found in the southern part of Europe, and in the southern part of North America. They are also found in the southern part of South America. They are also found in the southern part of Australia. They are also found in the southern part of New Guinea. They are also found in the southern part of the Philippines. They are also found in the southern part of the Malay Peninsula. They are also found in the southern part of the island of Sumatra. They are also found in the southern part of the island of Java. They are also found in the southern part of the island of Borneo. They are also found in the southern part of the island of Celebes. They are also found in the southern part of the island of Moluccas. They are also found in the southern part of the island of Timor. They are also found in the southern part of the island of New Caledonia. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Society Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Sandwich Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Phoenix Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Tokelau Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Cook Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Niue Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Tonga Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Samoa Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Tokelau Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Cook Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Niue Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Tonga Islands. They are also found in the southern part of the island of the Samoa Islands.

CHAPTER V.

DENTIROSTRES (*tooth-billed*), *continued.*

SILVIADÆ (THE WARBLERS).

THE very name of this family speaks of warmth and spring and harmony: and even in the depth of winter, conjures up before our imaginations lively pictures of the coppice and the hedgerows bursting into full leaf, radiant in the sunshine; the air redolent with the perfume of a thousand flowers, and filled with the song of countless birds. It is pleasant to bask for awhile in such a sunny spot, while we pass in review before us the sweet songsters of the grove, which compose the family we are considering.

The warblers are the largest family amongst all the birds, I do not mean numerically, but specifically; and with a few exceptions they may all be found in Wiltshire, no less than nineteen species being either indigenous to our county, or periodical or occasional visitants; but some of these species bear such a close resemblance to one another, and are so extremely difficult to distinguish from one another, that they will defy any but the most accurate and painstaking observer to discover their personal identity. Their principal characteristics are elegance and gracefulness of form, a delicate structure and slenderness of bill, and a sweetness and richness of note; and though some may be disposed to cavil at the statement, I am inclined to the opinion that in a greater or lesser degree *all* the species composing this family partake of these three characteristics.

39. HEDGE ACCENTOR (*Accentor modularis*).

Well known to everyone as the Hedge Sparrow, though the name is most unfortunate, causing it to be confused in the minds of many with the House Sparrow, with which it has not the smallest affinity, the latter being bold, hard-billed, and grain-loving, while the Hedge Accentor or Hedge Warbler is meek, soft-billed, and insect-eating. In Worcestershire it bears the provincial name of 'Blue Isaac,'* which at first sight seems unintelligible enough; but 'Isaac'—as was pointed out by a clever reviewer in the *Guardian*†—is simply the modern pronunciation of the Anglo-Saxon *hege sugge* (Chaucer's *heisugge*), meaning 'Hedge Sucker,' in obvious allusion to the habits of the bird. 'Hedge Betty,' another provincial name in use in the same county, is evidently later, and admirably expresses its dull and somewhat lustreless plumage. In Somersetshire it is known as 'Blind Dunnock.'‡ The scientific names bestowed on this species have sole reference to its singing powers, for the meaning of *Accentor* is given by the B.O.U. Committee, 'one who sings with another;' and *Modularis* 'one that sings in a measured manner;' from *modulus*, 'a measure,' or 'melody.' On the Continent its sombre hue and retiring habits are more recognised in the names it bears, as in France, *Le Mouchet*, 'the spotted one;' *Traine buisson*, 'hedge-frequenter;' *Fauvette de bois*, *Fauvette d'hiver*, and *Rousette*, 'reddish one.' In Germany, *Schiefer Brustiger Sanger*, 'warbler with slate-coloured breast.' In Portugal, *Negrinha*, 'little negress,' and *Pretinha*, 'blackish.' The English word 'Sparrow,' Swedish *Sparf*, German *Sperling*, and similar words in other languages, are all (says Professor Skeat) from the Teutonic *Sparwa*, 'a Sparrow,' literally a 'flutterer,' from *Spar*, 'to quiver,' hence to 'flutter.' Unlike most of this family, the Hedge Warbler remains with us throughout the winter, and

* 'The Nation in the Parish,' by Rev. R. Lawson. See Glossary.

† Jan. 21st, 1885.

‡ 'Birds of Somerset,' by Mr. Cecil Smith, p. 77.

loves to creep about the bottoms of hedges and among shrubs, and if there is a pile of old wood lying about the yard, there you may invariably see its dusky figure, as it seeks a scanty subsistence, not disdaining to search for food at the bottom of drains and gutters, for pride has no part in its composition, not one of all the race being so modest and humble as this. Its song, though not loud nor continuous, is sweet, but chiefly prized for the season at which it may be heard; it sings, indeed, all the year through, but in winter, amid piercing winds and frost and snow, it is refreshing to hear the warbling of this little bird, as it sits perched on some shrub or bush; while, as the spring advances and brings in troops of other and louder warblers, nobody notices the poor Hedge Accentor amidst the flood of music which then abounds. There is one exception here, however, for at this season the cuckoo singles out the Hedge Warbler and shows its appreciation of its domestic qualities by the doubtful compliment of selecting its nest oftener perhaps than that of any other bird wherein to deposit her egg.

['Alpine Accentor' (*Accentor alpinus*). I have no right, and I have no intention, of including among the warblers of Wiltshire this rare visitant to our island, for I have no instance before me of its appearance in this county; still, from the facts that one of the three instances of its occurrence given by Yarrell was in the adjoining county of Somerset, from the garden of the Deanery at Wells; that the specimen in Mr. Marsh's collection was said to have been killed near Bath; and that the opinion of that keen and accurate observer coincides with my own, that these birds are probably much more common than is generally supposed, their shy retiring habits and sombre plumage never making them conspicuous—from these premises I venture to conclude that the 'Alpine Accentor' probably visits us occasionally, and I therefore mention it in passing. In colour it is reddish-brown, but the chief distinguishing features which mark it at once from its congener, the common 'Hedge Accentor,' are its greater size and the dull-white throat, thickly spotted with black. It is not uncommon on the Continent, and

is fearless, courageous, and confiding, and frequents rocks and stones in preference to bushes.

40. REDBREAST (*Sylvia rubecula*).

Not only in England, but throughout Northern Europe, in Sweden and Norway, Russia, and Germany, the Redbreast is a favourite, and has a name of endearment: with us he is Robin; in Sweden he is Tommy; in Norway and Russia, Peter; and in Germany, Thomas; but in Italy and France he shares the fate of all other birds, little as well as big, and is mercilessly killed and eaten. Mr. Waterton says he has counted more than fifty lying dead on one stall at Rome, so that it is no wonder English travellers complain of the silence of the woods and fields in France and Italy, and lament the absence of the varied members of the feathered race which cheer and enliven us at home. Now I have often heard it asked *why* the Redbreast is so great a favourite? and its confidence in man has been regarded as the result of its immunity from persecution, but I apprehend this is mistaking the cause for the effect; for this above all other birds is *by nature* tame and familiar with man, fearlessly venturing close to him, and by its very confidence begetting the protection which its innocence and bravery seem to claim: for that indeed must be a bad and cruel heart which could abuse such an appeal, and long may our village children, and indeed all of every age and rank, respect this one at least of our winter songsters, so harmless, so pretty, and so confiding.

At the same time it cannot be denied that our friendly Robin is of all birds the most quarrelsome. A very tyrant among his fellows, he will brook no rival, but attack any intruder on his haunts with the utmost fury. Throughout the year he sings; even in the cold bleak days of winter he will pour forth his feeble song from some leafless spray; but not always to the delight of the listener; for in some places where superstition still lingers—and where does it not?—the song of the Robin is thought to bode death to the sick person who hears it, and much uneasiness is consequently caused when its note, or ‘weeping,’ is heard

near a house where anyone happens to be ill. And so in the north of Devon they have a saying that when a Robin perches on the roof of a cottage, and utters its plaintive 'weet,' the baby in the cottage will die. Another widely-spread belief is that if a Robin should chance to die in your hand, from that day forth your hand will always shake, as if with palsy; hence the obvious moral, be careful to have no hand in causing the death of a Robin. Amongst many other superstitions current regarding this bird, I will mention only the following pretty legend current in Wales, that, 'far, far away is a land of woe, darkness, spirits of evil, and fire. Day by day does this little bird bear in its bill a drop of water to quench its flames. So near the burning stream does he fly, that his dear little feathers are scorched, and hence he is called *Bron-rhuddyn*, or "Breast-burnt." To serve little children the Robin dares approach the infernal pit, so no child of proper feeling will hurt this devoted benefactor of man. But the Robin returns from the land of fire, and therefore feels the cold of winter far more than his brother birds, and in consequence deserves and claims man's especial protection and assistance.* Its name is almost universally derived in all countries, as with us, from its highly-coloured breast; thus *rubecula* is 'the little red bird,' from *rubeo*, 'I am red.' *Erithacus*, again, the generic name bestowed on it by some ornithologists, is from *ἔρυθθω*, 'I make red.' In France it is *Bec-fin Rouge gorge*; in Germany, *Rothbrustiger Sanger*; in Sweden, *Rödthake Sångare*, 'Red-throated Warbler;' in Spain, *Gargantirojo*, 'Red-throat,' and *Pechi-rubio*, 'Red-breast.'

41. REDSTART (*Phœnicura ruticilla*),

Or 'Redtail,' for *start* is but the old English word for 'tail,' familiar to us in Start Point, the tail-end of England, or the promontory jutting out into the sea last seen by the outward-bound voyager. It is also called 'Firetail' and 'Brandtail,' from its flaming colour; and 'Quickstart,' from the rapidity with which it flirts that member. In Swedish, *Rödstart-Sångare* or 'Red-

* Dyer's 'English Folk-lore,' p. 66.

tail Warbler.' In France it is *Bec-fin de Murailles*, 'Wall Warbler,' in allusion to its haunts and nesting-place; in Germany, *Schwartzkeliger Sanger*, 'Black-throated Warbler. The scientific name, *Phœnicura*, signifies 'red-tail,' from $\phi\omicron\iota\nu\epsilon\iota$, 'purple red,' and $\omicron\iota\rho\acute{\alpha}$ 'tail;' *ruticilla* is a repetition of the same in another form, meaning 'Red-tail,' from *rutilus*, 'red,' and *cilla*, 'tail,' the termination we have seen in *Albicilla*, 'White-tailed Eagle,' and shall see in *Motacilla*, the generic name of the Wagtails; *Bombycilla*, 'Silk-tail,' etc.

Towards the end of April this handsome and interesting bird arrives in England, and may be seen darting after insects on the wing, and capturing them with unerring precision; or running after its prey on the grass with equal certainty of success. In plumage it is the brightest and gayest of all the warblers; the female, in more sombre hue than her mate, is clad in a dress of pale reddish-brown; but the male, with his jet-black head and throat, bright chestnut breast and tail, white forehead, and gray back, presents a handsome appearance from the contrast and combination of colours: but the distinctive peculiarity of these birds consists in their spreading out the feathers of the orange-red tail, and jerking it from side to side, an action belonging to the Redstarts alone, and by which they may be distinguished from all other birds. Harting remarks that in this horizontal shaking of the tail, they move them as dogs do when they fawn, whereas the tail of a wagtail, when in motion, bobs up and down like that of the jaded horse.* They delight in buildings, especially old walls, in the crevices of which they make their nests; they are good songsters, and continue their song from morning till night. From my own observation I should say it is now much more scarce than it was a few years back; certainly its numbers in the localities where I have annually watched it are very much decreased.

* White's 'Selborne,' Harting's edition, p. 121; 'Our Summer Migrants,' pp. 75—78.

42. BLACK REDSTART (*Phœnicura titys*).

This little bird has been somewhat ill-treated by ornithologists in regard to its name. Originally designated *titys* by Linnæus, with the meaning of a 'small chirping bird'—relics of which we have in our *Titmouse* and *Titlark*—it became by mistake converted into *tithys*, for which there is neither authority nor reason. And this false title usurped the place of the rightful owner, and reigned in the works of many of our chief authorities, even in that of Yarrell himself, until detected and deposed, in the fourth edition, by the vigilance of Professor Newton, whose accurate eye no flaw of title could escape. It has also been most erroneously termed the 'Blackstart,' a name utterly misleading, as with a generally black or dusky plumage, its tail alone is of a reddish-bay. I am glad to add it to our Wiltshire list, on the authority of Mr. T. Rumming, of Red House, Amesbury, who very obligingly wrote to inform me that one had appeared near that place, and that he had himself seen it killed, but he could not give me the exact date; and again, I have one more instance for which I am indebted to Mr. Grant: it is of a specimen shot by Mr. H. Sargent, of Enford Farm, on April 16, 1881. It is a bird with which I am very familiar, having met with it frequently at Mentone, Bordighera, Cannes, and other parts of the Riviera, as well as at various times and places in Switzerland. I also saw it daily in Cairo, where one frequented a wall just outside my window, in Shepherd's Hotel; and again, in the very heart of Lisbon, a pair occupied, and probably were nesting, in some house-roofs below my windows in the Hotel Braganza, and I found it common throughout Portugal. It is not, however, very often noticed in England, though much more frequently of late years; but abundant as it is in Southern and Western Europe, I cannot help thinking that its scarcity here is perhaps in some degree due to its having been overlooked and mistaken for its more brilliant congener, which in general habits it very much resembles, though it frequents the mountain-sides and rocky districts in preference to valleys and plains. In France it is

known as *Bec-fin rouge queue*; in Germany, *Schwarze Rothschwanz*; in Spain, *Coliroyo*; and in Portugal, *Raboruivo*—all with the meaning of ‘red-tail;’ but in the latter country it has many provincial names as well, as *Negrone*, ‘the black;’ *Noite negra*, ‘the night black;’ and ‘*Pisco ferreiro*,’ ‘the blacksmith finch.’

43. STONECHAT (*Saxicola rubicola*).

This and the two following species comprise the genus ‘Chat,’ and all of them are tolerably numerous in this county. They run with great celerity, being enabled to do so by the great proportional length of the tarsus, and are pretty, little, lively, restless, noisy birds, and their absence would cause a sad blank on our downs, which they chiefly frequent; their habit is to flirt the tail up and down continually, but not after the manner of the redstart. I met with Chats of many species in Egypt and Nubia, where in some localities, especially above the first Cataract, they are the most abundant birds seen; and it is quite marvellous how well their colours are adapted to the ground they frequent. Some, as *S. leucomela*, *S. leucopygia* and *S. leucocephala*, in their respective dresses of black and white, readily escaping notice amid the dark granite rocks which run inland from the banks of the Nile to the desert, which hems it in on either shore; others again, as *S. isabellina*, *S. stapazina*, and *S. deserti*, in their russet clothing, scarcely to be seen on the sands of the desert. But the Stonechat, with which we are now concerned, I found most abundant in Portugal, where I met with it throughout the country in considerable numbers; for the wide tracts of heathland, covered with aromatic shrubs and other bushes, and which often extend over many square leagues, exactly suit its requirements.

The Stonechat is the only one which partially remains with us through the winter, and may generally be met with in stony places or open pastures covered with small shrubs: it is of bright plumage—the head, neck, back, and throat nearly black; wing and tail coverts and sides of the neck white, and rich

chestnut breast ; it utters a kind of clicking note, 'Chook, chook, hence sometimes called 'Stoneclink' and 'Stonechatter,' and is for ever on the move from one stone to another, or from the summit of one bush to the next. The Rev. G. Marsh used to say it was called the 'Furze Robin' in his neighbourhood. Elsewhere in the county it is known as the 'Horse Matcher,'* though the origin and meaning of the name are alike unknown to me ; but in Turkey it has the strange title—how derived I know not—of 'One in ninety.' The specific name, *rubicola*, means an 'inhabitant of bramble-bushes ;' and the generic, *Saxicola*, 'one that dwells among rocks,' from *saxum* + *colere* ; in France it is *Traquet Pâtre*, 'Shepherd's Mill-clapper ;' and in Germany, *Schwarzkehliger Steinschmatzer*, 'Black-throated Stone-kisser ;' in Portugal, it is *Chas Chas*, and *Chasco*. In that country it is looked upon with disfavour, for the country people have a superstition that it is an excommunicated bird, for it led Judas to the place where our Blessed Lord was to be found. They say that, as it led Judas on the way, it cried '*Chas, Chas, por aquí bem bas*, 'This is the way ;' but the Chaffinch tried to lead in a contrary direction, by crying, '*Pim, Pim, por aquí bem vim*, 'Come this way ;' wherefore the Chaffinch is honoured and the Stonechat detested.†

44. WHINCHAT (*Saxicola rubetra*).

The haunts, habits, and general character of this warbler are very like those of the last described. It is to be met with in the same localities, and, though not quite so common as the stonechat, may often be seen on our downs. Montagu, speaking of it fifty years ago, says 'it is plentiful in Wiltshire ;' but being a shy and solitary bird, only seen singly or in pairs, it is certainly not now numerous. In plumage it is not so gay as its congener, but prettily marked, and in colour mottled brown ; and in song it is pronounced superior : it is also said, when reared from the nest in a cage, to be a skilful imitator of other birds. It

* 'Wild Life in a Southern County,' p. 196.

† *Ibis* for 1887, p. 88, Mr. W. C. Tait on the Birds of Portugal.

derives its name of 'Whinchat' and 'Furzechat' from the whin or furze which it loves to frequent; and for the same reason is known in Sweden as the *Busk sqvatta*. In Sussex it is known as the 'Barley-ear,' probably from the date of its arrival coinciding with barley *earing*, or ploughing for barley.* The scientific name *Rubetra* would either refer to the 'ruddy' colour of its plumage, or more probably to the bramble-thickets it frequents, on the topmost twigs of which it will perch, and then pass on with undulating flight to the highest spray of another bush. In France it is *Grand Traquet* and *Traquet Tarier*; in Germany, *Braunkehliger Steinschmatzer*, 'Brown-throated Stone-kisser;' in Portugal, its correct name is like that of the species last described, *Chasco*; but its provincial name, by which it is more popularly known, is *Tange-asno*, literally 'Gee-up, donkey!' because its note is supposed to resemble that used by the donkey-boys to urge on their beasts.† With us it is migratory, arriving in April, and departing for more southern latitudes in the autumn.

45. WHEATEAR (*Saxicola œnanthe*).

This is essentially one of our down birds, and few inhabitants of Wiltshire can be ignorant of its handsome active figure. It loves the bare open down, especially a stony down, where it flits from stone to stone in search of its insect food: it is the largest of the genus, and very prettily marked; the upper part of the head and back pearl-gray, the wings and cheeks black, the under parts pale buff, while the upper part of the tail is pure white, and from the singular manner in which by a lateral expansion of the feathers it spreads its tail like a fan, it may at once be recognised: it is migratory, but one of the first to arrive, and the last to leave us. For several years past I have noticed its first appearance here on or within two days of the 26th March. And Mr. Cordeaux‡ calls it the 'Sea-blue bird of March,' though he

° Gen. xlv. 6; Exod. xxxiv. 21; Deut. xxi. 4; 1 Sam. viii. 12.

† *Ibis* for 1887, p. 87, Mr. Tait on the Birds of Portugal.

‡ 'Birds of the Humber,' p. 30.

says it seldom arrives in the marshes of his neighbourhood in March, but very regularly during the first week in April; but it does not nest there, merely passing on and returning for a short time in September. With us it breeds in a deserted rabbit-burrow, or some deep hole under the turf, where I have occasionally found its eggs. Though pretty generally dispersed over the Wiltshire downs, I do not think it could ever have been so numerous with us as it is, or was, on the Southdowns of Sussex, where vast quantities were trapped by the shepherds for the London markets, and found a ready sale, as the morsel of meat they yielded was, unhappily for them, considered an epicure's delicacy. Pennant speaks of 1,840 dozen being taken in one year near Eastbourne, in Sussex; and 84 dozen are said to have been trapped by a single shepherd in one day! Would not any species be thinned by such wholesale destruction?

As we have seen the Stonechat to be dubbed by Wiltshire rustics the 'Horse Matcher,' so the late Rev. G. Marsh used to say this species was called in Wiltshire the 'Horse Snatcher;' but he did not know the reason of the term, and the name was quite new to me. 'Fallowchat' is another provincial name, the meaning of which is apparent enough; for, unlike its two congeners above mentioned, this species avoids bushes and shrubs, and seeks the open field or down. The scientific name, *Ænanthe*, is attributed by the Committee of the B.O.U. to the appearance of the bird in its spring migration at the season when the *vine shoots*;* but the meaning of the English 'Wheat-ear' has been much questioned. Mr. Harting says that perhaps it is a corruption of *whit-ear*, from the 'white ear,' which is very conspicuous in the spring-plumage of this bird; or else it may be derived from the season of its arrival. The latter is, I think, the true origin; but then I submit that it cannot allude to the wheat being in ear when it reaches us in the middle of March, but must refer to the old meaning of *ear*, 'to plough,' and unquestionably the Wheat-ear does arrive when the ploughing and sowing of spring-

* Aristotle, 'Hist. An.,' ix. 49, B. 8.

wheat is in operation. In France it is *Vitrec* and *Traquet moteux*, which may be translated 'restless mill-clapper;' in Germany, *Graurückiger Steinschatzer*, 'Gray-backed Stone-kisser'; in Italy, *Gulbianco*, 'Whitethroat;' and in Portugal, *Caiada*, 'Whitewasher.'

46. GRASSHOPPER WARBLER (*Salicaria locustella*).

This, the most shy and retiring of all the warblers, derives its name from the rapid ticking noise which it will continue for a long time without intermission; and its curious note is so like the chirp of the grasshopper, that it is often mistaken for it. As soon as it arrives in the spring, it makes known the fact by the cricket-like ticking which proceeds from the midst of the very thickest bush or furze, where it hides itself from human sight, and here it skulks and creeps, and at the bottom of the furze amid the thickest grass it conceals its nest; indeed, so shy is it that it is rarely seen, and but for its incessant chirp would escape general notice. Selby calls it a ventriloquist, because it not only imitates the notes of several other birds, but in uttering its peculiar note can cause the sound at one moment to proceed from the immediate neighbourhood of the listener, and at the next, as if removed to some distance, and this without any actual change of place in the operator—a peculiarity which it shares with the corn-crake, also a bird very difficult to raise on the wing. It is of elegant shape, and its plumage consists of mottled shades of brown.

The generic name *Salicaria* is simply 'Willow Warbler,' and *locustella*, the diminutive of *locusta*, 'grasshopper,' from its cricket-like cry; hence, too, our specific name, and with precisely the same signification we find *Bec-fin Locustelle* in France, and *Heuschrecken Sanger* in Germany.

Montagu, speaking of the localities where he had seen this bird, says, 'We have found it in Hampshire, South Wales, and Ireland, but nowhere so plentiful as on Malmesbury Common in Wiltshire, to which place the males come about the latter end of April.' The late Canon John Wilkinson sent me the eggs

which he had taken from a nest at Broughton Gifford, in June, 1856, and described the nest as being completely hidden and cleverly covered with rank grass in the clover-field where it was found, after the manner of this species. Mr. Baker says that it is common at Mere, where it is known as the 'mowing-machine bird,' in allusion to its remarkable note.

The Marlborough College Natural History Society's Reports speak of many nests taken in the neighbourhood in 1866; mention it occasionally in several subsequent years, and in 1881 record that an unusually large number of this species visited Marlborough during the summer of that year. I have, also, many notes of its occurrence in all parts of the county, but sparingly, for it is not so common as either of its congeners, and is much more retiring and timid.

47. SEDGE WARBLER (*Salicaria phragmitis*).

We must look for this elegant species by the banks of streams or the margins of lakes, and there amongst the tall sedge and reeds we shall be almost sure to find it, for it is by far the commonest of the genus, and few patches of sedge or willow beds are without it. It is an incessant songster, or rather chatterer, for its notes, though very various and rapid, are not particularly melodious, and yet from its habit of singing throughout the summer's night, it has been sometimes mistaken for the nightingale: when silent, it may be excited to renew its song by the simple expedient of throwing a stone into the bush where it is concealed.

Professor Newton observes that many of its notes are very harsh, and the frequent repetition of one of these has gained for the species in some parts of England, particularly in the valley of the Thames, the name of 'Chat,' by which it is there mainly known.* This I can corroborate, for such was the name by which it was designated at Eton, where I used to find it breeding in abundance, on the reedy banks of the Thames.

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 379.

Its colour is on the upper parts oil-green and yellowish-brown and below yellowish dusky white, but though it closely resembles its congeners in other respects, it may on comparison be distinguished from them by the distinct white streak that passes above the eyes.

It derives its scientific name *phragmitis* from φράγμα, 'a fence,' from its habit of haunting fences or hedges. The French name, *Bec-fin phragmite*, the Swedish, *Säf-sångare*, and the German, *Schilfsanger*, as well as our English name, are taken from the localities it affects. It is the first of the River Warblers to arrive here.

48. REED WARBLER (*Salicaria arundinacea*).

Very difficult, but for the mark over the eye, just described, is this species to be distinguished from the last, which it resembles in the time of its arrival and departure, in the localities it frequents, in habits, general appearance, and colour: it is, however, not nearly so common. Montagu says that 'in Wiltshire and Somersetshire, where the Sedge Warbler abounds, not a single Reed Warbler is to be found;' here, however, our worthy countryman is mistaken, for I have myself observed it by the banks of more than one reedy stream; the Rev. G. Marsh has frequently seen it on the Avon; Mr. Withers has taken it near Devizes. The Rev. A. P. Morres pronounces it nearly if not quite as abundant as the Sedge Warbler in his district near Salisbury, and adds that it is one of the most favourite nests selected by the cuckoos of that neighbourhood for their nursery. Mr. Harting says it is a species much overlooked, and instances that a notice of its occurrence at Marlborough was given 'for May 31st, at least six weeks after its usual time for arriving.*' I used to find in my bird-nesting days the deep cup-shaped nest of this species, cleverly suspended between three or four reeds on the banks of the Thames at Eton, in perhaps greater profusion than the nests of the Sedge Warbler.†

* 'Our Summer Migrants,' p. 326.

† See *Zoologist* for 1853, p. 4095, on the nesting of the Reed Wren.

Mr. Selby pronounces its song to be superior to that of the Sedge Warbler, both in volume and in sweetness, but in truth it requires a very accurate ear as well as eye to distinguish these two graceful little warblers from one another.

One of the specific names by which it is oftentimes designated is *strepera* or 'noisy,' in allusion to the perpetual babble in which it indulges. In the more marshy parts of England, where the chirping of grasshoppers and crickets is not a very common sound, this bird has long been known as the 'Reeler,' from the resemblance of its song to the noise of the *reel* used, even at the beginning of the present century, by the handspinners of wool. The power of so-called 'ventriloquism,' ascribed by some to this bird, has been in a measure explained by writers to be the effect of the bird turning its head while singing, so as to change the direction in which the sound of its voice is thrown.* In France it is *Bec-fin des Roseaux*; in Germany, *Rohrsanger*, in accordance with our 'Reed Wren;' but in Portugal, where its song is more appreciated than with us, it is *Rouxinol pequeno das Caniças*, 'Little Nightingale of the Reeds.'

49. NIGHTINGALE (*Philomela lusciniæ*).

I need not point out the localities which these birds frequent; for who does not know whether a nightingale haunts the thicket near him, and who does not remember the spots where he has listened to this wondrous songster of the grove, or as good old Izaak Walton styles it, this 'chiefest of the little nimble musicians of the air that warble forth their curious ditties, with which nature has furnished them, to the shame of art'? But the nightingale seems very fanciful in her selection of habitation, and is guided by some choice which we cannot fathom. In the most western and warmest parts of our island it is rarely heard; and in our own county, while one wood resounds night after night and year after year with their wondrous melody, a neighbouring copse, apparently in all respects equally suited to their

* Professor Newton in fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 385. See also paper by O. Salvin in *Ibis* for 1859, p. 305.

tastes, is never honoured by their presence. Some say that dampness of soil, a trickling stream, or a moist meadow, is needed to tempt it; and M. Viellet declares it is partial to the vicinity of an echo! Montagu propounded—I know not with what reason—that possibly it is not to be found but where cowslips grow plentifully; but I think we have hardly mastered a knowledge of its requirements. It arrives here towards the end of April or beginning of May; and being of a very shy, timid nature, seeks the thickest hedges and most impenetrable copses, where, though so often listened to, it is rarely seen, and few are acquainted with the form of the humble but elegant little brown bird which charms them so much with its unrivalled song.

It owes its generic name to the mythological writers, who state that Philomela, the wife of Tereus, was turned into a nightingale; and the name was in use for that bird at all events as long ago as the time of Catullus; and the specific name *luscinia* is conjectured by the B.O.U. Committee to be derived from the root of *λάλος*, 'talkative,' and *cano*, 'I sing.' In France it is *Rossignol*; in Portugal, *Rouxinol*; in Spain, *Ruiseñor*; in Germany, *Nachtigall*, which latter, as well as our 'Nightingale,' is derived (as Pennant informs us) from *Nacht*, 'night,' and the Saxon word *galan*, 'to sing;' not, however, that it is silent during the day, but then the chorus of voices, loud and shrill and numerous, drown it so that it cannot so readily be distinguished as in the witching hour of twilight, when other songsters are hushed in repose. Not everywhere, however, is the Nightingale known as a songster. In Egypt, to which it retires for the winter, its voice, except its somewhat harsh alarm-note, is unknown; just as the Redwing—the 'Swedish Nightingale'—though notorious for its vocal powers in Norway and Sweden, is never recognised while in its winter quarters here as capable of song.* It is sad to think what vast numbers are caught in England by the professional bird-catcher; and that the modern inhabitants of Malta, appreciating it more for the delicacy of its flesh than for the quality of its song, persecute it unrelentingly,† with about as

* Selby's 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' vol. i., p. 207.

† Mr. C. A. Wright in *Ibis* for 1864, p. 66.

much sense as the unreasoning Roman epicure of old attempted to gratify his palate with a dish of nightingales' tongues. But strange to say, persecution does not seem to thin its numbers. Mr. Morres speaks of them as quite abundant near Salisbury; and though I have never known them in such profusion in north Wilts, I have seen and heard them in many localities there; and in the oak copses of Sussex, and the leafy lanes of Surrey, I have found them in great force. But in Portugal, and especially at Cintra, and on the banks of the Lima in Minho, they positively swarmed; while in the Ionian Islands, Corfu, and many portions of the Grecian coast, their numbers are astonishing.

50. BLACKCAP WARBLER (*Curruca atricapilla*).

This active little warbler is second only to the nightingale in song, and being a regular summer visitant to our gardens and orchards, as well as hedgerows, is known to most observers. Its general colour is ash-gray, but the jet-black head of the male and the brown head of the female mark it at once from all others. Insects and fruit are its favourite food, but few will quarrel with it on the latter account, as it makes ample amends for any petty thefts it may commit in the garden by the quantities of various kinds of insects which infest fruit-trees, upon which it feeds its young, as well as by the sweetness of its song, and its interesting and engaging manners. Montagu designated it the 'Mock Nightingale,' and Harting says it has been called the 'contralto singer among birds,' and this title is certainly not undeserved.* In Germany it is provincially called the 'Monk,' in allusion to the hooded appearance of both male and female; and in the Azores the female is known as 'Red Hood;' otherwise in all Continental languages it derives its name, as with us, from its black head. In France it is *Bec-fin à tete noir*; in Germany, *Schwarzköpfige Grasmücke*; in Italy, *Capinera commune*; in Portugal, *tutinegra* for *toutanegra*, i.e., 'black poll;' in Sweden, *Svart hufvad Sångare*. It is a timid bird and very restless, scarcely stationary an instant, except when it pours forth its

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 49.

rich and clear notes from the top of some tree or bush. The Rev. G. Marsh thought it not very common in Wiltshire, but my own observation does not agree here, as I see it frequently in many parts of the county; and it arrives at Yatesbury, as well as in the neighbourhood of Devizes, regularly every spring in some numbers.

51. GARDEN WARBLER (*Curruca hortensis*).

Though closely resembling in general colour and appearance several others of this family, the Garden Warbler may on comparison be distinguished from its congeners by its superior size, being nearly an inch longer than any other species answering to the same description. Its plumage is grayish-green above, and greenish-yellow below; it is even more restless, more shy, and more retiring than the last described, and is at least equally common. It frequents the same localities, has the same propensity for fruit, and is an excellent songster; hence it is called by Bechstein *Bastard Nachtigall*, the 'Spurious Nightingale.' In Sweden it is, as with us, *Trädgårds Sångare*, 'the Garden Warbler; in France, *Bec-fin Fauvette*; in Germany, *Graue Grasmücke*, 'Gray Grassfly; in Italy, *Beccafico cenerino*, 'Ash-coloured Fig-pecker.'

This and the two following species are indiscriminately called 'Nettle Creepers' by our Wiltshire lads. It is the 'Greater Fauvette or Pettychaps' of Willoughby, Pennant, Latham, Montagu, Bewick, and our earlier ornithologists; and it is the famous 'Beccafico,' so highly prized as an epicure's morsel in Italy and France. But though so much esteemed, and consequently so much sought after, it is wonderful in what vast numbers it appears every spring throughout Western Europe. In Italy it may be seen exposed for sale in every market; and in Malta, as many as a hundred dozen are sometimes brought in at a time.* Montagu says of it: 'In Wiltshire, where I have found this species not uncommon, it resorts to gardens in the

* Mr. C. A. Wright in *Ibis* for 1864, p. 67.

latter end of summer, together with the Whitethroat and Black-cap, for the sake of currants and other fruit.'

52. COMMON WHITETHROAT (*Curruca cinerea*).

This is the commonest of all our little summer warblers, and may be seen in every shady lane or thick hedge, almost in every bramble and bed of nettles. Its head and back are light brown, under parts dusky white slightly tinged with rose-red; in habits it resembles its congeners previously described; but it has one peculiarity, which consists in its often singing on the wing, as it rises with a very peculiar flight, sailing round in little circles, till it attains a considerable height in the air, and then descends slowly to the same spot whence it started; at other times it will erect its crest, puff out its throat, stretch its neck, and exhibit every mark of excitement and defiance, while it seems to strain every nerve to raise its voice above its rivals.

The generic name, *Curruca*, if derived from the Latin, and signifying 'the runner,' may, I suppose, with sufficient accuracy, describe its rapid movements at the bottom of the thickest hedges. In France it is *Bec-fin grisette*, and in Sweden *Grä Sångare*, which are mere translations of the specific name *cinerea*. In Germany, too, it is *Fahle Grasmücke*, 'Ash-coloured Grass-fly;' but in Portugal it is known as *Papa-amoras*, literally 'Blackberry or Mulberry Eater.*' Mr. Tait adds that its disappearance in October coincides with that of the blackberries, of which it is gluttonously fond; and it is probable that many blackberry plants are dispersed by seeds dropped by this bird.

In Wiltshire it is popularly known as the 'Nettle Creeper,' from its partiality to ditches and banks where nettles abound; and there it delights to make its semi-transparent nest, mooring it to the stems of nettles, much as the Reed Warbler attaches her nest to the reeds on the banks of streams. Though undoubtedly fond of fruit, it confers untold benefits on man by its wholesale destruction of caterpillars, aphides, and other destructive insects.

* *Ibis* for 1887, p. 90, Mr. W. C. Tait on the Birds of Portugal.

53. LESSER WHITETHROAT (*Curruca sylvicola*).

Quite as common in Wiltshire, if not more so, than the last, with which it is often confounded. Indeed, the eggs of this and the preceding species form a large proportion of the whole on every schoolboy's string—a table, by the way, of no mean authority in calculating the abundance or rarity of any species in any particular locality. It is even more retiring than its larger namesake, and creeps away out of sight among the brambles the instant it is discovered, threading its way with the rapidity and adroitness of the mouse. From the peculiar character of its note, a low soft warble, it is called the 'Babbling Warbler,' and by Continental naturalists, '*C. garrula*,' and '*Bec-fin babillard*;' and from the clicking sounds with which it repeats its call-note, 'Klapp, klapp, klapp,' which much resembles the sound emitted from the clapper attached to the little windmills one often sees placed in gardens to scare away sparrows and other birds, it has obtained in Germany the name of *Klapper Grasmücke*, and provincially of *Weismüller*, 'White Miller,' and *Müllerchen* or 'Little Miller.' In Sweden it is known as *Art Sångare*, or 'Pea Warbler,' so called from its frequenting the pea-fields, for which it has a great partiality.* The Wiltshire ploughboy, who is not appreciative of the minute distinctions which mark the species, knows this, too, by the name of 'Nettle Creeper,' to which perhaps it is even more entitled than its larger congener, inasmuch as it is more ready to escape observation by hiding in the bed of nettles, which offers so convenient and so effectual a shelter. This appears to be the Pettychaps of Gilbert White.† Professor Newton observes that the repetition of notes which have been syllabled as 'Sip, sip, sip,' is almost incessant, especially if the weather be sultry; and that it continues its song much later in the summer than any of its congeners,‡ while Harting not only says its song is less powerful than that of the Common Whitethroat, but is merely a kind of convulsive laugh

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 299.

† Harting's 'Sketches of Bird Life,' p. 70.

‡ Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 411.

or call.* Montagu says that he observed the arrival of this bird in Wiltshire for several years together, and that it ranged from April 21st to May 10th.

54. WOOD WARBLER (*Sylvia sylvicola*).

Extremely difficult is it to identify this pretty little bird from its two congeners, more particularly from the one next to be described: both are graceful and elegant, and frequent woods and plantations; both have a plumage of gray-green above, and primrose yellow below; both feed on insects, and sing sweetly from the top of some tall tree. There are, however, several marks by which we may distinguish them; on close examination we shall find that the Wood Warbler has a purer green on the upper parts of its body, and more white on its under plumage, while the Willow Warbler has more yellow: and again, the nest of the Wood Warbler is always lined with fine grass and hair, while that of the Willow Warbler contains feathers.

Perhaps nobody has more clearly pointed out in few words the marks by which the three British Willow Wrens may best be distinguished from each other than Mr. Harting, who says: (1) The *Wood Wren* is the largest of the three; it has comparatively the longest wings, and the longest tail: in colour it is much *greener* above and of a purer white beneath than either of its congeners; legs flesh-coloured. (2) The *Willow Wren* is the *yellowest* of the three species; legs also flesh-coloured. (3) The *Chiff Chaff* is the smallest of the three; wings remarkably short; colour greenish-brown above, white tinged with *yellow beneath*; legs hair-brown.† Compare with this the Swedish names by which these birds are designated: (1) Wood Warbler, *Grön Sångare* or Green Warbler; (2) Willow Warbler, *Löf Sångare* or Leaf Warbler; and (3) Chiff Chaff, *Gül brystad Sångare*, Yellow-breasted Warbler; and we have their respective points of distinction pretty accurately expressed.

To Gilbert White is due the credit of separating and calling

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 51.

† Harting's edition of White's 'Selborne,' p. 57.

attention to the points of difference between these closely allied species, and his 19th letter to Pennant is entirely occupied with this subject. It is with him 'the Larger Willow Wren,' and he describes it as a trifle larger than its congeners: he also calls attention to its remarkable tremulous note, in consequence of which he calls it the 'Sibilous Pettychaps.' In France it is generally known as *Bec-fin Siffleur*; and *Sibilatrix*, 'one that hisses or whistles,' is the specific name by which it is generally known to Continental naturalists. This is certainly to be preferred to the somewhat unfortunate name it bears here; for *Sylvia*, 'a wood bird,' and *Sylvicola*, 'an inhabitant of woods,' is not a very happy or descriptive title. This is the *Regulus non cristatus major* of Willoughby; but Montagu having in 1790 carefully observed this species at Easton Grey in North Wilts, furnished an account of it in 1796 to the Linnean Society, under the name of *Sylvia sylvicola*.

In Malta it is styled *Bû-fula*, 'father of a bean,' from its partiality to the olive and carob trees, where it finds both shelter and the insect-food suited to its taste. It also frequents the fig and almond trees when in leaf, the colour of whose foliage mostly assimilates to its own plumage, and renders it not easy of detection when at rest;* hence its scientific name. It is not so numerous as the other species, but it visits us annually, and I have occasionally met with its nest near Devizes, as well as in my own parish of Yatesbury. Mr. Morres says that it is not common in his district near Salisbury; but that it has been recognised at Mere and Stourton, and near Warminster.

55. WILLOW WARBLER (*Sylvia trochilus*).

This is by far the most abundant of the genus, and may be seen in every plantation and hedgerow, but chiefly in meadows intersected with streams and watercourses which give birth to osiers and willows, for amongst these it delights to revel. In addition to the points of difference mentioned above, it far

* Mr. C. A. Wright's 'Birds of Malta,' in *Iris* for 1864, p. 70.

surpasses its congeners in song; indeed, so sweet and musical are its notes, as to give it the sobriquet of the 'Warbling Pettychaps,' and 'Melodious Willow Wren.' Gilbert White says it has a 'joyous, easy, laughing note; it is constantly in motion, flitting from branch to branch, in search of the smaller insects that constitute its food: for this and its congeners are perpetually employed in the destruction of *Aphides* or insect blight, which are so injurious to our fruit and other trees, and sometimes threaten to overwhelm them with their numbers; but little account is taken by short-sighted man of the incalculable benefits which these insect-eating birds confer upon him. All the Willow Warblers live entirely on insect-diet, and *never* eat fruit or berries, though they often frequent the fruit trees in search of their insect prey. The specific name *trochilus* is given in the B.O.U. Catalogue, as if 'a runner;' but if this is the correct derivation, the name does not appear to be very happily chosen. It is derived from *τρέχω*, 'I run,' and is the same name as that given by Herodotus to the Crocodile bird, the 'Spur-winged Plover' (*Charadrius spinosus*), which was supposed to pick the leeches from the open mouth of that formidable reptile. In France it is from its singing powers known as *Le Chantre* as well as *Bec-fin Pouillot*; in Sweden it is *Löf-Sångare*, 'Leaf Warbler.' Why it is called 'Willow' Warbler is not quite apparent, though for this several sufficient reasons may be found. Perhaps, says Mr. Harting, from its partiality to willows and the aphides which abound on them; perhaps from its prevailing green colour; perhaps from its arrival as the willow is budding.* From its domed or hooded nest, with a large hole at the side, both this species and its congeners are sometimes known as 'Oven birds.'

56. CHIFF CHAFF (*Silvia hippolais*).

This is one of our earliest spring arrivals, and may be readily recognised on reaching us, for alone of its congeners it makes its appearance early in April, sometimes even in the last week of

* 'Our Summer Migrants,' p. 25.

March; indeed, next to the Wheatear, it is the earliest migrant to tell us that spring is at hand. And, again, it may be distinguished by the peculiar monotonous song of two notes which it begins to utter immediately on arrival, and which it continues to repeat throughout the summer, and whence it derives its name; 'Chiff Chaff,' 'Chip Chop,' 'Choice and Cheap,' 'Twit Twit,' 'Fit Fit,' being some of the syllables which various observers have applied to it, and which it continues to pour forth incessantly, even in the bleakest and most boisterous weather, from the top of some tall tree or leafless branch. It is distinguished from its congeners in France by the title of *Bec-fin à poitrine jaune*, and in Sweden as *Gul-bröstad Sångare*, 'Yellow breasted Warbler.' *Hippolais* is derived by the B.O.U. Committee from ἵππó + λαῖα, a name originally given by Aristotle to some bird from its habit of creeping *under stones*. But Professor Newton bestows* on it the specific name of *Collubita*, from κολλῦσις, 'a money-changer,' a name given it by Vieillot, because in some parts of Normandy it was called, from its note, '*Compteur d'argent*.'

It is the smallest of the three species, and differs very little from the last, but may always be distinguished by the dark colour of its legs and feet, those of the Willow Warbler being of a pale brown: it is much more familiar than its congeners, and as it reaches us before the trees and hedges are in leaf, is more frequently seen and better known. It is the 'Lesser Pettychaps' of Gilbert White and Montagu, and in truth it does resemble, though on a much smaller scale, the 'Greater Pettychaps,' as they called the 'Garden Warbler.' It is a very sprightly and active as well as hardy bird, and does not leave us till October, being one of the last to depart as it was one of the first to arrive here. It winters in Algeria, and Egypt and North Africa generally, assembling in countless multitudes, and spreading over the cornfields and gardens until its short winter is past.

* Professor Newton in fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 442.

57. DARTFORD WARBLER (*Melizophilus Dartfordiensis*).

The name *Melizophilus* is explained by the compilers of the B.O.U. list of British Birds to mean 'song-loving,' from *μελιζω*, 'I warble,' and *φιλείω*, 'I love'; and *undatus*, one of its accepted specific names, as 'marked with waves,' *undæ*. As to the quality of its song, there is a wide difference of opinion, some calling it harsh and unmusical, and some describing it as sweet and plaintive; but there is no question that it is prolonged and almost incessant, so the 'song-lover' may apply sufficiently well. But as to the 'wave-markings,' they must have reference, I suppose, to the plumage, and these can belong only to the 'chestnut brown chin, which in autumn is mottled with white *undulations*, which disappear in spring;*' but this seems but a feeble cause for so pronounced a name. This pretty little warbler frequents the downs and commons abounding in furze, in the thickest parts of which it will conceal itself, and over which it will hover on outstretched wing while it utters its short hurried note. It is a hardy bird, and remains here throughout the year: its body is very small, scarcely exceeding that of the common wren, but its great length of tail gives it the appearance of superior bulk; the general colour of its plumage is dark brown above and chestnut brown beneath. Mr. Withers informed me that some years since, several of these birds were shot annually by Mr. Edwards at Amesbury; they were decoyed from the midst of the bush wherein they concealed themselves by a certain noise made by Mr. Edwards, when they rose to the top spray and were easily killed. The Rev. G. Marsh was also informed by the man who procured the specimen in his collection, that by imitating their note he could bring these birds to the top of the furze, and that he had so killed three in one morning in the neighbourhood of Chippenham. Mr. Baker sees them on the downs near Mere, where they are almost certain to be roused from the gorse when the hounds are drawing the cover; and I have other instances before me of its

* Professor Newton in fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 404.

occurrence in Wiltshire, which is one of the counties given by Professor Newton as its abode.* But, in truth, wherever there are open downs or heaths covered with furze, there I suspect this shy solitude-loving species will be found by the patient watcher. Montagu, who devoted much attention to this bird, says, that 'when roosting at night, like the Long-tailed Titmouse, they assembled with a plaintive cry at a convenient spot chosen for the night, and then each strove for an inner berth.' By day, he pronounced them most active, almost in perpetual motion, throwing themselves into various attitudes and gesticulations, erecting the crest and tail at intervals, accompanied by a double or triple cry, which seemed to express the words, 'Cha, cha, cha.' Buffon called it '*Le Pitchou de Provence*'; and it was there and in other districts of Southern France, more especially on the shores of the Riviera near Cannes, that I first became acquainted with it, though I afterwards became very familiar with it in other southern lands.

58. GOLDEN CRESTED REGULUS (*Regulus cristatus*).

Regulus, the diminutive of *rex*, as if 'a little king,' or 'kinglet;' in France, *Roitelet*; and *Küings Vogel*, or 'King's Bird,' in Sweden, in whose vast forests it abounds as far north as the pine-woods grow; in Italy, *regolo*; but in Portugal, *estrellinha*, 'little star.' Well known to everyone is this charming little favourite, the smallest and most fairy-like of all our British birds; three inches and a half only in length, and 75 grains in weight, yet it braves the cold of winter, and remains with us throughout the year. Its numbers, however, are considerably increased in autumn by the arrival of large flocks on the Eastern coast, which reach our shores from Scandinavia early in October, and hence the little bird is known in Yorkshire as the 'Woodcock Pilot,'† as it seems to lead the way to that species, so eagerly expected by the sportsman and the epicure. It is almost inconceivable

* Professor Newton in fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 399.

† Cordeaux's 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 37.

how these delicate and fragile-looking creatures can accomplish so long and weary a flight over so rough and stormy a sea as a passage over the North Sea in autumn generally is, as I know by experience; but that they do manage it cannot be doubted, as they have been repeatedly watched both on passage and on arrival. It prefers fir plantations, but may be seen in hedgerows and gardens; it is incessant in motion, hopping from branch to branch, now clinging to the under boughs of the firs with back downwards, in search of its insect food—wherein it closely resembles the titmice, with which it often associates—now hovering over a twig or flower, suspended in the air, and fluttering its wings, and all the while singing melodiously; wherein it resembles the little warblers last described, and so forming a link between the two families. Its colours are brownish-green and greenish-yellow, while its head is ornamented with a stripe of long silky feathers, yellow tipped with orange, forming a golden crown. It abounds in this county, as I know by personal observation, and it sometimes breeds in my garden, suspending its nest below the bough of a yew-tree. There is another species, of whose occurrence in Wilts I have no certain tidings, with which it may easily be confounded, known as the ‘Fire-crested Regulus,’ or ‘Firecrest’ (*Regulus ignicapillus*). It may, however, on examination be distinguished; for, as Mr. Harting concisely points out, ‘The Firecrest invariably has a white line both above and below the eye, and a black line running through the eye. Hence Temminck calls it *Roitelet à triple bandeau*. These three lines are absent in the Goldcrest.’*

PARIDÆ (THE TITMICE).

Exceedingly interesting are all the members of this pert, active family, ever restless, creeping and running and flitting from bough to bough in quest of insect food, careless whether they are hanging beneath or climbing along, or running up or down the branch; hardy too, for they are all permanent residents

* ‘Birds of Middlesex,’ p. 56.

here, chattering, and bold and familiar and pugnacious withal. There are no better friends to the gardener than the bold Titmice which we see around us, so constantly employed in searching for spiders, earwigs, woodlice, and all manner of destructive insects, which they hunt for among the leaves and pick out from the crevices of the bark as they run over the branches. The original sense of the word *Tit* (says Professor Skeat) is merely something small, as *titlark*, 'little lark;' *titmouse*, 'little mouse,' etc. The genus *Parus* contains in all seven species, of which five are to be found abundantly in Wiltshire, the remaining two—the 'Crested Tit' (*Parus cristatus*) and the 'Bearded Tit' (*Parus biarmicus*)—being of very rare occurrence in England, and no instance having reached me of the appearance of either of them in this county.

59. GREAT TITMOUSE (*Parus major*).

First in point of size, and therefore at the head of the family, stands this well-known bird, whose peculiar markings and well-contrasted colours render it unmistakable. The black head, white cheeks, and yellow breast, parted down the middle by a broad black stripe, distinguish it at once from all others. The Great Tit is to be found in every wooded district, and it clears the buds and leaves of trees from an incredible number of insects; but it loves fruit as well, and being somewhat bold, fierce, and bloodthirsty, will occasionally vary its diet with the flesh of some bird which it has done to death with its sharp beak, and whose bones it picks with wonderful skill. In Sweden it is known as *Kiod Meise*, or the 'Meat Titmouse,' from its penchant for scraps of meat where it can find them, a taste which it shares with other members of the family. In that country, as in England, during summer it frequents woods and coppices; but in the autumn it collects about the houses, 'to live amongst people,' as the peasants express it: and when it comes to their dwellings, and, as they say, *pickar kittet af glassn*, 'picks the putty from the windows,'

the near approach of winter may be confidently expected.* Its note is a loud *cheep*, followed by a harsh chatter; but in spring and early summer this changes to a curious see-saw note, not unlike the sound produced by sharpening a saw with a file—hence in some parts of England it is known as the ‘Sawsharper.’ These notes are very loud for so small a bird, and may be heard at a great distance.† This species is noted for the strange places it will sometimes select for its nest. In my garden at Yatesbury it has for several consecutive years selected a spot within a bee-house, just outside one of the bee-boxes, containing a hive of bees in full activity: and here it piles up an extraordinary mass of moss and cowhair, and on the top it places its soft nest of feathers, and has hitherto always been fortunate in bringing off its brood in safety; but whether or no the bees always escape, and whether they approve as a neighbour so determined a persecutor of the insect race, is not quite so apparent. In France it is *La Grosse Mesange*, or *Charbonnière*; in Spain and Portugal, *Carbonero*, all with the meaning of ‘Charcoal-burner.’ In Italy it is *Cinciallegra maggiore*, and in Germany *Kohlmeise*. In Portugal, however, where it is very abundant, it is more correctly known as *Cedovem*. Mr. Tait says that in that country it begins to sing its peculiar note in February, and, according to the country people, seems to say, *Semeia linho, semeia linho*—‘Sow flax, sow flax’—indicating that the time has come for that seed. They believe that when the bird sings much it is a sign of an abundant harvest, and that it also says, *Tudo bem, tudo bem*—‘All’s well, all’s well.’ He remarks also that it is the only species which he has observed eating the procession caterpillar, the hairs of which are well known to be highly irritant to the human skin, and *Parus major* must therefore have a strong throat, gizzard, and stomach.‡

* Lloyd’s ‘Scandinavian Adventures,’ vol. ii., p. 306.

† Harting’s ‘Sketches of Bird Life,’ p. 89.

‡ Mr. W. C. Tait on the ‘Birds of Portugal,’ *Ibis* for 1887, p. 183.

60. BLUE TITMOUSE (*Parus cœruleus*).

Commonly called the 'Tom Tit,' and as well known by its blue cap and pert appearance as by its lively active habits. Like the Great Tit, its efforts are directed not against the buds and blossoms, with which it is so often charged, but against the larvæ and eggs of the insect tribe, which are therein deposited in incredible quantities, and which these useful little birds seek out and consume. It is, for its size, the most bold and pugnacious of the feathered race, and will attack and sometimes kill birds much larger and heavier than itself. It is known to village boys as 'Billy Biter,' from the severe bite or pinch with which it will punish the fingers of the incautious lad who seeks to take its nest from the hole of some tree. In Norfolk it is popularly called 'Pick-cheese.' The Blue Tit is remarkable even among the Titmice for the singular and even grotesque attitudes it assumes in seeking its insect prey, now hanging head downwards, now scrambling underneath a dead branch, as if it were walking on a ceiling, and with its tiny but strong bill chipping off a fragment of the loose dead bark.* In France it is *Mésange bleue*; in Germany, *Blaumeise*; in Sweden, *Blå-mes*, equivalent to our 'Blue Titmouse;' but in Italy it is *Cinciallegra piccola*, and in Portugal *Cedovem pequeno*, as it were *Parus minor*. It is so constantly before our eyes that I need say no more of its appearance or habits.

61. COAL TITMOUSE (*Parus ater*).

Not so common as the two last species, but generally distributed, and of similar habits. It closely resembles in appearance the Marsh Tit, next to be described, both having black heads, white cheeks, and grayish olive-green backs; but the Coal Titmouse may at once be recognised by the irregular white patch at the back of its neck, which is totally wanting in the Marsh Tit. In France it is called *Mésange petite Charbonnière*, the Great Tit bearing the title of *Mésange Charbonnière*; in

* 'Gamekeeper at Home,' p. 79.

Sweden, where it braves the severe winter and does not seem affected by the intense cold, it is known as *Svart Mes*. Professor Newton has pointed out that in like manner (and as the specific name *ater* indicates), 'Coal,' and not 'Cole,' Titmouse is the correct English name. In Germany it is *Tanne Meise*, 'Fir-tree Titmouse;' in Spain, *Herrerillo*, 'Little Blacksmith.'

62. MARSH TITMOUSE (*Parus palustris*).

The specific name points out the localities which this Tit frequents. I should say it is not so common in this county as the last—at least, I have not met with it quite so often; but wherever there is moist ground, and alders and willows flourish, there it may frequently be seen. Mr. Cecil Smith says that he has seen it busily engaged in eating the berries of the honeysuckle, occasionally picking one off and holding it in its claw like the parrot, while it was getting out all the edible parts.* It makes its nest in holes and sometimes in the scrubby heads of old pollard willows. In Germany it is, as with us, *Sumpfmeise*, the 'Marsh Titmouse;' in France, from its sombre dress and black hood, *La Nonnette*, 'the Little Nun;' in Italy, *Cinciallegra cinerea*; and in Spain it shares, with the species last described, the name *Herrerillo*.

63. LONG-TAILED TITMOUSE (*Parus caudatus*).

This very ball of feathers with a long tail is common in all woods, and may be found in hedgerows, but rarely visits our gardens. Its body is scarcely bigger than that of the 'Golden-Crested Regulus,' but its very long tail and its habit of puffing out its feathers give it an appearance of greater size than it really possesses. Its beautiful oval nest, so cleverly formed of moss and wool, coated with lichen and lined with feathers, is the greatest marvel of the kind we possess in this country, and in this snug cradle it will rear twelve or more young; and in the winter months you may see the whole family, including the parents, flitting with undulating movements from tree to tree—

* 'Birds of Somersetshire,' p. 128.

hence deriving the specific name *vagans* attributed to it by some authors—following in a long line, and keeping up a shrill and incessant cry of *Twit twit*, and anon hanging in an inverted position from the ends of the small twigs while in search of insect food. Montagu relates that he once observed a brood of twelve on a July evening as it became dusk, apparently very restless, when, on the utterance of a single note by one, and as instantaneously repeated by the whole, they assembled in a moment and huddled on a branch so close together as to appear like a ball of down.* The specific name seems in all languages to refer to its long tail, as *caudatus*, and our own ‘Long-tailed Tit.’ In France it is *Mésange à longue queue*; in Germany, *Schwanzmeise*; in Italy, *Codibugnolo*; in Holland, *Staaertmees*; and in Sweden, *Stjert Mes*. It is sometimes called provincially ‘Bottle Tit’ and ‘Bottle Tom’ from the shape of its nest, and in this county is generally styled ‘Huckmuck,’ a truly Wiltshire word, the derivation of which I cannot fathom.

AMPELIDÆ (WAXWINGS).

Of the family of Fruit-eaters we have but one single example occurring in England; their characteristics are short bill but wide gape, enabling them to swallow whole the large berries and fruits on which they feed; and short legs and feet formed for perching, as they are never seen on the ground. The meaning of the family name *Ampelidæ* is really ‘fruit-eaters,’ or, literally, birds which frequent *ἄμπελος*, ‘the vine.’ The single species visiting us is styled the

64. BOHEMIAN WAXWING (*Bombycilla garrula*).

Called also the ‘Silk-tail,’ and ‘Chatterer;’ it is a winter visitant, and though it occasionally comes in some numbers, it is by no means regular or periodical in its arrival; an interval of several years often elapsing between its visits. It is recorded by Ray to have appeared in this country in large flocks in the winter of 1685; Gilbert White records its visit in 1767; Bewick

* ‘Ornithological Dictionary,’ Supplement.

in 1790, 1791 ; Selby in 1810, 1822, and 1823 ; Yarrell in 1830, 1831, 1834, and 1835 ; and Professor Newton that while scarcely a year passes without the arrival of some individuals, the winters of 1830-31, 1834-35, 1849-50, and 1866-67 were remarkable for the numerous occurrences of this species. Subsequently to this they have appeared in force in the winters of 1872-73, and in 1882-83. Its true habitat is Northern Asia and the North-eastern parts of Europe, where thirty years since Mr. Wolley discovered its nest and eggs, which up to that time were unknown to science. I happened to be in Paris when I heard that this discovery of 1856 had been followed up in 1858 by the taking by Mr. Wolley and his collectors of no less than 150 nests, containing 666 eggs ; and soon after, chancing to call on the well-known naturalist, M. Parzudaki, I communicated to him this interesting piece of bird news, and never shall I forget the passion into which he worked himself, the mixture of envy, vexation, and indignation, not unmixed with admiration, with which this hot-tempered but enthusiastic ornithologist received the intelligence, as he marched up and down the room, shrugging his shoulders and throwing up his arms as he exclaimed over and over again : '*Six cent soixant six, six cent soixant six,*' the real cause of his fury being that Mr. Wolley at this time declined to sell any of these eggs, but sent them all to England, and none were to be had by M. Parzudaki and his friends in Paris.*

It is a handsome, gay bird, of a cinnamon-brown colour, tinged with red ; the feathers on the head are long and silky in texture, forming a crest : but the peculiarity from which it takes its name consists in its having on the tips of the wing quill-feathers, little flat scarlet horny appendages, exactly resembling drops of red sealing-wax ; the tail-feathers are tipped with pale yellow. The specific name, *garrula*, and one of its common sobriquets, 'Chatterer,' would seem to proclaim it at once as of noisy habits ; but this, Professor Newton points out, is by no means the case,

* For a most interesting and detailed report of the breeding of the Waxwing see *Ibis* for 1861, pp. 92-106 ; and *Ibis* for 1862, p. 295. Also Professor Newton in fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., pp. 528-533.

for, on the contrary, it is a remarkably silent bird ; but it was so called from its likeness to that notorious chatterer, the Jay, (*Garrulus glandarius*). For the same reason it is known in France as *Grand Jaseur*, 'Great Chatterer.' But in Sweden and Germany, where it is better known, it derives its name from the red, horny, or parchment-like appendages—the existence of which, so says Lloyd, seems to have been somewhat overlooked by English naturalists—but which, as the bird advances in years, make their appearance at the extremity of the yellow at the end of the tail-feathers ; and these increase *annually* in size and number. It is only, continues Lloyd, when these red excrescences are fully developed that the Waxwing can lay claim to its present pretensions—that of being the most beautiful of all Scandinavian birds. Hence the generic name *Bombycilla*, 'silky tail,' and the Swedish *Siden svans*, and the German *Seidenschwanz*. Its natural food appears to be the berries of the hawthorn, juniper, and mountain-ash ; and it usually associates in flocks. I was told in Norway that this bird visits that country also at irregular periods, many years sometimes elapsing between its visits. It was as abundant throughout Scandinavia in 1850 as it was here. I have many notices of its occurrence in this county. The Rev. G. Marsh has seen it in the woods at Winterslow, and stated that a pair were killed in Clarendon Park in 1820. Mr. Withers told me that many were killed at Potterne in 1850. The Rev. H. Hare, of Bradford, sent me notice of one killed in his field December 7th, 1857, while engaged in picking hawberries from a hedge. Colonel Ward saw one in his garden at Castle House, Calne, in the month of February, about 1865. The late Mr. Butler, of Kennett, a very careful observer of birds, told me he had seen a party of five or six of this beautiful species in some trees in his neighbourhood about 1860. The Rev. A. P. Morres records one shot by Mr. Fussle at Corsley, about two miles from Warminster, and brought to Mr. King, of that town, for preservation about forty years ago ; and the Marlborough College Reports speak of one observed at Draycot in 1864.

MOTACILLIDÆ (THE WAGTAILS).

Graceful and elegant are the epithets best suited to this family, as everybody will confess who has watched their engaging manners, running along the grass-plots, darting by the streams, and ever flirting their long tails, which alone seem to preserve their equilibrium, as they hurry this side and that, and seem in danger of losing their balance; and this perpetual fanning motion of the tail, which is never still, and is so characteristic of the members of this family, has been wisely applied to designate them; the Latin *Motacillidæ*, as well as the English counterpart, signifying 'tail-movers,' as indeed they are *par excellence*. They are of slender form and very active, the lightest and most buoyant of birds; and as most of them remain with us during the winter, they are doubly valued and doubly welcome.

65. PIED WAGTAIL (*Motacilla Yarellii*).

No one can be ignorant of this very common bird, with its parti-coloured dress of black and white; its food consists of insects which it finds in running over the grass or on the margins of streams and lakes, in the shallow waters of which it will wade in search of its tiny prey. Gilbert White also long ago called attention to its habit, which we may constantly verify, of running close up to feeding cows, in order to avail itself of the flies that settle on their legs, and other insects roused by the trampling of their feet. Though some are resident in Great Britain throughout the year, there is no doubt that this is one of the birds which partially migrate from the high, cold, bleak uplands to the sheltered valley or the coast. Moreover, it is certain that large numbers arrive in spring from beyond sea, and recruit our home birds. Indeed, indigenous though it is, this is one of the first spring arrivals which I anxiously look for on the downs, nor is it till the severity of winter is past that I am able to welcome this harbinger of a more genial season to my upland home, for a pair of these pretty birds return every year to rear their young in a rose-tree trained against my house. Those

that remain in England through the winter generally join the Pipits in resorting to turnip-fields, where they find shelter and minute slugs, as well as insect food. In Scandinavia, where they never pass the winter, their appearance in spring about the time the ice is breaking up is anxiously looked for, and the bird is known as *Is-spjärna*, literally, the 'Kicker away of the Ice.' Elsewhere in Sweden it is known as *Kok Ärla*, or the 'Clod Wagtail,' because it is so constantly seen among the clods in the new-ploughed fields. There is, moreover, a saying in some parts of the country that if the farmer commences ploughing either before the coming or departure of the Wagtail, success will not attend his endeavours.* In Egypt, where it is very common, it is figured in the hieroglyphic legends as 'the type of an impure or wicked person;' and is still called there *Aboo Fussad*, or the 'Father of Corruption,' though why it should be a bird of bad omen does not so readily appear.† The name by which it is generally known in Wiltshire is 'Dishwasher,' and in France *La Lavandière*, and in Spain *Lavandera*, 'Washerwoman;' but in Germany *Bachstelze*, 'Brook-trotter.'

66. GREY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla boarula*).

By no means common, but yet generally, though sparingly, dispersed, and to be found in most localities. It is even more graceful and slender, and has a still longer tail than the last. Its prevailing colours are slate-gray above and bright yellow below, with black throat, wings, and tail. It is less sociable and familiar than its pied relative, and is, in short, of solitary habits, and seeks secluded spots where it may live undisturbed, haunting the margins of streams, which it seldom leaves. In allusion to the localities it frequents, the Maltese call it *Zadak ta del*, 'Wagtail of shady places.' Why it should be dubbed *melanope*, or 'black-faced,' as it is by some of our best ornithologists, I am at a loss to know, though doubtless they have some good reason

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 302.

† Dr. A. L. Adams on the 'Birds of Egypt and Nubia,' in *Ibis* for 1864, p. 21.

for such title. Is it possible that the black *throat* which it exhibits in the breeding season should give rise to the name? In Scotland it is known as the 'Seed-bird,' because it arrives at the season when in those more northern latitudes farmers are sowing their land. In Wiltshire it remains, though sparingly, throughout the year; and this is one of the few South-Western Counties enumerated where it has been known to breed. In France it is *Bergeronnette jaune*, 'Yellow little Shepherdess'; *Gul Ärla*, 'Yellow Wagtail,' in Sweden.

67. GRAY-HEADED WAGTAIL (*Motacilla neglecta*).

This species is rarely met with in England, perhaps I should say is rarely recognised, for it bears so close a resemblance to *M. flava*, next to be described, which is extremely common everywhere, that it is difficult to distinguish between them without very close and minute examination; and so, in all probability, it is very often overlooked. A careful observer will, however, notice that it has a white line over the eyes, and a white chin, both of which in Ray's Wagtail are yellow; and that it has a gray head, which in *M. flava* is light olive. In habits and manners it differs nothing from its congeners.

I place it with the utmost confidence in the Wiltshire list, on the authority of the Rev. G. Marsh, who possessed a specimen killed at Marshfield, near Chippenham, in October, 1841. The Rev. A. P. Morres, though he cannot speak positively, thinks he has seen it in the water meadows at Britford. Mr. Norwood reports that he saw a pair near the South-Western station at Salisbury, and Mr. Baker killed a bird at Mere, which he considered to belong to this species, but of which some doubts were afterwards entertained.

68. RAY'S WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flava*).

This is our common Yellow Wagtail, which flocks here every summer, and leaves us in the autumn; it frequents open plantations and arable land, and fields of sprouting wheat, as well as meadows, open downs, and sheep pastures, and does not seem so

dependent on the neighbourhood of water as its congeners. It has a shorter tail, and is altogether less graceful in form than the Gray Wagtail; but in colour it is more brilliant, and of a more pronounced yellow than that bird, the olive-green of its upper plumage partaking of the yellow tinge which is so bright and clear below. It was called *Raii*, in honour of John Ray, the friend of Willughby, and one of the pioneers of British ornithology, who flourished about two hundred years ago. In some places it is called the 'Barley Bird,' and in others the 'Oatseed Bird,' from its arrival being coincident with the spring sowing of those two species of grain. In Malta, on arriving on migration in flocks, these birds are caught in nets, and kept in shops and houses for the purpose of killing flies,* with which that island is infested in summer, and none but those who have experienced it can conceive what an intolerable nuisance the plague of flies is. In France it is *Bergeronnette printanière* or *de printemps*, 'Little Shepherdess of Spring.' In Germany, *Gelbe Bachstelze*; and in Sweden, *Gul Ärla*, 'Yellow Wagtail.'

ANTHIDÆ (THE PIPITS). .

This is the last family of the tooth-billed tribe, and it forms an excellent connecting link between the soft-billed insect-eaters and the hard-billed grain-consumers. In many respects allied to the Wagtails last described, in others nearly resembling the Larks, the first family of the Conirostral tribe, it is, however, a true soft-billed race, and subsists entirely on insects.

The Anthidæ derive their name from *Anthus*, known in mythology as the son of *Autonous* and *Hippodameia*, who was torn to pieces by his father's horses, and was metamorphosed into a bird, which imitated the neighing, but always fled from the sight of a horse.†

69. TREE PIPIT (*Anthus arboreus*).

This is a summer visitor, and though far from common, may be seen in most woodland districts: it is by far the most beautiful

* Mr. Wright's 'Birds of Malta,' in *Ibis* for 1864, p. 62.

† B.O.U. 'List of British Birds,' p. 32.

of the genus, and the sweetest songster; and has a habit of rising above the top of some tall tree, and singing with outstretched wings on its descent. In colour it very much resembles the larks; is somewhat larger than its congener next to be described, from which it differs in the stronger and broader bill, and in the short and hooked hind claw; also its gait on the ground is a slow walk, while the 'Meadow Pipit' runs after the manner of the Wagtails.

It is notorious that the eggs of this species differ very much, both in general colour and in markings; but Mr. Seeborn says that those in each cluster are alike; and that it is more probable that each bird lays a peculiar type, which it has inherited from its parents, and transmitted to its offspring.* It is—like its more numerous and indigenous congener *A. pratensis*—often called the 'Titlark;' and Mr. Knox reports that it is styled by the Brighton birdcatchers the 'Real Titlark,' to distinguish it from its fellow.† On the Continent it derives its name, as with us, from the trees in which it dwells; in France it is *Pipit des buissons*; in Germany, *Baumpieper*; and in Sweden, *Träd-Piplärka*.

70. MEADOW PIPIT (*Anthus pratensis*).

Very common, especially on our furze-clad downs, where it remains the whole year, though it will occasionally assemble in flocks, and haunts stubble and turnip-fields in winter. Mr. Cordeaux says that in Yorkshire the resident birds receive large additions to their number in early spring by the arrival of migratory flocks; and that they are the first of the little spring visitors whose cheery note is so welcome in the bleak marshes, where they arrive early in March, usually preceding the less hardy Pied Wagtail by a full fortnight.‡ But in truth it will brave very severe weather, for it has been met with in abundance in Northern Lapland and even on the highest fjall moors of Scandinavia, to which it resorts in summer to breed; and when autumn comes with its icy blasts, warning all strangers to retire,

* 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 222.

† 'Birds of Sussex,' p. 203.

‡ 'Birds of the Humber,' p. 44.

it is the last of the smaller migratory birds that takes its departure for the south.* In Ireland and Scotland it is known as the 'Titling' and 'Moss-cheeper,' the latter in allusion to the moss and peat covered ground in which it delights, and also to its call-note. In the northern counties of England it is called the 'Ling Bird,' again from its partiality for the moors; but in most places it is generally known as the Titlark. It sings in the air as it descends to the earth, as its cousin the Tree Pipit does in descending to some lofty tree-top; it is a quiet, unobtrusive bird, builds its nest on the ground, and is very frequently the foster-parent of the young cuckoo: its hind toe is furnished with an elongated and straightened claw; its bill is slender; it warbles rather than sings; and its flight consists in short jerks. The Rev. G. Marsh said that its scent is so strong that pointers commonly mistake it for the partridge—indeed, much more frequently than they do the skylark.

In France, as in England, it is known under many names, as *Pipit Farlouse* and *le Cujelier*, and *l'Alouette des Prés*; in Germany, it is *Wiesenpieper*; and in Sweden, *Äng-Piplärka*. In Spain and Portugal, as is so often the case in those countries, the several species are not recognised; but all the Pipits in Spain are called *Cinceta*, and in Portugal *Sombria* and *Cia*.

This closes the list of the tooth-billed perchers resident in or visiting Wiltshire.

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 304.

CHAPTER VI.

INSESSORES (*Perchers*).

CONIROSTRES (*Cone-billed*).

WE come now to the second great division of the Perching birds ; and having examined all those whose soft notched bill proclaims the insect nature of their food, we have arrived at those exhibiting a harder and more conical-shaped beak, bespeaking at once that grain forms the principal part of their diet. As we proceed with the families of this tribe, we shall see this typical characteristic develop itself more and more, till we come to some species armed with such strong sharp-pointed beaks as to be enabled to break the very stoutest seeds and even the stones of many fruits, as well as to pierce the hard ground, in search of food ; but, as I before pointed out, nature makes no rapid strides from one distinct kind to another, but only gradually and step by step leads us on ; thus, insensibly as it were, and through many connecting links, joining together genera and species, the most opposite to one another in appearance and habits.

ALAUDIDÆ (THE LARKS).

We cannot have a better proof of what I have just said than in the family we now proceed to consider, standing at the head of the Conirostral tribe, and bearing so great an affinity in many respects to the last family of the Dentirostres, viz., the Pipits : for the Larks, though to a certain extent grain-consumers, yet feed on insects as well ; and though they have a short strong bill, yet it is styled by Selby and Yarrell *Subconic*, rather than conical, proving the exact position they hold.

Alauda is said to be a Celtic word, meaning 'great songstress,' from *al*, 'high' or 'great,' and *aud*, 'a song.' Hence is derived the French *Alouette* (B.O.U.). Our English word 'lark' is a contraction of 'lavrock,' meaning 'a crafty worker,' 'a worker of ill,' and the name points to some superstition, now forgotten, which regarded the bird as of ill-omen [Skeat].

71. SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*).

Intimately associated in the minds of all with blue sky, bright sunshine, open down, and aërial music, is the very name of this favourite songster. All its motions betoken such excessive happiness in unconstrained liberty, such intense appreciation of freedom, as it mounts upwards higher and higher, and soaring into the clouds, pours forth such strains as ravish mortals below, that it is positively painful to see it incarcerated in a cage, and to reflect how its heart must throb, and how intensely it must pine to burst its prison bars and soar away out of sight of its persecutors, singing a hymn of gladness and gratitude at its escape. It remains with us the whole year, and is essentially one of our down birds, preferring open arable lands to more inclosed districts; towards autumn it associates in flocks and frequents stubble and turnip fields. Its food consists of seeds of all kinds, as well as insects of various sorts; and the benefit it confers on the agriculturist in this wholesale destruction of noxious weeds and insects is incalculable. But notwithstanding this, it is killed in astonishing numbers for the table in England France, Italy, and especially Germany. In the London markets alone, in 1854, 400,000 are said to have been sold, 20,000 or 30,000 having been often sent together. There can be little doubt that over the western half of Europe the Skylark must be the most numerous bird, as from a commercial point of view it is one of the most valuable.* In France it is *Alouette des champs*, and in Germany *Feldlerche*, which are simply translations of *arvensis*; but in Sweden it is *Sång Lärka*, 'Song-Lark;' and in

* Professor Newton in fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 622.

Italy *Allodola*, 'the one who gives praise.' In Spain, on the contrary, it is *Zurriaga*, 'the scourge which inflicts punishment.'

It never perches on trees, but walks or runs on the ground very swiftly, which it is enabled to do by means of the very long straight hind claw, which gives it a firm footing on the ground. In the north of England the country people have a curious notion that, if you are desirous of knowing what the lark says, you must lie down on your back in the field and listen, and you will then hear him say:

'Up in the lift go we,
Tehee, tehee, tehee, tehee!
There's not a shoemaker on the earth
Can make a shoe to me, to me!
Why so, why so, why so?
Because my heel is as long as my toe.'^o

Elsewhere its song is described by a more ambitious poet:

'Ecce! suum *tirili, tirili, tiritirliri* tractim
Candida per vernum cantat alauda solum.'

It sings in descending as well as in ascending and while hovering in the air; and anon, as some fright or sudden impulse seizes it, down it will come like a stone to the earth and away amongst the corn to its nest, but only to soar upwards again presently, rising on quivering wing almost perpendicularly, and singing more merrily than before; and we may hear it carolling away long after we have lost sight of the rapidly diminishing speck retreating into the clouds, for 'Excelsior' is ever the motto of this aspiring bird. Montagu says 'the Field or Meadow Lark is nowhere so plentiful as in the north of Wiltshire,' and I am happy to report that the account he gave some fourscore years ago still holds good. It is still one of our most abundant, as well as one of our most charming, birds, scattered over the broad tracts of corn-land, and as plentiful on Salisbury Plain as in North Wilts. The same author remarks that they are seen in Egypt about Cairo in autumn in incredible numbers, and are supposed to come there from Barbary. In Egypt they are called *Asfour Djebali*, or 'Mountain Birds.'

^o Dyer's 'English Folk-lore,' p. 75.

72. WOOD-LARK (*Alauda arborea*).

In France, *Alouette lulu*; in Germany, *Baumlerche*; in Sweden, *Träd Lärka*, 'Tree Lark'; in Malta, *Ciuklajta*, or 'Rattle'; in Portugal, *Cotovia pequena*, 'the Lesser Lark.' Very like its congener, but considerably smaller, with a shorter tail, and a white line over the eye and round the back of the head, this species is sparingly scattered through the county, frequenting woods, as its name implies, and singing sweetly while perched on some tree as well as while sailing about on the wing: indeed, it has generally the reputation of excelling the Skylark in song, though I am scarcely willing to allow this. Montagu was the first to call attention to the fact that, with the hedge warbler, redbreast, missel thrush, and throstle, it will frequently sing in frosty weather after Christmas if the weather is bright in midday, and, he adds, all these birds are early breeders. It is a permanent resident with us, and in food and nesting closely resembles the preceding. I have before me many notes of its occurrence from various localities both in North and South Wilts, proving that it is generally distributed throughout the county. Mr. Morres relates what, I think, is very unusual, that a flock of sixty was seen in a wheat stubble near Lord Nelson's seat at Trafalgar, and that nine of them were caught by a bird-catcher.

EMBERIZIDÆ (THE BUNTINGS).

Members of this family may at once be distinguished from all others by a hard, bony, oblong knob in the upper mandible, which is narrow and smaller than the lower one. They are somewhat clumsy in form, with large heads and short necks, and heavy in flight; they eat grain and seeds in the winter, but in the summer insects and their larvæ form no small portion of their food. Our English word 'Bunting' means, according to Professor Skeat, 'one that pokes his head forward,' the old word *buntin* signifying 'short,' 'thick,' 'plump,' which is sufficiently descriptive of the short neck of members of this family.

73. SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophanes nivalis*).

This native of northern regions, known in Sweden as *Snö-Sparf*, 'Snow Sparrow;' in France, *Bruant de Neige*; in Germany, *Schneeammer*; in Italy, *Ortolano Nivola*, seldom comes so far south as Wiltshire, though it appears pretty regularly every winter on our eastern and northern coasts, and I have met with it in considerable numbers on the shores of the Wash, in Norfolk. At that season, however, its plumage is reddish-brown above and dull white beneath, and so much do individuals vary from one another in hue as well as in the distribution of their colours, that they have often been erroneously divided into several species, receiving the sobriquet of 'Tawny' and 'Mountain' Bunting, according to their sex and age and garb; but it is in summer plumage and in the extreme north that this bird is to be seen in perfection, arrayed in its attractive dress of deep black and pure white, and haunting the highest and most desolate fjelds of Scandinavia. And there I have been so fortunate as to meet with it on several occasions, now flitting from one lichen-covered rock to another, now running quickly over the snow, seeming to delight in those wild inhospitable regions, so congenial to its habits, but so little to the taste of most members of the animal kingdom. Though it strays southwards in winter, it returns regularly in spring within the Arctic Circle to breed in very high latitudes; and touching tales have been told of the extravagant delight and wild excitement of the crews of ice-bound vessels—who had passed the long dreary months of winter, fast frozen in during some Arctic expedition—caused by the appearance of the first Snow Bunting, which was seen fluttering about among the hummocks, uttering its sweet and plaintive chirp, which to them was the most pleasing music they had heard for many a long day. No wonder the sudden appearance among them of this little visitor was so interesting, for it was the first bird they had seen for nine long months. Even the invalids, as they lay on the sledges, requested that they might have their faces uncovered, so as both to see and hear the little

friend that had flown off to them, as if it were a messenger to welcome the ship's crew back to life and friends.* Other Arctic voyagers have also spoken with enthusiasm of the arrival of this harbinger of spring, and recounted how the despondent, homesick sailors were cheered by the pleasant twitter of this welcome visitor.† And Major Fielden found a nest in Grinnel Land above lat. $82\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$; indeed, it is not known that any bird breeds farther north than this thoroughly Arctic species.

I have never seen it in this county, but I learnt from Mr. Withers that it has been occasionally killed in various localities, and brought to him for preservation; and Mr. Elgar Sloper, of Devizes, informs me that he has seen several which had been killed on Salisbury Plain. The Rev. A. P. Morres records its occurrence now and then in very hard winters near Salisbury; two having been seen near Grately in 1868, associating with a large flock of Bramblings; one killed at Brixton Deverill and one at Mersome years since. I should therefore describe it as an occasional and not very infrequent straggler, though by no means a regular winter visitant here.

It is sometimes called the 'Snow-flake,' and Saxby writes, 'Seen against a dark hillside or a lowering sky, a flock of these birds presents an exceedingly beautiful appearance; and it may then be seen how aptly the term 'Snow-flake' has been applied to the species. I am acquainted with no more pleasing combination of sight and sound than that afforded when a cloud of these birds, backed by a dark gray sky, descends as it were in a shower to the ground, to the music of their own sweet tinkling notes.‡ The meaning of the generic name *Plectrophanes* is given in the B.O.U. list as 'Spur-showing,' from *πλήκτρον*, 'a spur,' and *φαίω*, 'I show.' Temminck, too, classes it in a distinct section of the Emberizidæ, which he calls *Bruants eperroniers*, 'Spurred

* 'The Great Frozen Sea,' a personal narrative of the voyage of the *Alert* during the Arctic expedition of 1875-6, by Captain Albert Hastings Markham, R.N.

† Nordenskiöld, 'Arctic Voyages in 1858-1879,' pp. 51, 218-265.

‡ Professor Newton's fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 7.

Buntings,' though I cannot find that he assigns any reason for the name.

74. COMMON BUNTING (*Emberiza miliaria*).

Though extremely common, especially in the vast tracts of arable land on our downs, this bird, from its great similarity of plumage to the Skylark, is seldom recognised by ordinary observers; and yet its more bulky shape and heavier gait and more awkward flight should at once distinguish it from its more sprightly companion. It has little or no song, but may be seen perched on the topmost spray of some low hedge, uttering its somewhat harsh screaming note. It is the largest of the family, and remains with us throughout the year; but though some are undoubtedly resident, their ranks are augmented every year by the arrival of large flocks of migrants. 'During the pairing season,' says Professor Nilsson, 'it flies in a totally different manner to what it does at other times. Its legs hang down, it elevates its wings, and moves them rapidly, and thus gradually *drags* itself, as it were, from one elevation to another. Again,' he remarks, 'it never leaves the open line of country where it once appears, and never flies over a forest.' This is in allusion to its summer habits in Sweden; for here, when frost and snow appear, it congregates in flocks with Finches and Sparrows, and seeks the shelter and the food which the rickyard offers. The specific name *miliaria* simply signifies 'feeder on millet,' an unfortunate title, which might, with equal propriety, have been given to any other of the genus. Nor is our 'Corn' or 'Common Bunting,' or 'Bunting Lark,' nor the Scandinavian name *Korn Sparf*, 'Corn Sparrow,' more happy. In Leicestershire both this and the Yellow Bunting are called 'Writing Larks,' from the strange markings of the nature of scribbling, perhaps by the pen of an Arab, on their peculiar eggs.* In Sussex it is known as the 'Clod Bird,' from its habit of perching on a projecting clod of turf or clay in a stubble or fallow field, while it utters its monotonous note.† In France it is *le Proyer* or *Bruant Proyer*;

* *Zoologist* for 1885, p. 466. † Knox, 'Birds of Sussex,' pp. 132, 205.

in Germany, *Grauammer*; in Spain (where it is pronounced by Howard Saunders to be 'the most abundant bird in Andalusia,' and the 'number of it brought into the markets to equal that of all the larks, sparrows, and thrushes put together'), it is known as *Triguero*, 'Corn-merchant.'

75. BLACK-HEADED BUNTING (*Emberiza schœniclus*).

Called also the *Reed Bunting* from the localities it frequents, and the *Reed Sparrow* from its general resemblance to our common House Sparrow. In Sweden, *Säf Sparf* or 'Sedge Sparrow;' in France, *Bruant de roseau*; in Germany, *Rohr-ammer*; and its scientific name *schœniclus* is also derived from the Greek *σχόνοζ*, 'a rush or reed.' This bright handsome bird may be met with sparingly wherever there is water; indeed, I have often seen it frequenting a dry ditch, and have found its nest at some distance from the nearest stream: it delights, however, in moist wet places, abounding in sedge and reeds and coarse grass, and here you may generally see its black head standing out in contrast with its white collar.

Harting says that he has seen it, when in pursuit of food, walk into the water, like a true wader, until the water reached above the tarsus.* It is resident with us throughout the year, but (as with so many of our residents) its numbers are reinforced in winter by arrivals from abroad. In winter the male loses its black head, and comes forth in March bright in nuptial array. It is notorious for the clever manœuvres it displays in alluring the intruder from its nest, just as the Lapwing, and the Partridge, and some others do, shuffling along on the ground, trailing its wings, or dragging its leg as if broken, and all to entice the unwelcome visitor from dangerous proximity to its young.

76. YELLOW BUNTING (*Emberiza citrinella*).

Well known to everybody as the Yellow Hammer, though here we have an instance of a general error so universally propagated

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 76.

that any effort to correct it would seem almost hopeless: yet in truth Yellow Ammer is the correct word, *ammer* being the German term for Bunting, which is undoubtedly meant by the generic name we ordinarily employ, prefixing an unnecessary and meaningless H, after the manner of certain of our provincial countrymen.* The Yellow Bunting may be met with in every hedge and wood during the summer, when it feeds its young entirely, and itself subsists mainly, on caterpillars and insects of various sorts; and in autumn consumes the seeds of weeds to a very large extent, in all of which it proves itself the farmer's best friend. In winter it may be seen in flocks on the bushes and in the open fields, occasionally resorting to the stackyard in severe weather; and a very beautiful bird it is, with golden-yellow head and chestnut and yellow plumage, and highly would it be prized were it not so common: but alas! with birds as with human beings, we are apt to overlook the brightest and best, if they are ever before our eyes, whereas we highly prize and bestow abundant attention on the inferior and less deserving, if only occasionally seen by us.

The specific name *Citrinella* appears to me a somewhat far-fetched adjective, and, moreover, one which fails to describe what it would portray; for under this diminutive, as if from 'a little Citron,' or 'coloured like a little Citron,' who would recognise the brilliant yellow of this handsome species, the *Bruant jaune* of France; the *Gul Sparf*, or 'Yellow Sparrow,' of Sweden; and the *Goldammer* of Germany?

In the northern parts of England it has by some mischance incurred the superstitious dislike of the peasantry, and is commonly known as the 'Devil's Bird.' For it is currently believed that it drinks a drop, some say three drops, of the devil's blood, every May morning, or, as others affirm, every Monday morning. It is therefore much persecuted, and its nest

* Professor Newton in his fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds' has a learned note on this subject, and adduces the high authority of Mr. Skeat to prove that the prefix H was not added by inadvertence by our old English ornithologists. I cannot, however, honestly say that I am convinced, but I refer my readers to the passage, vol. ii., pp. 43, 44.

receives less mercy than that of almost any other bird; while the boys address it in the following rhyme of reproach :

‘ Half a puddock, half a toad,
 Half a yallow yorling ;
 Drink a drap o’ the deil’s blood
 Every May morning.’*

77. CIRL BUNTING (*Emberiza cirlus*).

The specific name *Cirlus* is, we are told, derived from the Italian *Zirlare*, ‘to chirp.’ In Germany it is known as *Zirlammer*; in France, as *Bruant Zizi*; and in Italy, as *Zivolo* or *Zigolo*, all bearing the same signification. But in the north of Portugal, where Mr. Tait says it is by far the commonest of the Buntings, it is called *Escreveadeira*, ‘the Scribbler,’ from the markings on the eggs, as I mentioned above.

Montagu first discovered this species in 1800, on the coast of Devonshire, and after much patient watching and careful examination of its habits, after the usual manner of that most accurate and painstaking inquirer, recorded the result of his observations in the ‘Transactions of the Linnæan Society.’ Selby hazarded the assertion that it was only to be found on the coast of Devon. Yarrell too, though he gives Wiltshire as one of the counties it frequents, somewhat inconsistently says that it is ‘generally found on the coast, and does not often appear to go far inland;’ but here for once our grand-master in Ornithology is at fault, and, indeed, ‘quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus;’ for in addition to many notices of its occurrence in all parts of the county, north and south, from various observers on whose accuracy I can rely, I have repeatedly watched it in several localities which it regularly haunts, and have not only killed it, but have found its nest in the neighbourhood of Devizes.

Only last summer, Mrs. Story Maskelyne informed me that it was nesting in the gardens at Basset Down; and in South Wilts the Rev. A. P. Morres described it as widely scattered, though not numerous, in the neighbourhood of Salisbury. Mr. Baker,

* Dyer’s ‘English Folk-lore,’ p. 71.

too, says it breeds annually at Mere, and that he has seen it for the last twenty years in one particular spot, but has never met with it in any other part of the parish. In habits it closely follows the Yellow Bunting, which it also greatly resembles in general appearance; differing, however, sufficiently to be at once distinguished from the commoner species, by the dark green top of the head and throat, olive-green breast, and other marks.

FRINGILLIDÆ (THE FINCHES).

By some authors these are styled Passerine birds or Sparrows: with the exception of the bill (which is broad and concave, instead of being narrow and furnished with a prominent knob) they closely resemble the Buntings last described. The members of this family are all of small size, and their characteristics are large head, short neck, and compact body; they are an active lively race, gregarious in winter, for the most part granivorous, and very abundant numerically as well as specifically: we have no less than eleven distinct species in this county, either as residents or occasional visitants.

78. CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla cœlebs*).

As common as the Sparrow, and as well known to everybody, is this active handsome bird, flocking to our yards in winter, and frequenting our meadows and woods in summer; but not so generally known, perhaps, is the cause of its specific name *cœlebs*, 'the Bachelor.' It arises from the separation of the sexes into distinct flocks in the winter in northern countries, the females migrating southward by themselves, and leaving the males to club together, as bachelors best may, or to follow after their truant wives at their leisure: on this account Linnæus named them *cœlebes*, and the name is not undeserved even in these more southern latitudes; for the males and females frequently divide into separate flocks in the winter, as good old Gilbert White of Selborne long since pointed out, and as we may verify for ourselves any winter.

Its nest is a perfect marvel of artistic skill, most dexterously put together, and then adorned with bits of lichen, applied with admirable ingenuity on the exterior. In France it is called *Pinson*; in Spain, *Pinzon*; in Portugal, *Pim-pim*; in Germany, *Gemeine Fink*; in Italy, *Pinsione*; and in Southern Scandinavia, where it is very abundant, *Bo Fink*; and in England it is provincially known as *Pink*, *Spink*, and *Twink*, all having reference to the sound of its call-note. In olden times the plaintive note of the Chaffinch was interpreted as a sign of rain; when, therefore, the boys heard it, they first imitated it, and then rhymingly referred to the expected consequences:

‘Weet, weet!—dreep, dreep!’*

This is another undoubted benefactor to the agriculturist, for during the summer it subsists and feeds its young almost entirely on insects, and at other seasons devours the minute seeds of innumerable noxious weeds. Our English word ‘Chaffinch,’ says Professor Skeat, is ‘the finch that delights in chaff;’ given to it because it frequents our barndoors and stackyards.

79. MOUNTAIN FINCH (*Fringilla montifringilla*).

This pretty bird, called also the ‘Brambling,’ though not a regular winter visitant, occurs so frequently as to be by no means uncommon; I have notices of it from several parts of Salisbury Plain, and Mr. B. Hayward told me it occurs on the Lavington Downs occasionally in some numbers; Mr. Withers said it had often been killed near Devizes, and many of them have passed through his hands; and during 1858 I received a fine specimen in the flesh from the Rev. F. Goddard, which was killed March 10th at Sopworth, Malmesbury, and is now in my collection; and was very kindly offered another by the Rev. H. Hare, which was killed at Bradford. Since then I have myself shot it in my garden at Yatesbury, out of a small flock which was occupying some larch trees, and the Rev. A. P. Morres relates that in 1868 it visited the neighbourhood of Salisbury in

* Chambers’s ‘Popular Rhymes.’ p. 190.

very large flocks, amounting to thousands; when forty were killed at one shot, and six or seven dozen were trapped by a birdcatcher in one day. Its visits here, however, are most irregular, and several consecutive winters often elapse without the arrival of a single individual. By the Marlborough College Natural History Reports, I learn that flocks were seen in that neighbourhood in January, 1871; that early in February, 1873, vast numbers arrived, and were to be found all round the town, when thirty-five were secured at a single shot; that in December, 1875, they were again seen in large flocks on the farms bordering on Marlborough Forest, and that in 1877 they were common on the downs above Rockley. Lord Arundell mentions one that had been brought to him which was killed at Wardour. Mr. Grant has furnished me with a list of twenty-two which have passed through his hands for preservation since 1863, which were taken at Berwick Bassett, Netheravon, Keevil, Patney, Roundway, Wedhampton, Collingbourne, Lavington, Allington, All Cannings, and Bratton. Lord Radnor writes me word in March of this year (1887) that he picked up one dead at Longford; while the Rev. A. P. Morres says they were common both this year and last about Britford, and that seven were killed at one shot in Longford Park. In the name *Fringilla montifringilla* there is unnecessary repetition; *fringilla* is defined to mean 'a bird that squeaks or twitters,' but 'the twitterer mountain twitterer' is clumsy. In France it is *Le Pinson d'Ardennes*; in Germany and Sweden, *Bergfink*; in Italy, *Fringuello montanino*; in Spain, *Montañas*; and in Portugal, *Tentilhão montez*.

The Mountain Finch, when it appears here, is always found associating with the Chaffinches, which it much resembles in habits, but is conspicuous amongst them by its exceedingly handsome plumage of black, white, and fawn-colour so mingled as to form a pleasing contrast. Its true habitat is in the vast pine forests of Northern Europe, where it breeds, not fearing to penetrate to the far north, even to the woods which come down to the borders of the Icy Sea; and where it finds its favourite

birch-tree, which it selects in preference to all others for its nursery. But on its return to more southern latitudes on the approach of winter, the migratory flocks of this species assume dimensions which seem to our unaccustomed eyes almost incredible; for we read of columns a quarter of a mile long, and fifteen yards broad; and again of some hundred thousand frequenting the foot of the Thüringerwald; and again of six hundred dozen being killed every night in Lorraine, on the appearance of a flock in 1765; and as a climax, a flight of about sixty million in Luxemburg in 1865!* In quoting these numbers I have no thought of disputing or doubting their accuracy, but I would point out that living in an island, and in an inland county in that island, we little know the amazing numbers in which flocks of birds occasionally move.

80. HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*).

So well known to everybody that I need not say a word about it, beyond calling attention to the extremely handsome plumage of the cock-bird, which is often overlooked; the colours, black, gray, chestnut, and brown, blend with peculiar harmony; I mean of course in our country specimens, for in favour of town sparrows I have nothing to say, pert, ill-conditioned, dirty, and grimed with soot as they are. Here, however, I would call attention to the Sparrow Club, or the Sparrow Fund, which used to exist in so many of our agricultural parishes in this county; and in many of the Churchwardens' account-books may be seen, as a considerable item of the Church-rate annually and for very many years past, so many dozen Sparrows destroyed at so much per dozen, the price varying according to the maturity or immaturity of the victims: Thus in an old Churchwarden's book, belonging to my small parish, dating from above 100 years ago, I see the items every year of from 20 to 90 dozen old Sparrows at 4 pence the dozen, and from 10 to 70 dozen young birds at 2 pence the dozen; and these, with an occasional shilling for the

* Professor Newton in fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 77.

capture of a fox, a goat for a polecat, and an occasional sixpence given to a sailor, seem to have formed the principal part of the church expenses of the good parish of Yatesbury for above 100 years—so lightly did the Church-rate sit upon our forefathers!—and this continued to within forty years ago, when my predecessor considered Sparrow-killing scarcely a legitimate Church expense. Now I am not about to deny that Sparrows are mischievous, or to inveigh against their destruction, which I suppose to a certain extent is rendered necessary; but I would observe, first of all, that they are not wholly inimical to man, for (like most, if not all, of their fellows) they feed their young altogether on caterpillars and insects, as may readily be granted if we consider how unfitted must be the callow young at that early stage of their existence to digest seeds or corn. And again, I would observe that the cause of their immoderate abundance is the indiscriminate extermination of all our birds of prey, useful and mischievous alike, at the hands of the gamekeepers and others; for I contend that, were Nature allowed to preserve her own balance, we should not witness the extinction of one species and the enormous increase of another, to the manifest injury of our Fauna. And with reference to the foregoing remarks, before taking leave of the above-named Churchwardens' accounts, I would make two observations which strike me in perusing its pages, viz., the great abundance of foxes, polecats, and such like vermin, and the paucity of Sparrows 100 years ago, as compared with later entries; for whereas in the middle of the last century 4 foxes, 6 polecats, and 30 dozen Sparrows seem to have been the annual tale of the slain, at the beginning of the present century 2 foxes, 1 polecat, and 60 dozen Sparrows form the average sum-total. But the last entry recording such items, viz. A.D. 1840, shows that whereas foxes and polecats are exterminated from the parish, as far as their persecution by Church-rate is concerned, no less than 178 dozen Sparrows met with an untimely end in that year; proving that notwithstanding the persecution raised against them, Sparrows still increase upon us, and have enormously increased since the universal destruction of so many

of our birds of prey, for whose behoof they seem in great part to have been provided.

In France it is known as *Le Moineau*, doubtless on account of its apparent cowl; in Germany, as *Haus Sperling*; and in Sweden, as *Grä-Spink*; in Italy, *Passero*; in Spain, *Gorrion* or 'little pig;' and in Portugal, *Pardal*, 'the gray bird,' as in Sweden. 'Our word *Sparrow*,' says Professor Skeat, 'means "flutterer," from *spar*, "to quiver," or "flutter."'*

Before I take leave of the House Sparrow, I would relate an anecdote of that bird communicated to me by Mr. James Waylen, of Devizes. In 1785, in the days of lofty head-dresses, some ladies and gentlemen were drinking tea in a garden in the Close at Salisbury, when a Sparrow perched on the head of one of the ladies, and then disappeared; till after some time it was discovered to have made the ladies' head its resting-place, unperceived and unfelt by the owner. The philosophical Editor of the *Salisbury Journal* conjectured that it must be some love-stricken spirit!

81. TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*).

In my former papers on the Ornithology of Wilts, I omitted this species; for at that time I did not feel sure of its presence in the county. Subsequent observation has, however, enabled me to add it to our list; for I have myself seen it on more than one occasion; and others, both in North and South Wilts, have recorded it from time to time. Still, though doubtless often overlooked, it appears to me to be very local, and somewhat capricious in its choice of abode. Nowhere, however, in Wilts is it by any means common. In short, I believe it to be very sparingly distributed over the Western Counties of England, but little known in the neighbouring county of Somerset, and scarcely if at all recognised in Dorset, Devon, and Cornwall.* It is to be distinguished from the House Sparrow by its smaller size, chocolate-coloured head, and triangular patch of black on the

* Cecil Smith's 'Birds of Somerset,' p. 184.

sides of the neck.* It is called 'Tree Sparrow' from its habit of resorting for rest as well as for breeding purposes to trees apart from the habitation of man, and *montanus* from its supposed partiality for hilly districts. It does, however, on occasions build in the thatch of a barn, in company with the House Sparrow, but in such cases it has been observed, singularly enough, to differ from its congener in its mode of entering the nest, not from the inside of the building as does the species with which we are most familiar, but by holes on the outside of the thatch. In France it is distinguished as *Le Friquet*, which I can only translate as 'the prig;' in Germany, as *Feld Sperling*; in Sweden, as *Pil-Fink*.

82. GREENFINCH (*Coccothraustes chloris*).

Also extremely common throughout the county, and residing with us the whole year, and easily distinguished from all others by its olive-green dress tinged with yellow and gray. The generic name *Coccothraustes*, from *κόκκος* + *θραύω*, signifies 'berry-breaker,' which is no inappropriate designation of the several species, armed as they all are with so powerful an instrument for securing the kernels inclosed in hard envelopes. *Chloris* aptly describes the yellowish-green, which is the prevailing colour of the bird, from *χλωρός*, 'green;' and this has been the origin of its name in all the Continental languages: in France, *Le Verdier*; in Germany, *Grünling*; in Italy, *Verdone*; in Sweden, *Grön-Fink*; in Spain, *Verdon* and *Verderon*; in Portugal, *Verdilhão*.

It is a very pretty bird, and is sometimes styled the 'Green Grosbeak,' from the large thick form of its bill; this gives it rather a clumsy appearance, and indeed in shape it is somewhat heavy and compact, and has none of the elegance which distinguishes other members of its family. It can boast of no song, and associates in winter with chaffinches and yellow buntings, which congregate at that season in the stubble-field and rickyard.

* Harting's 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 82.

Greenfinches are in the habit of returning regularly to the same evergreen shrubs in which they roost; and Selby has pointed out that, before they retire for the night, they quit the company of their associates, and make many ringing flights round their resting station. This, however, is not peculiar to this species only, but is a habit common to several other kinds of birds.*

83. HAWFINCH (*Coccothraustes vulgaris*).

When once seen will not be confounded with any other species, its large horny beak giving it a remarkable appearance; and this thickness of bill renders necessary a large size of head and a stout neck, which give the bird a top-heavy clumsy look, making the body and limbs seem disproportionately small. It occasionally visits us in the winter, when it may be seen consuming greedily the berries of the whitethorn; the stones of which it breaks with apparent ease by means of its strong and massive bill; and it is remarkable that while it feeds on the kernels of plums, cherries, haws, etc., it rejects the pulpy fruit which surrounds them. It is of most shy retiring habits, and hence escapes general observation even where it is not uncommon: for this is one of the very few species of our British birds which has been of late years, by the testimony of those most qualified to judge, decidedly on the increase. It has also of late been discovered to remain and breed here in several localities, among which favoured spots we have been enabled (through the diligence of a member of Marlborough College) to include this county; † for Mr. Reginald Bosworth Smith informed us that 'it frequents Savernake Forest, and nearly every spring three or four or even five nests are met with; they select the thickest hawthorn bushes, and build their nests close to the top, where they are quite concealed.' In addition to this statement of its permanent residence here, I have notices of its occurrence in 1845 near Devizes from Mr. Elgar Sloper; of its being frequently killed in North Wilts, and brought to Mr. Withers for preservation; of its appearance

* See *Zoologist*, for 1857, p. 5681.

† Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 107.

near Salisbury in 1832 from Mr. Marsh ; and I have myself shot it at Old Park, on the topmost spray of a copper beech in the garden (as I before mentioned in this volume, p. 39). Of later years Major Spicer wrote me word that a specimen in good plumage was picked up dead in Spye Park in October, 1876 ; Mr. Alexander informed me that one was killed by his gardener at Westrop House in February, 1877. The Rev. G. Ottley reported, and courteously sent for my inspection, one killed at Luckington Rectory in December, 1878 ; and in the same month the coachman at Old Park reported another specimen seen there busily engaged with the berries in some hawthorn-bushes. Mr. W. Stancomb, jun., has seen it at Bayntun ; Mr. G. Watson Taylor reports that it frequently nests at Erlestoke ; Mr. Algernon Neeld says that there are always a pair or two in the grounds at Grittleton ; and Mr. Grant has furnished me with a list comprising thirty specimens which have been killed in the neighbourhood of Devizes, and have come into his hands for preservation. While in the south of the county Lord Heytesbury reports one killed in the water meadows on his estate, within the last four or five years. Lord Arundell says a flight of male birds with reddish heads and handsome plumage visited Wardour some time since. Lord Nelson possesses a specimen killed at Trafalgar. Mr. W. Wyndham says it is common at Dinton ; and in short, the Rev. A. P. Morres says that though formerly looked upon as a rare straggler in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, it has now become a frequent visitor there, and gives evidence for belief that it occasionally breeds in the district round Warminster. My friend the Rev. G. S. Master, until lately Rector of West Dean, bore testimony to their annual occurrence in his garden ; on one occasion, in 1877, accompanied by a family of five young ones, where—to the indignation of his gardener—they attacked the peas with much chattering and screeching, and committed no small havoc in a very short time. So that when Mr. Seebohm says there is no authentic account of its breeding in the West of England,* I think he is mistaken, for both North and South Wilts claim it as

* 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 57.

a native of the county. In France it is simply *Le Gros-bec* : but in Germany, *Kirsch Kernbeisser*, 'Cherry-stone Biter;' in Sweden, *Sten-Knäck*, 'Stone-breaker;' and in Spain, *Casca-nueces*, 'Nut-breaker.'

Its general colour is reddish-brown, with black throat, and black and white wings and tail; the largest wing-feathers have a peculiar formation, and present the appearance of having been clipped square at the ends with a pair of scissors; they are glossy black, with a white oblong spot on the inner webs, singularly truncated at their points, or (as Yarrell says) 'formed like an antique battle or billhook.' The beak in the living bird is of a delicate rose-tint, which, however, quickly fades after death to a dull yellow.

84. GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis elegans*).

This is one of the few birds which everybody knows, and everybody appreciates: its bright gay plumage of brilliant colours, its sprightly form, active habits, and sweetness of song rendering it a great favourite: its scientific name well describes it, *Carduelis*, from *carduus*, 'a thistle,' signifying the 'Thistle Finch,' and surely a more elegant handsome bird does not exist. But a bird so brilliantly clad and so much sought after was sure to receive many provincial names at the hands of the birdcatchers, some of which have been bestowed upon it in admiration, as 'Red-cap' and 'King Harry;' but others in derision, as 'Proud Tailor' and 'Fool's Coat;' young birds are sometimes designated 'Gray-pates' and 'Branchers.*' The names by which it is known to Continental naturalists are derived partly from the generic *Carduelis*, as in France *Le Chardonneret*, and in Germany *Distelzeisig*, both meaning 'Thistle Finch;' partly from the specific name *elegans*, as in Spain *Colorin* ('Bright-coloured'), and in Portugal *Milheira Galante* ('Beauteous Linnet'). In Sweden it is *Steglits*, and in Italy *Calderello*.

In my early days it was quite common throughout the county, though never so abundant as to beget too great familiarity, which,

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., pp. 118-124.

we have seen with other species, is too apt to breed contempt. Towards winter it used to be seen in flocks; and commons which abounded in thistles, or fields where those weeds ripened their seed, were the haunts which it loved to frequent, and where it made its choicest banquet.

I regret to say that, unlike the species last described, it is rapidly diminishing in numbers with us, and within my own memory is not nearly so abundant as when I was young; but this was inevitable, as every year has seen waste lands and commons taken into cultivation, and thistle-beds done away. Canon Goddard, who has always been a close observer of birds, has called my special attention to this. He says: 'It is remarkable how very rare the Goldfinch has become in North Wilts. It cannot be that its food is deficient; for it would naturally flourish on agricultural distress, being a consumer of the seeds of weeds! But I have not seen a Goldfinch here (Hilmarton) for several years, and yet it formerly abounded here above measure, and it is the most prolific of birds. An invalid parishioner, living in a solitary cottage in this parish, some years ago, very late in the year (I think in October), showed me a Goldfinch's nest on an open branch of a larch fir in his garden; and he said there were four young ones in it, and it was the fourth family the parents had reared that season, each family consisting of four young birds.' But if getting very scarce, as I am afraid it is, throughout England generally, and as it certainly is in Wiltshire, on the Continent it is still common enough. Thus on the shores of the Mediterranean its numbers are very great, and in France and Italy, and the East, I have met with it in large flocks, but nowhere so abundant as in Portugal.

Professor Steenstrup, in some very interesting observations on this species, called attention to the preference it showed for the pith of willow, lime, and thorn boughs, and the mode in which the bird procures it. This he described as being effected by picking off the bud, and then stripping the bark, an operation in which the bird's *longicone* beak is a very apt tool.*

* See *Ibis*, for 1866, p. 212.

I conclude my account of the Goldfinch with the following observation from the pen of the Rev. G. Marsh, and which I believe is perfectly sound, while the names of Mr. Marsh and Mr. Dyson are sufficient proof that their observation is accurate and not the result of any hastily formed opinion or conjecture. Mr. Marsh writes thus:—‘In the spring of 1851 Rev. F. Dyson first told me that there was a bird which birdcatchers call the “*Chevil*” Goldfinch, quite different from the common Goldfinch, and the only bird that will breed with the common Canary. On the 1st of June I went with him to see one of these birds paired with a canary; it *was* certainly different from the common bird, the red feathers not continuing under the chin; it was a very fine bird, and the birdcatcher (one Fisher, of Cricklade) told me they were always the leading birds of the flock.’ This opinion, which I printed in 1860, has been amply corroborated by the Rev. A. P. Morres, who said there is no doubt at all about there being two distinct species of these birds recognised by the birdcatchers of his district, one of whom said, ‘We call the bigger sort “three-pound-tenners” amongst ourselves, and they are quite different from the others. You can distinguish them readily by the largeness of the white spot on the end of the quill-feathers of the wing, and also by their white throat, and the bigger black crescent, which comes much further round the side of the face, and they are of a more slender shape altogether than the others. They are worth more because they will breed more readily with the canary than the smaller kind, though the latter will do so sometimes.’ Another bird-fancier said that he knew the two birds well, and that they called the bigger sort ‘the Chevil’ or ‘Chevril.’* Professor Newton, however, maintains that it is not a distinct species, but only a variety,† and Montagu referred to it in his day as a variety, under the name of ‘Cheverel,’ but it is hard to say where a variety ends and a species begins.

* *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, vol. xviii., pp. 291, 292.

† Fourth edition of Yarrell’s ‘British Birds,’ vol. ii., p. 124.

85. 'SISKIN' (*Carduelis spinus*).

Better known in this country as a cage-bird, mated with the canary, than in its wild state. It is, however, by no means a rare, or scarcely an occasional visitant, some appearing amongst us almost every year, and sometimes in great numbers, consorting with Linnets and Redpoles, as Mr. Withers, of Devizes, testified. It is a native of northern latitudes, and generally visits us in the winter, when it may be seen clinging to the alder trees, the seeds of which it especially loves. Willoughby, indeed, said that in his day it was known as the 'Barley Bird,' because it arrived at the time of barley-sowing. But this is contrary to modern experience, for the flocks which occasionally visit us certainly appear in the autumn or early winter. The Rev. A. P. Morres, however, gives it as his opinion that at times some will remain throughout the year, and that it occasionally breeds in his district, a birdcatcher in his parish having trapped, in July, 1871, a party of seven, two of which were old birds and five evidently young, and he had reason to believe that they also bred in the neighbouring parish of Nunton. Lord Arundell has known it brought in to him at Wardour; Mr. Grant has had specimens taken at Rowde and the outskirts of Devizes; and the Rev. A. P. Morres informs me that in February of this year (1887) Dr. Blackmore saw a flock of eight birds on the birch-trees in the Museum gardens at Salisbury.

Though somewhat short and thick, it is by no means a clumsy bird; on the contrary, it is exceedingly graceful, and most restless, resembling the Titmice in its almost incessant motions and the variety of its attitudes. Its plumage is a mixture of green and yellow, the former predominating; it is also known as the 'Aberdevine.' In Sweden it is called *Grön Siske*, and in the south of the country abounds in winter as well as in summer, but resorts to the large pine forests for preference, where it breeds. In France it is *Le Tarin*; in Germany, *Erlenzeisig*, 'alder-finch;' in Spain, *Lubano*; and in Portugal, *Canario da França*. *Spinus*, says the B.O.U. Committee, is derived from

σπίρω, 'I chirp shrilly,' and was the name given to a small bird commonly eaten at Athens, from its shrill piping cry. *Siskin* says Professor Skeat, is a Swedish word meaning 'chirper' or 'piper.'

86. COMMON LINNET (*Linota cannabina*).

Extremely numerous throughout this county, more particularly on our downs, where they congregate in autumn in large flocks. In summer the old birds assume a red breast and red forehead, but this is only a nuptial plumage, which they lose when the breeding season is over, exchanging it for the more sober brown in which they are commonly arrayed. This change of dress caused much confusion among our earlier ornithologists, who mistook the bird in summer and winter plumage for two distinct species, and they named the former the Redpole, the latter the Gray Linnet; and this was another error which our countryman Montagu was the first to discover and rectify. It is a joyous gentle bird, quite harmless, and a sweet songster; and (Yarrell informs us) derives its name *Linota*, 'la Linotte,' 'Linnet,' from its partiality to the seeds of the various species of flax (*linum*); from whence also comes *Cannabina*, which has the same signification, from *καννάβις*, 'flax' or 'hemp;' and in Sweden, *Hämpling*. This is another species which, within my experience, is sensibly and even rapidly diminishing in numbers, in consequence of the waste places and commons, where thistles and weeds luxuriated, and which were its favourite haunts, having been now brought into cultivation. In France it is *La grande Linotte de vignes*; in Germany, *Bluthanfling*; in Sweden, *Hämpling*; in Italy, *Montanello maggiore*; and in Spain, *Camacho*.

87. TWITE (*Linota montana*).

I did not include this species in my former papers on the Ornithology of Wilts, for the sufficient reason that I was not then convinced of its occurrence within the county. Now, however, I gladly admit it, on the evidence of the Rev. A. P. Morres, of whose practical acquaintance with the birds of his locality I

have already made so much use, and shall continue to do so throughout this volume. He says that, though very little known or noticed amongst us, it is occasionally seen, and visits us, as he believes, at any rate in the winter, annually. The birdcatcher in his parish, before mentioned, knows the bird well, and has sometimes trapped them, taking three or four in a day, and has caught them at Odstock Pond and at Wittsbury Down, during the months of August and September. Mr. Baker said that they are not unfrequently met with on Mere Downs, and thought it probable that they occasionally bred there; to which conclusion he was led by receiving a pair from a neighbouring birdcatcher early in the autumn of 1870. It is of more slender and elegant appearance than the Common Linnet, and this is in great measure due to the greater length of its tail; it is also to be distinguished by its yellow beak, whence one of its common scientific names, *flavirostris*, and that by which it is recognised in Sweden, *Gul-nåbbad Fink*, or 'Yellow-beaked Finch.' Generally it passes the summer months in the northern parts of Scandinavia, where it frequents the lower regions, and especially delights in the boulders and stones at the foot of the fjelds. At no season does it put on the red breast and head for which its congeners are so conspicuous in the breeding season; but at all times the male has the rump of a reddish hue. It derives the name 'Twite' from its note, and that of 'Mountain Linnet' from the localities it prefers. In general appearance and habits, mode of feeding, and flight, it resembles the Common Linnet; indeed, at a little distance it requires a very practised eye to distinguish between them. In France it is *La Linotte de montagne*, and in Germany, *Arktische Fink*, from the high latitudes to which it resorts for breeding, as well as *Gelbschnabliche Fink*, from the yellow beak mentioned above.

88. LESSER REDPOLE (*Linota linaria*).

This is not a common bird in our southern county, though abundant farther north. It inhabits the pine forests of Scandinavia, and is seldom seen here but in winter. For breeding

purposes, the main body of this species extends its migration into the far north, even to the shores of the Icy Sea; and is chiefly seen in Sweden on passage to and from its nesting-places. Some, however, remain in the pine forests of that country to breed, as indeed they do occasionally in Scotland and even in the north of England. Mr. Withers, however, informed me that he occasionally received one to preserve; and Mr. Elgar Sloper had a female in his collection that was killed at Rowde on its nest in May, 1850. The Rev. A. P. Morres speaks of it as occasionally visiting the neighbourhood of Salisbury; and Mr. Baker says it is to be found in small flocks on the downs near Mere, both in summer and winter; while Mr. King, bird-preserved at Warminster, asserts that he has known instances of its breeding in that locality; but as none of these opinions as to its nesting in Wilts have been corroborated by the production of the specimen, they must not be too readily accepted, more especially when we consider that the species in question has congeners which undoubtedly breed here, of such very close resemblance to it in general appearance and colour and habits, that mistakes might easily occur. I have also information that the eggs of this species have been taken at Castle Combe by Mr. Watkins, agent to Mr. Lowndes, and again near Marlborough.* In France it is *Le Cabaret* and *Sizerin*; in Germany, *Bergzeisig*; in Italy, *Montanello minore*. The specific name, *linaria*, is simply another form of *linota*, and with the same meaning, 'belonging to flax or hemp.' It is a very small bird with bright plumage, and closely resembles the Siskin in all its habits and motions; hence the name by which it is known in Scandinavia, *Grä Siska*, while the true Siskin (*C. spinus*) is known as *Groü Siska*. Like the true Siskin, it will also hang with its back downwards at the extremity of the smaller branches of the birch and alder, and assume a variety of constrained attitudes in its earnest endeavours to reach its favourite seeds; in all which it also reminds us of the family of Titmice.

* See 'Reports of Marlborough College Natural History Society' for 1866, p. 111; and for 1878, p. 94.

89. BULLFINCH (*Pyrrhula vulgaris*).

The scientific name, *Pyrrhula*, is said to signify 'a red or fine-coloured bird,' which will describe its general hue sufficiently well; but it has also been interpreted as meaning 'fine-coloured tail,' from *πυρρός*, 'the colour of flame,' and *ουρα*, 'a tail' (B.O.U.); anything remarkable, however, in the colour of the tail the bird does not possess.* 'Bullfinch' doubtless means 'large Finch,' just as a 'Bullfrog' is a large frog, and a 'Bullrush' a large species of rush. In Sweden it is known as *Domherre*, and in Norway as *Dompap*; both Swedish and Norwegian designations mean 'a Canon of the Church.' 'Perhaps so called,' says quaint old Pontoppidan, 'for its melodious voice, resembling an organ, though not loud enough to fill the choir of a cathedral where the canons sing their Horæ.' In France it is known as *Le Bouvreuil*; in Germany, *Rothburstiger Gimpel*; in Italy, as *Ciufoletto*; and in Portugal, as *Pisco chilreiro*, 'Chirping-finch,' and *Cardeal*, 'Cardinal,' from its red dress. Handsome as this bird is, and sweet as is its song, I fear we must confess it to be one of the most mischievous of the feathered race, for the buds of fruit trees are unhappily its favourite food; and so well can it ply its strong parrot-shaped beak, that in an incredibly short time it will strip a tree of all its fruit-bearing buds, and therefore of all prospect of fruit. It is on this account most hateful to gardeners in early spring, at which season alone it has the courage to come so near human habitations, for it is essentially a shy, timid, retiring bird, and loves the depths of dark woods, and the thickest of hedges for its retreat. Indeed, excepting in spring, it feeds on the seeds of weeds, and supports its young with caterpillars and insects; and it should not be forgotten that during by far the larger portion of the year it is conferring benefits on man. It is sparingly distributed throughout the county, and its plumage is too well known to require comment.

* 'List of British Birds,' by Committee of B.O.U., p. 56.

90. COMMON CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*).

Very eccentric in the periods of its visits here, no less than in the formation of its beak, is this truly singular bird. It is a denizen of northern latitudes, and though an interval of many years frequently elapses between its visits, it will occasionally arrive here in considerable numbers, when it frequents larch and fir plantations. And it is in extracting the seeds from the fir-cones that its remarkable beak (which at first sight appears a deformity) is so useful; this is of great strength, as are also the muscles of the head and neck, enabling it to work the mandibles laterally with extraordinary power (this being the only British bird which exhibits any lateral motion of the mandibles): these are both curved, and at the points overlap one another considerably; and when the bird holds a fir-cone in its foot, after the manner of the parrots, and 'opening its bill so far as to bring the points together, slips it in this position under the hard scales of the cone, the crossing points force out the scale, and the seed which lies below it is easily secured.* An old writer of Queen Elizabeth's time quoted by Yarrell says of it: 'It came about harvest, a little bigger than a sparrow, which had bills thwarted crosswise at the end, and with these it would cut an apple in two at one snap, eating onely the kernel; and they made a great spoil among the apples.' Hence it gained the name of 'Shell-apple' in some localities. The scientific word *Loxia* is from the Greek λοξός, 'awry,' or 'crosswise,' which is applicable enough. When first hatched, and even while the young bird remains in the nest, there is no crossing of the beak to be discerned; both mandibles being perfectly straight, and only assuming the crossed position when the bird ceases to be immature. In Sweden it is called *Mindre-Kors Näbb*, or 'Lesser Crossbill,' to distinguish it from its supposed larger relative, the 'Parrot Crossbill,' which is called in Scandinavia *Storre-Kors Näbb*, 'Greater Crossbill'; but modern ornithologists do not generally allow that these so-called species are distinct. In

* *Monthly Packet*, 'Our Feathered Neighbours,' vol. xi., p. 274.

France it is *Le Bec croisé*; in Germany, *Fichten Kreuzschnabel*, 'Pine Crossbill'; in Spain, *Pico-tuerto*, 'twisted beak,' and in Portugal *Cruzabico*.

I have many notices of its occurrence in almost all parts of the county; suffice it to say that some years since they frequented the larch plantations at Old Park in considerable numbers. Mr. Marsh saw some trees in his garden at Sutton Benger covered with them in 1838, and relates that the keeper at Brinkworth killed fifteen at a shot. In South Wilts Mr. Baker records that a large flock visited Mere in the winter of 1868; Mr. King of Warminster had many brought to him from Stourton about 1873; Mr. T. Powell of Hurdcott reports that they frequented a plantation of Scotch and spruce fir there, some time back; and the Rev. A. P. Morres has numerous notices of their appearance from time to time in the neighbourhood of Salisbury. The 'Marlborough College Natural History Reports' mention a flock at Martinsell in 1866, and some seen in 1870. Major Heneage has a specimen, considered from its large size to be a Parrot Crossbill, which was shot at Compton Bassett in 1868. Lord Methuen informs me that it has been seen at Corsham Court. Mrs. Story Maskelyne recollects its appearance at Basset Down some winters back; and Mr. Grant received half a dozen in the winter of 1868, when it was generally abundant in England.

In plumage scarcely two specimens in a large flock are alike, so variously are its colours distributed, for while some old males are nearly crimson all over, others are of a lighter shade of red, and others again in a mottled garb of green, red, orange, and brown. Its legs, though short, are very strong, and it will climb and swing from branch to branch, taking firm hold with its long hooked claws; it is very active too, and lively in its manners, and remarkably fearless and confiding.

STURNIDÆ (THE STARLINGS).

This is an interesting family, the members of it so pert and lively, and with so many amusing habits; they are very sociable, and usually move in large flocks; omnivorous, for nothing seems

to come amiss to their appetite ; and perfectly harmless, so much so as to have excited but little enmity and little persecution from man.

91. COMMON STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

This is one of our most constant companions, frequenting the roofs of our houses for nesting purposes, marching about our lawns and gardens all day in search of worms, wheeling about on rapid wing in small companies around us, and otherwise demeaning itself as an innocent harmless bird should do, its *mens conscia recti* giving it confidence, and demanding its protection, or at least comparative freedom from molestation, at the hands of man. Moreover, it lends its gratuitous services to the shepherd, and may often be seen perched on the sheep's back, giving its friendly aid to rid them of their troublesome parasites. In Sweden it is looked upon—I know not why—with a sort of veneration, and, in common with the stork, is protected, and rash indeed, and dead to all sense of shame, must he be who would molest a Starling in that country. In the desert of North Africa, on the other hand, where vast flocks resort in winter to the date forests, and do incalculable damage to the ripe fruit, they are destroyed by thousands. Moreover, they are highly prized by the Arabs as excellent food ; but notwithstanding such wholesale and continual destruction, there seems to be no appreciable diminution of its numbers till the date crop is gathered and spring commences, when not a straggler remains in Africa.* In like manner in the Azores, when vines were more cultivated, it was relentlessly destroyed, as it was accused of feeding on the grapes.† Professor Newton says that in England a very great increase in numbers of this species has been going on for some years past.‡ The English name *Starling*, which is the diminutive of *Stare*, the German *Staar*, the French *Etorneau*, the Spanish *Estornino*, and the Portuguese *Estorninho*, are all derived from

* Canon Tristram, in *Ibis* for 1859, p. 293.

† P. Godman, in *Ibis* for 1866, p. 98.

‡ Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 231.

the same root as *Sturnus*, which means the 'twittering bird.' Though at a little distance of dull sombre dress, it will on examination be found to possess a remarkably bright burnished plumage, composed of long narrow silky black feathers, shining with metallic tints of green, blue, and purple, and each garnished with a triangular white spot at the tip. As autumn approaches these birds congregate in vast multitudes in certain favoured spots towards evening, arriving in flights of forty or fifty, till many thousands and even millions are collected, and forming quite a cloud they whirl through the air as if guided by one impulse; now ascending high, then wheeling round, descending with a roar of rushing wings, till they almost brush the earth in their rapid course, and finally down they glide into the plantation or reed-bed which they have selected for their roosting-place. And then such a hubbub of voices ensues, such chattering and such scolding, each apparently anxious to secure the best berth for the night; but if a gun should chance to be fired, or anything else occur to startle them, away goes the whole flock in a dense cloud, with a roar which would astonish those who have not previously seen and heard them. Such a roosting-place exists on the Lavington Downs, at New Copse; and here I am informed by Mr. Stratton, of Gore Cross, that these birds flock in thousands and tens of thousands, and he adds that it is curious to observe their tactics when a hawk appears—for as the hawk prepares for the fatal pounce, they collect into balls or compact flocks, and so baffle their enemy, which immediately ascends higher for another swoop, meanwhile the Starlings hurry along towards some place of shelter, but ball again as the hawk prepares to make a second dash. Another favoured haunt of the Starlings is a wood in the parish of Nettleton, near Chippenham, where, I am informed, 'one thousand were killed a few years since by thirty discharges from a single-barrelled gun at one time'—a piece of wanton cruelty only outdone by the massacre which Colonel Hawker records, how he slew many hundreds of Starlings at a single shot from his long gun in the reeds near Lymington, in Hampshire. In the fens of Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire this habit of

roosting in masses is productive of considerable mischief to the reed-beds, which are of great value, the vast numbers settling on the same reed bearing it down and breaking it with the unwonted weight; and even plantations and copses sometimes suffer a certain amount of damage from a similar destruction of the leading branches of the young trees. Canon Jackson informs me that one of these enormous colonies of Starlings had been for many years allowed without disturbance to roost nightly in one of the late Mr. Neeld's plantations alongside the public way (the Foss Road) at Dunley, near 'The Elm and Ash,' about two miles from Grittleton; but in April, 1850, the keeper, whose cottage was only a few yards off, having had occasion one night to take a few of the birds prisoners for some shooting practice the next day, the whole colony resented the breach of hospitality, and suddenly left the place altogether. It was then found that they had entirely spoiled the young trees and laurel shrubs on about one acre of the plantation; but, to make up for the damage, had bequeathed a valuable deposit of *guano*, of which no less than sixty loads were hauled away. The Rev. A. P. Morres reports that there is another great Starling roost in Odstock Copse in his neighbourhood, near Salisbury.

92. ROSE-COLOURED PASTOR (*Pastor roseus*).

This very beautiful bird is extremely rare in England, a few stragglers only having occasionally appeared; it is a native of the hottest parts of Asia and Africa, but migrates northward in summer, and is sparingly scattered throughout the southern countries of Europe every year, the outskirts of the army sometimes penetrating so far north as Britain. The first instance I adduce of its undoubted occurrence in Wiltshire was in 1853—end of July or beginning of August—when a specimen was killed by a shepherd on Salisbury Plain, near Wilton, and is now in the possession of the Rev. G. Powell, of Sutton Veny, who informed me that it was quite alone when shot, feeding on the ground. Another—as I learnt from Canon Eddrup—was shot

in 1868 in the parish of Bremhill, at a small farm at the bottom of Bencroft Hill. A third was observed in the gardens of Bannerdown House with a companion, and remained for some days near Box, and was shot under Kingsdown, and is now in the collection of Colonel Ward. A fourth was shot on the western borders of the county, on July 29th, 1869, about two miles from Road Hill, as I was informed by the Rev. E. Peacock, who was then residing there. It is usually seen associating with the Starlings, to which family indeed it belongs, and which it much resembles in general habits, mode of feeding, etc. Its plumage is exceedingly beautiful in the living bird, but the delicate rose tint, whence it derives its specific name, loses much of its freshness after death, and in course of years fades to a dingy pink. The head, wings, and tail are of a glossy velvet black, with violet reflections, the whole of the under parts and back of a deep rose-red; the head is likewise adorned with a long pendent crest of loose silky feathers of a glossy black. The legs are very strong, and with the upper mandible of the bill reddish-orange. It is called *Pastor*, the shepherd or herdsman, from its habit (which it shares with the common Starling) of attending flocks and cattle. Continental naturalists have generally looked upon it as a thrush: thus in France it is *Merle couleur de rose*; in Germany, *Rosenfarbige Drossel*; in Sweden, *Rosen-färgad Drossel*; and in England it has been styled the 'Rose Ouzel.' It is, however, a true Starling in habits and in feeding, and in Italy is called *Storno roseo*. In the Ionian Islands, where it frequents the mulberry orchards in large numbers, and does no small damage, it is known to the peasantry as *σκαμνοφάγος*, the 'mulberry-eater.*' It is, at the same time, a great consumer of locusts, and for that service to man is highly appreciated. It breeds in large colonies, arriving in enormous multitudes at its nesting-places, amidst suitable rocks or ruins, or in deserted stone-quarries. But for a very interesting and detailed account of the breeding of this bird, which until then had been little known, I must refer my readers to an admirable memoir by

* Lord Lilford, in *Ibis* for 1860, p. 137.

Signor de Betta,* a translation of which I obtained from the pen of my lamented friend Mr. William Long, of West Hay, which I sent to the editor of the *Zoologist* in 1878, and which was published the same year in that periodical.†

CORVIDÆ (THE CROWS).

This is a very large and important family, very numerous too, and widely distributed, and most of its members, being of considerable size, attract more general attention than the preceding smaller and more retiring birds, and are therefore familiar to the least observant. Their general characteristics are stout, compact body; large head; thick, short neck; beak large, straight, and pointed; legs strong and well adapted for walking with ease as well as for perching. Their flight, too, is strong and even; and as regards their appetite, they seem to devour everything they meet with, being truly omnivorous, and refusing nothing eatable which comes in their way. From these several properties the Crows have been styled the most perfect of the winged creation; and it has been remarked that they seem to have received some peculiar property from each order of birds, by which they stand in the centre of the feathered kingdom, reflecting the characteristics of the whole, being so well fitted for walking, equally powerful on the wing, inhabitants of all climates, and capable of subsisting on all kinds of food. Notwithstanding their frequent association with man, they are a vigilant, cautious race, ever on the watch for an enemy, and scenting danger from afar.

93. CHOUGH (*Fregilus graculus*).

This is scarcely a true Crow, but rather a link between the Starlings and Crows, partaking most, however, of the habits and appearance of the latter. It is a very graceful, elegant bird, and slender in form; its plumage of a glossy bluish-black, strongly contrasted with which are the beak, legs, and feet, which are of a bright vermilion-red or deep orange colour. The beak is very

* Atti del R. Istituto Veneto, ser. v. ii.

† *Zoologist* for 1878, p. 16.

long, slender, and considerably curved. It is said never to perch on trees, but always on rocks; and Montagu (who gives a full account of one of these birds which had been tamed) says its inquisitive habits are equal to those of any Crow. Its food principally consists of insects, for reaching which in the crevices of rocks its long sharp-pointed slender bill is admirably adapted. Its true habitat is among the lofty precipices on the sea-coast, or amid the rocks of inland counties; and the only place where I have seen it in its native haunts was in the rocky heights above Cintra, looking down on the broad Atlantic, and the mouth of the Tagus, and there, day after day, I met with several parties, consisting of six or seven, of this elegant and very interesting bird. The Chough which is found in the Swiss Alps and the Tyrol is of another species (*F. Alpinus*), and lacks the red beak and legs so conspicuous in our bird, and may be seen among the loftier and more desolate regions of those countries far up among the glaciers. But it is our British species (*F. graculus*) that is found in the desert of Northern Africa, and is known to the Arabs by the name of *Ogreeb Hamraid*, or the 'Red Crow,' though it is strange that one of our northern coast birds should be found in a scene so widely different, as Canon Tristram has observed.* There is an old Cornish legend that King Arthur is still alive in the form of a Chough, and certain superstitious persons refuse to shoot these birds, from a fear that they might inadvertently destroy the mystic warrior:

'And mark yon bird of sable wing,
 Talons and beak all red with blood,
 The spirit of the long-lost king
 Passed in that shape from Camlan's flood.
 And still when loudliest howls the storm,
 And darkliest lowers his native sky,
 The king's fierce soul is in that form,
 The warrior spirit threatens nigh.'†

In England it is sparingly found on some of our rocky coasts, and is often styled the *Cornish* Chough, from an erroneous impression that it was peculiar to that county, though Shakespeare,

* *Ibis* for 1859, p. 292.

† Hawker's 'Echoes from Cornwall.'

with his usual wonderful knowledge of nature, shows that he did not share in that mistake, for in describing the height of the cliff at Dover he says :

‘The Crows and *Choughs* that wing the midway air
Show scarce as gross as beetles.’

Wiltshire, too, is one of the few inland counties which has had its stragglers of this species. Yarrell, quoting from the *Field Naturalist's Magazine* for August, 1832, recounts how a Red-legged Crow was killed on the Wiltshire Downs, near the Bath Road between Marlborough and Calne, by a man employed in keeping birds from corn: this must have been very near, if not in, my own parish of Yatesbury. In addition to this, Blyth, the editor of ‘White’s Selborne,’ records the capture of another of this species on Salisbury Plain. Mr. King, of Warminster, recollects that many years ago one of this species was killed by a shepherd lad at Battlesbury Camp, on the edge of Salisbury Plain, about a mile and a half from Warminster, but that specimen was, unfortunately, not preserved. The Rev. E. Duke has one which was killed at Lake, and is in a small collection there made by his father as illustrative of the Fauna of Lake, and I have one more instance of its occurrence in the county, for the Rev. F. Dyson killed one many years since on the downs at Tidworth, where two had been seen hovering about for many days previous. This I fear is likely to be the last specimen of this truly graceful bird wandering to our county, for it is now become very rare even in those localities on the sea-coast where it was once most numerous, and will probably soon be classed in that sad catalogue of species which, once abundant, are now exterminated by the ruthless rage for slaughter so prevalent with all classes, in which the noble Bustard already figures, and will soon be joined by the Kite and the Bittern, and many another interesting bird with which the last generation was familiar.

Of the meaning of *Fregilus* I know nothing, but by most modern ornithologists *Pyrrhocorax* is the generic name in use: this is defined by the B.O.U. Committee to be ‘a Crow with red beak,’ from $\piυρρ\acute{o}\sigma\epsilon$, ‘the colour of fire’ ($\pi\tilde{\upsilon}\rho$), and $\lambda\acute{o}\rho\alpha\zeta$, ‘a

Crow.' In France it is *Le Coracias Huppé ou sonneur*; in Germany, *Stein-Krahe* 'Stone (or Rock) Crow;' and in Italy, *Coracia di montagna*.

94. RAVEN (*Corvus corax*).

If the Crows exhibit more intelligence than all other families, as is often asserted, here we have the most sagacious of the Crows. Unlike many of its congeners, the Raven lives for the most part a solitary life, at least in this country, but it is not so everywhere. I have had many opportunities of seeing it in small colonies in Norway, in Portugal, and in Egypt, and Canon Tristram, writing of the birds of North Africa, says it is gregarious both in the mountains and deserts there, returning home to roost at sunset in a long file after the manner of rooks; moreover, though not breeding in communities, the nests are frequently within a few yards of each other.* Mr. Salvin, speaking of the Eastern Atlas, says it was no uncommon sight to see twenty or thirty of these birds at one time.† It is also most ubiquitous, and impervious (as it would appear) to the effect of extreme heat or cold. We have seen above how they frequent the burning desert of Africa; and Arctic voyagers relate that it is one of the few birds capable of braving the severity of an Arctic winter. Sir Edward Parry met with it in the highest northern latitudes; it was found at Melville Island; and Nordenskiöld, in his famous voyage, says that in a journey over the inland ice in exploring a northern portion of Greenland, during the whole of his excursion on the ice he had seen no animal except a couple of Ravens.‡

It is by far the largest of all the pie tribe in Europe, of strong robust shape, of grave and dignified bearing; its plumage of the deepest and glossiest black, with purple, blue, and green reflection. The term Raven has been derived from an old word signifying to tear away, or *snatch* and devour, alluding to

* *Ibis* for 1859, p. 292. † *Ibid.*, p. 312.

‡ 'Arctic Voyages,' p. 165.

its voracious plundering habits, for it not only feeds on carrion, but attacks weak and sickly animals and birds. Professor Skeat, however, derives it from its cry, and says that *kráp*, 'to make a noise,' is the origin of 'raven,' 'crow,' 'croak,' etc. As to the derivation of the scientific names of the several species which compose this family, they seem to come generally from the same root; for the B.O.U. Committee, under the several heads of *Corvus*, *Corax*, *Corone*, *Cornix*, refers the reader to *κράζω*, 'I caw,' and *κράζω*, 'I cry,' as the real origin. From the same root appear to be derived most, if not all, of the Continental names for this bird, as in France, *Le Corbeau*; in Germany, *Kolkrabe*; in Italy, *Corvo imperiale*, as if 'the king of Crows;' in Sweden, *Korp*; in Spain, *Cuervo*; and in Portugal, *Corvo*.

Ravens will sometimes, as they fly, turn over on their backs, with a loud croak, and seem to be falling to the ground; but Harding points out that when this odd gesture occurs, they are merely scratching themselves with one foot, and thus lose the centre of gravity.*

It is supposed to live to a very great age, but this does not seem to have ever been satisfactorily proved; it pairs for life, and breeds very early in the year, returning, if undisturbed, annually to the same spot for the purpose: but it always drives away the young birds when they are fully fledged and able to provide for themselves. Montagu observes that between this bird and its egg there is a greater disproportion than in any other species, for it takes nearly fifty eggs to make up the weight of the bird.

Extremely wary and impatient of molestation, it has been expelled from many of its old accustomed breeding-places by the persecution of gamekeepers and others; and this persecution is not only of modern date, but was in force in the last century, for when the Government auditors of parochial highway accounts examined the books of a certain parish, they found amongst the more common items of so much for the killing of a fox, and so much for the killing of sparrows per dozens, old and young, the following entry, 'Resolved at a vestry, that for a Raven, on the

* Edition of 'White's Selborne,' p. 254.

production of the same, the person so producing it will receive 2s. 6d. from the guardian of the said parish.' Let me as guardian of the parish of Yatesbury, in passing, assure all whom it may concern, that to me at least the Corvicide will apply in vain for blood-money on account of any such atrocious murder. Ravens, however, were happily too wide-awake to be easily caught in the days of inefficient weapons; but now the breechloader, the trap, and poison have all done their work so effectually, that these grand birds are become scarce in England, though some few chosen spots there are where they are guarded from molestation. And, indeed, a Raven tree is no mean ornament to a park, and speaks of a wide domain and large timber, and an ancient family, for the Raven is an aristocratic bird, and cannot brook a confined property, or trees of young growth: would that its predilections were more humoured, and a secure retreat allowed it by the larger proprietors in the land! The time has, I trust, gone by in England when the poor Raven was regarded as a bird of ill-omen, and its croak dreaded as a sure sign portending some coming evil; and yet not long ago such was the absurd superstition regarding this much-maligned species, as we may see from various passages of Shakespeare as well as other authors of that and even a later date—its remarkable power of smell and almost inconceivable sensitiveness to the odour of sickness and death* having procured it the reputation of a prognosticator of misfortune, so that its harsh croak, listened to with fear when illness of any kind was in the house, was regarded as a most inauspicious sound, as we read in 'Othello':

' Oh, it comes o'er my memory
As doth the raven o'er the infected house,
Boding to all.'

And this supposed faculty of 'smelling death' made its presence, and even its voice, looked upon as accursed:

' The hateful messenger of heavy things,
Of death and dolour telling.†

* For a remarkable proof of this sensitiveness see an account given by the Rev. A. P. Morres, of what occurred in modern days at Mere, in the *Wiltshire Magazine* for 1879, vol. xviii., p. 299.

† Dyer's 'English Folk-Lore,' p. 78.

But this was not the only reason why the Raven was abhorred in England. There was also a national cause for its abomination, in that it was the symbol on their sacred standard of the hated Danes.

In old time and in heathen countries, we all know how anxiously its every note was listened to and its every action studied by the soothsayer, and it was consecrated to Apollo as a foreteller of things to come; but it may not be so generally known that at this day not only do the North American Indians honour it as unearthly, and invest it with extraordinary knowledge and power, and place its skin on the heads of their officiating priests as a distinguishing mark of their office, but even in Christian Scandinavia and especially in Iceland, all which countries are at least a century behind the rest of Europe in civilization, it is regarded with like fear, so much so as to have gained for itself the sobriquet of the 'bird of Odin,' whose satellite it is supposed to be, on whose shoulder it was wont to perch, and in whose ear it was wont to whisper all the tidings it had gained in its wanderings up and down through the world. In former times it was supposed to have been white, and to have been changed to black as a punishment for babbling. Amongst other absurd notions regarding it, is the popular belief that in its body is a so-called *Korb-sten* or 'raven-stone,' which is possessed of the remarkable property, that the individual who swallows it will be invisible to mortal eyes.*

I must not omit to mention one thing which the Ravens do *not* do. They do *not* breed in the holes made by weather in the large standing stones at Stonehenge, as has been asserted by an old author of a history of this country,† a most erroneous and unfortunate assertion which has been copied by many writers ever since, even our excellent author of the latest treatise on Stonehenge,‡ Mr. William Long, having repeated it in his admirable account.

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 331.

† Speed's 'History of Great Britain,' A.D. 1672, p. 267.

‡ *Wiltshire Magazine*, vol. xvi., p. 23.

And now I come to speak of the Ravens of Wiltshire, of which I have made careful inquiry in every part of the county, and about which I have derived a great deal of valuable information, negative as well as positive, from no less than one hundred and ten correspondents whom I have invaded with questions, and whom I heartily thank for the courtesy and ready kindness with which they have replied to me. It will be seen that the history of the Ravens of Wiltshire is, alas! rather a history of that which is past and gone than of that which is flourishing to-day. So persecuted, shot down, trapped, and despoiled of their young have these noble birds been at the hands of ruthless gamekeepers and others, who have gone upon the false issue that they are very destructive to game, whereas, with the exception of an occasional raid on a leveret or a rabbit, they do little harm in the preserves, for the Raven cannot bear an enclosed district—he must have plenty of room to wander over, a wide extent of open ground on which to disport himself; and as to being ‘cabin’d, cribb’d, confin’d’ within narrow woods, he eschews them altogether, and only during the breeding season will he consent to occupy some big tree in the park, generally the highest and most inaccessible he can find, and there he and his mate return, year after year, to occupy their accustomed nursery. I proceed now to enumerate the localities which, earlier or later, Ravens have been known to occupy, and some few of which they occupy still.

Wilton Park.—I am informed by Lord Pembroke that the Ravens are building this year (1887), as they have done during the last four years, in a tall fir-tree in the low ground in Wilton Park: they moved to this tree from another group of firs about three hundred yards away. It was about six years ago that they came to the park; but the old people say that they used to build there regularly, and an old groom was accustomed to relate how the peregrine falcons for some time nested in the park as well, and how the Ravens drove them away. At the present time it is interesting to watch the Ravens during the nesting season as they harry the herons flying home in the evening. In Wilton Park the Ravens are carefully preserved;

but two years ago the cock bird was shot by mistake for a crow while the eggs were being hatched, when the remaining bird brought up the young ones successfully.

Compton Park.—Mr. Penruddocke tells me that Ravens have bred in his park from time immemorial, and when they have safely brought the young birds to that period in their lives when they can shift for themselves, the old birds lead them away and leave them, and permit no return to the family nest. He also adds, 'The history of my Ravenry is rather a curious one. A pair of Ravens have built in the fir-clump in the park beyond the memory of the oldest inhabitant. At least, I can find out nothing to the contrary. These birds, however, as properly attested, left the place on my uncle's death in December, 1841, and returned when I came to live at Compton in 1849, and built in the same place and in the same Scotch fir-tree. This tree fell down some twelve or fifteen years ago—perhaps less—when the birds built in a Scotch fir-tree on the top of Compton Down, in a clump of firs called "The Long Folly." Here they were frequently disturbed by a certain gipsy, who with his sons used to rob the nest annually.' This ungenerous treatment seems to have daunted the spirit of the bold Ravens, for, to Mr. Penruddocke's regret, they are not nesting at Compton this year, though they have visited their old haunts. It is hoped, however, that they will return to the park, where they will meet a hearty welcome and efficient protection from the kind-hearted owner. The Ravens' nest in the park was on a tree, which though scarcely inaccessible, was not to be climbed without the help of a ladder: that on Compton Downs was on a smaller and less difficult tree. I must add that the experience of Mr. Penruddocke's keeper, George Barrett (who was born on the estate), and that of his father before him (now deceased), is to the effect that Ravens do *not* destroy the eggs of game: this is evidence of no slight value from men who have seen Ravens breeding in their midst every year.

Breamore.—I learn from Mr. E. H. Hulse that Ravens used to breed for about twenty years at the Shoulder of Mutton Clump,

near Gallows Hill, on the Breamore property; but for the last ten or twelve years they have not bred on the estate. They have, however, within the last few years been seen by the keeper, flying over, presumably on a foraging excursion. And in a second letter, written a few days after, Mr. Hulse adds, 'Curiously enough I only heard yesterday from one of the keepers that a pair of Ravens had been seen on Breamore Downs the day before yesterday. It is supposed that they came after the dead lambs, a kind of food of which they are very fond. I believe they breed now, as they have done of late, at Rockbourne, about three miles from Breamore.' In this immediate neighbourhood, the Rev. C. W. Hony, Vicar of Bishops Cannings, met with the last Ravens he remembers to have seen in the county, viz., a pair which he saw some eight or nine years ago, when riding over a farm at Damerham, at the extreme southern point of the county of Wilts.

Fonthill.—I learn through the courtesy of Mr. Lightfoot, and on the authority of Mr. A. Morrison, that there used to be a Raven's nest regularly every year just opposite his house at Fonthill; but he does not know if it is still tenanted, and neither have I been able to get reliable information on this point.

Longleat.—I have the authority of Lord Bath for saying that a pair of Ravens used to build in a particular tree by the pond at Longleat, but the tree was blown down two years ago. And I have the evidence of the head-keeper, to whom Lord Bath most kindly wrote for information, that the last nest he remembers was in Swancomb Bottom, about four years ago, and the nest is still to be seen there. He adds, 'There have been three Ravens in the upper woods all this winter' (1887). Possibly by this time there may be a nest.

Cornbury (Tilshead).—The Rev. H. V. Thompson tells me, on the authority of Major Fisher, who was then hawking rooks in that neighbourhood, that about twenty-five years ago a pair of Ravens frequented some very old trees at Cornbury; but when the trees were cut down by Mr. Kelsey's father, they disappeared.

They did not, however, enjoy a very peaceful life at the best, for they were oftentimes molested, and on one occasion a sweep was engaged to climb the tree and secure the eggs.

Erlestoke.—Mr. George Watson Taylor says that Ravens formerly bred in a tree—destroyed many years since—at the lower end of the lake in the park; and though they never attempt to breed there now, they return to their old haunts every spring.

South Tidworth.—There is a Raven-tree at Assheton Coppice in Sir J. Kelk's park, now occupied, and which has flourished, as I am told, for the last century, certainly for many years past. The tree is not inaccessible to a bold climber, but as the Rev. H. E. Delmé Radcliffe informs me, is happily guarded by the general understanding that whoso harries the Raven or its brood is sure to meet with misfortune; a very wholesome piece of superstition, which is now more firmly fixed than ever in the minds of the people, inasmuch as a rash keeper, who laughed the tradition to scorn and destroyed one of the Ravens, soon after fell sick of a fever in which all his family were involved, and some of them had a hard struggle for their lives. South Tidworth is not in Wiltshire, but in Hampshire; but as it is only just across the border, and the Raven is a bird of very wide excursions, I think we may fairly claim a large share in these Hampshire-bred birds.

Tangley Clump.—I am informed by my friend the Rev. W. H. Awdry, that there used to be a nest of Ravens every year in Tangley Clump, which is also across the border in Hampshire, not very far from Ludgershall; but about ten years since some mischievous fellow cut off the special branch of the tree which the Ravens had made their nursery, and the birds have never been seen there since. In reference to this Ravens' nest at Tangley, I learn from Mr. W. H. Fowle, of Chute Forest, that on one occasion, when one of the old birds was shot, at the time there were young birds in the nest, the other parent bird disappeared for about three hours, and then returned with another mate, who helped to bring up the brood. This was told to Mr. Fowle by a man who had himself witnessed it. The young birds were

frequently taken from this nest at Tangley Clump, but this spoliation of their young never caused the old birds to forsake their nesting-place, to which they invariably returned year after year.

North Tidworth.—The Rev. Canon Hodgson informs me that there used to be a Ravens' nest also in North Tidworth, at 'The Flemings,' but when this property passed from the Poores to Mr. Assheton Smith, the Ravens disappeared, in due accordance with the old popular saying, that 'there are never two Ravens' nests on one estate'!

Amesbury.—The Rev. A. Phelps tells me that he remembers a pair of Ravens nesting year after year in Porton Firs, two miles south of Amesbury; and that he understood they always drove away their young ones when fully grown; but he has not seen them there for some time.

Beacon Hill (Amesbury).—Mr. T. Rumming, of Red House, Amesbury, informs me that Ravens nested near Beacon Hill, about two miles east of Amesbury, for several consecutive years, and that he had himself seen them there.

Maddington.—The Rev. Canon Bennett writes, that some years ago Ravens were often seen on the downs near Yarnborough Castle, and they used to build in a plantation at Maddington, called 'The High Trees;' but they have some time since deserted it, and those who frequent that neighbourhood say that they do not see them about the downs now as they did.

Everley Downs.—The Hon. Gerald Lascelles, speaking of these downs, says, 'I have not unfrequently seen Ravens here, and have known of three nests since 1876. (1) Near the Bustard; (2) on the wild downs not far from Silk Hill; (3) in Tedworth Park.'

Enford.—I learn from the Rev. C. F. Cooke that though they have no breeding-place in the parish, Ravens are frequently seen on the downs above Enford, and in the meadows on the banks of the river Avon. They may often be observed following in the wake of a flock of sheep, usually a pair, but sometimes three together; and they would seem to be in expectation of a dead

sheep. Indeed, the country people believe that if a Raven flies over the fold, a sheep will be sure to die in the course of a short time; for the shepherds think they can scent approaching death in the flock.

Savernake Forest.—I have many records of the Ravens which once dwelt here, but I can hear of no survivors. Mr. George Butler, of Kennet, recollects a Raven-tree in Marlborough Forest when he was a schoolboy fifty years ago. Mr. C. E. Ponting, of Lockeridge, says that when he lived at Lye Hill, on the southern edge of Savernake Forest, prior to 1870, Ravens built annually in a clump of tall silver spruce known as Bittam Clump; this lies between Lye Hill and the Column Avenue, leading out of the Salisbury road. Mr. C. Tanner, jun., informs me that the keepers sometimes now see Ravens crossing the woods very high up, but they no longer alight on the trees or on the ground at Savernake.

Ramsbury.—There was certainly a Raven's tree here, as indeed there should be, considering that 'Ramsbury' is but a contracted form of 'Ravensbury.' Moreover there was a Raven-tree here within the memory of living man, for my friend, Mr. C. Tanner, jun., has spoken with a man who had climbed the tree; but I have failed to find out any particulars about it. Nor does the squire, Sir F. Burdett, nor the vicar, the Rev. H. Baber, know anything about it, save that there is a most venerable patriarch of a tree, an elm of prodigious size, hollow as to its interior, computed to be six hundred years old, now standing in the village, in what is proudly called 'the square.' Perchance this was the Raven-tree of Ramsbury!

Cricklade.—My old friend, the Rev. F. Dyson tells me that though there are no nests or birds there now, there is a *Ravenshurst* in Braydon, in his parish of Cricklade, which I make no doubt was so called from having been, probably for a long period, the quondam habitation of some Ravens.

Ravenshurst (near Charlton Park).—Lord Suffolk informed me that though he knew nothing of any Ravens at Charlton, there was a wood about four miles east of that park, the property

of Sir John Neeld, called 'Ravenshurst'—pronounced *Ravens-roost*—where he had heard that these birds used to breed, and this was corroborated by Mr. Algernon Neeld, who, however, added that the Ravens have not existed there for at least thirty years past.

Draycote Park.—That there was a Raven-tree in the park here I am very certain, because my excellent friend, the Rev. G. Marsh, often told me that he obtained his celebrated Raven from here more than forty years ago. It was a large elm tree, and Canon Goddard tells me he remembers the high trees at the top of the park where the Ravens used to breed. Now, however, they are quite gone, and Lord Cowley knows nothing of them there at the present day.

Charlton Park.—I have already said, on the authority of Lord Suffolk, that no Ravens' nests or even Ravens have been in residence there in modern times: but in the olden time, which I suppose means fifty years ago, Ravens used to breed regularly in the park here.

Badminton.—By the kindness of Mr. Lowndes, of Castle Combe, I have the following interesting account of the Ravens at Badminton, from the pen of the Duke of Beaufort, and as his Grace permits me to make use of his information, I do so with singular satisfaction. 'Ravens used to breed frequently in the top of the highest elm of the park, about three furlongs to the north-east of the house, and one furlong from Allengrove. The nest was of enormous size, and much used, and about three years in five, young birds were hatched out there.' Some thirty years ago a keeper destroyed the pair of old Ravens that had brought out their brood, and caught the young birds: but the Duke, indignant at the destruction of the Ravens, ordered the man to bring up the young birds by hand, and turn them out into the park: and as his farther employment as keeper depended on his success, the man contrived to rear the young Ravens, and thus replace the old birds which he had shot. 'About 1879 or 1880, on a very still June day the Raven-tree fell without any apparent cause. Then such a nest was laid open to view as I had never

seen before: there must have been in it ten or eleven hundred-weight of wood. I was sadly vexed at the fall of the tree and at losing the Ravens; for now they only occasionally show themselves in the park, and I have not heard of a nest since the tree fell. They used to sit on the tops of the high trees in Allengrove Bottom, and bark like dogs, which caused the park-keepers' dogs to bark in response.' This Raven-tree of which the Duke speaks was within, but only just within, the county of Gloucester; the park fence dividing the park from Allengrove being the boundary between the two counties. I will only add that I would that the admirable sentence which the Duke passed on the ruthless keeper was printed in letters of gold on the market cross at Devizes, as a hint to other landowners, and a timely warning to other keepers similarly disposed.

Corulam Court.—I learn from Lord Methuen that there are no Ravens now on his estate here, or in the immediate neighbourhood; but they did build regularly in the north avenue some twenty years ago, but were destroyed by a keeper during Lord Methuen's absence from home.

Spye Park.—There was a Raven-tree, a Scotch fir, in the fine old park here, with which in old times I was very familiar, and which had been tenanted by the sable occupiers time out of mind, until Mr. Starkey sold the property to Mr. Spicer, and then, by a strange coincidence, and as if to verify the old superstition, the Ravens deserted Spye Park altogether. Still more remarkable was the coincidence related to me more than once by Mr. Charles Wyndham, that some years after the sale had been completed, when the late owner, Mr. Baynton Starkey, happened to be staying with my informant at Wans House, as he and his host walked out in the garden after breakfast, a croak was heard above their heads, and there, sure enough, were the Ravens, come back as if to greet their old master, and seen then for the first time since their departure by Mr. C. Wyndham, who is too keen an observer to have overlooked their presence, if they had visited him before. This is so pretty a tale, and so thoroughly in keeping with the romances about birds of the

good old times, that it is almost too bad to affirm that it really was nothing else but a very strange coincidence.

Roundway Park.—It is now a long time since the Ravens used to breed annually in the large trees here, but I well recollect hearing in my younger days that they had a nest here every year, and even some time after they had deserted it they returned, on one occasion at least, to their old haunts, but were thought to be so destructive to game, that they were scared away. Now, however, they are never seen there, and I doubt whether they even visit Roundway Downs and Oliver's Camp, where they used to be found passing the day in solitary grandeur, far removed from the hateful presence of man.

I believe I have now exhausted all the particulars with which I have been furnished about Wiltshire Ravens, past and present, and, thanks to my numerous obliging correspondents, the picture is, I think, tolerably complete. There is yet, however, some negative evidence to add, which will help to fill in the background or any gaps there may be in our landscape; viz., the testimony of those who have never seen or heard of a Raven in their neighbourhood, and of others who speak of some rare and exceptional appearance of that bird at long intervals of time. Thus the Rev. E. Duke has no recollection of any seen or killed in the neighbourhood of Lake. Mr. W. Wyndham's experience of them is that they have become extremely scarce near Dinton since the gipsies harried the nest on Compton Down, and drove away the old birds some twelve years ago. Lord Heytesbury (who most kindly instituted inquiries for my benefit), reports that none have been seen in the neighbourhood of Heytesbury, at any rate for many years past. Mr. C. Phipps has never heard of their appearance at Chalcot. Sir C. Hobhouse has never seen one at Monkton Farleigh, nor is there any tradition of their occurrence there. Colonel Wallington knows nothing of them at Keevil, though he had tidings of a pair seen at Steeple Ashton some sixteen years since. The Right Hon. E. P. Bouverie has never seen them at Lavington, nor indeed anywhere in Wiltshire. The Rev. C. Soames says that, so far as he knows, they have

quite disappeared from the district round Mildenhall. Major Heneage has never seen or heard of one at Compton Bassett, nor any place nearer than Spye Park. Mr. Gladstone has never known any at Bowden Park. Finally, Sir R. H. Pollen says there are none in the immediate neighbourhood of Rodbourne, but adds that a few years back some were seen at Bell Farm, Stanton Saint Quintin, the property of Lord Radnor, but they were not known to breed in the place, and were only seen occasionally.

Before I take leave of the Wiltshire Ravens, I must say a few words about the tame specimen which, as I have already said, the Rev. G. Marsh procured from Draycote Park, and which lived for years at Sutton Benger, and was a source of infinite amusement to Mr. Marsh and his friends. I could fill several pages with anecdotes of his quaint manners and clever tricks and cunning ways, and the distinct sentences which that bird uttered seemed quite marvellous to those who were not familiar with the species, but I must content myself with one anecdote. Whenever his owner put his open hand down towards his back, as if about to stroke or caress him, the bird would turn his head round, look up at his master, and say as distinctly as any human being could speak, 'Good-bye, old fellow, good-bye, old cock!' and then hop on a few steps. Now it chanced one day that the bird escaped from the outhouse in which it was necessary to confine him, on account of his mischievous tricks and his thievish propensities, and had wandered off, as he had often done before, across a meadow outside the village, and not far from the high road. But a commercial traveller who was driving by, seeing what he conjectured to be a wounded rook, descended from his gig and ran across the grass, thinking to secure the bird; but his dismay as well as astonishment may better be conceived than described, when on putting out his open hand to seize his prize, the Raven, looking round at him with a knowing leer, exclaimed in most distinct terms, 'Good-bye, old fellow, good-bye, old cock!' and then hopped on as was his wont. But the traveller took to his heels, jumped into his gig as fast as possible, and drove back to

the village, where, frightened almost out of his wits, and trembling with alarm, he declared to the highly amused villagers, who knew the bird and his habits well, that he had met with the arch-fiend in the shape of a big crow, and that he had spoken to him.

95. CARRION CROW (*Corvus Corone*).

So much resembling the last described in form and manners, but of smaller size, that it may well be termed 'the Miniature Raven.' This species is likewise seldom seen in flocks, pairs for life, and may be found in wooded districts throughout the county. In colour it is jet black, without the metallic lustre so conspicuous in the plumage of the Raven: it is very bold and a great enemy to young game and eggs as well as to the poultry yard. Its ordinary food, for lack of carrion, which it rarely finds here, is any animal matter it can pick up, and failing this, it contents itself with grain and vegetable diet.

In reference to the various kinds of food on which it feasts, it bears many provincial names, as the 'Carrion Crow,' 'Flesh Crow,' 'Gor (or Gore) Crow,' 'Mussel Crow,' etc., and certainly it must be allowed to be a very destructive and mischievous bird. This was so well-known of old, that an Act was passed in the reign of Henry VIII. (1532), requiring every parish to provide a Crow net for the thinning of the numbers of this marauder. But the desired effect has certainly not yet been produced, for, persecuted though it is by gamekeepers and others, few of the larger birds contrive to baffle their enemies more than the Crows, and I am afraid to say how many nests were found in one season, three or four years ago, within the limits of my small parish of Yatesbury. The Rev. W. Butt tells me it abounds in the parish of Minety, where there are no keepers to molest them, and the Rev. C. W. Hony that last year the Rooks at Bishop Cannings were so persecuted by Crows, that he feared the lawful owners of the rookery would have been driven away. This year (1887), I am informed that the Crows have attacked the rookery on Mr. R.

Coward's premises, in the hamlet of Roundway, near Devizes, so effectually, that the Rooks have deserted in a body, and betaken themselves to some large trees at the barracks hard by. Neither in Norway, or Sweden, or Palestine, or Egypt, did I ever see the Black Crow, but I found it common enough in Portugal, where, as with us, it is *par excellence* 'the Crow,' *Corvo*. In France it is *Corneille noire ou Corbine*; in Germany, *Krahen rabe*; in Italy, *corvo maggiore*; and in Spain, *Grajillo*.

It has the same evil reputation for causing as well as foreboding misfortune with its larger relative, but that is no other than it had in the days of the poet Virgil:

'Sæpe sinistra cavâ prædixit ab ilice Cornix.'

And now the women of Wiltshire at work in the fields will remark that the farmer then lying ill will not recover, for a Crow had been seen to fly over his house just above the roof-tree.*

In the County of Essex, the peasants repeat a rhyme respecting the Crow, almost similar to that commonly connected with the Magpie. For if Crows fly *towards* you, then

'One's unlucky ;
Two's lucky ;
Three is health ;
Four is wealth ;
Five is sickness,
And six is death ;†

and Butler in 'Hudibras' says,

'Is it not om'nous in all countries
When crows and ravens croak upon trees ?'

Though shy and with reason suspicious of too great familiarity with man, it is one of the most pugnacious of birds and will attack and drive away all intruders from its nest; Mr. Waterton, who has protected it and studied its habits closely at Walton Hall, says, 'It is a very early riser, and long before the Rook is on the wing, you hear this bird announcing the approach of morn with his loud hollow croaking from the oak to which he had

* 'Gamekeeper at Home,' p. 130. † Dyer's 'English Folk-Lore,' p. 80.

resorted the night before ; he retires to rest later than the rook—indeed, as far as I have been able to observe his motions, I consider him the first bird on wing in the morning, and the last at night, of all our non-migrating diurnal British Birds.’

Mr. Waterton also noticed that this bird is at times more gregarious than is generally supposed. From his drawing-room window, which was usually open, and from which a powerful telescope always in position commanded a good view of the park and lake, he observed this bird minutely, and he records in his note-book that on January 11, 1830, he counted fifty Crows going to roost ; on October 16, 1850, he saw fifty-five congregated in the park ; on March 1, 1851, he observed sixty-four at the water’s edge ; on May 11, 1853, seventy or eighty ; and on December 15, 1863, he counted more than a hundred congregated in the park preparing to roost.

96. HOODED CROW (*Corvus cornix*).

Loyal as I am to the instructions of my ornithological guide, Professor Newton, I must crave his pardon if in this one instance I repudiate with all my might the cruel act, whereby he has, by one single dash of his pen, obliterated this handsome species from the list of birds, and condemned it to share existence with the Black Crow, of which he declares it to be but a variety.* Doubtless he has good reasons for such annihilation of what would appear to most observers to be a very distinct species indeed, but yet I cannot honestly say I am convinced. That they freely breed together is, I own, a very strong point in favour of their specific identity, and Mr. Seebohm has established that fact beyond the possibility of doubt ;† but surely the Grey Crow, if not a larger bird, is of stouter build and of clumsier form than its black relative. Speaking from my own experience (and during a whole summer in Norway, and a whole winter in Egypt, it has been one of the commonest birds around me every day), I

* Fourth edition of Yarrell’s ‘British Birds,’ vol. ii., p. 274.

† Seebohm’s ‘Siberia in Asia,’ pp. 30, 81, 84, etc., also in *Ibis*, for 1878, pp. 328-331.

have such a partiality for its bold jaunty air, and its independent impudent habits, that I cannot bear to think of my old friend being thus suppressed altogether, or at best allowed but a half existence, to be shared with a brother of sable hue. It reminds me of the trite assertion that cannot be disputed, that the negro is a fellow man and a brother with the free born-American or Britisher; but that does not prevent the general practice of an absolute avoidance of the man of colour, and of the provision in every railway train of a separate car for the negroes. So if the two species of Crows were once identical, methinks *C. cornix* has raised himself above his congener, and has a right to the footing he has so long secured. At all events I must be allowed to regard it as all our older ornithologists have ever done, and deal with it as a true species. Apart, however, from the interest in so handsome a bird, I fear I have but little good to say of it.

With all the bad and none of the good qualities of the preceding, this Crow is no favourite in those parts of England where it abounds. It is a determined destroyer of the eggs and young of game birds, more especially of the genus Grouse, and is cowardly as well as cruel in the execution of its victims. Mr. St. John, in his 'Field Notes and Tour in Sutherland,' speaks of it in no measured terms, and declares it is the 'only bird against which he urges constant and un pitying warfare,' and he excuses himself for so doing on the plea that he has so often detected it destroying his most favourite birds and eggs, that he has no pity on it: and Mr. Knox, the intelligent author of 'Game Birds and Wild Fowl' has not a word to say in its favour: not even Mr. Waterton, the general champion of the oppressed, has a good word for the Hooded Crow; so that we may congratulate ourselves that it only appears in Wiltshire occasionally. Its visits, however, are frequent enough to render it familiar to most people. I have myself often seen it on the Marlborough Downs, and I have many notices of it from various parts of the county, more especially in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, where it frequents the water meadows in the winter months, at which season only it migrates so far south; but its visits are, I fear,

yearly becoming more and more rare. I have not personally seen it on our downs for several years past, but one record I had of its appearance in my own neighbourhood from my lamented friend, the late Rev. C. Bradford, Vicar of Clyffe Pypard, who saw one at intervals during a month in January, 1877, in the pond meadow, near the Manor House in that parish; and for the last four years, as I learn from the present vicar, the Rev. E. Goddard, it has returned to Clyffe regularly every November, spent the winter there, and departed in March. For the first three winters it was alone, but last year it brought back three companions; this year (1887) it is again alone. It does not fraternize much with the Carrion Crows, which are very numerous at Clyffe, but associates rather with the rooks, which, however, do not seem to desire its company, so that it is somewhat of an outcast; but as nobody molests it, and it likes its winter quarters, it returns every year. Mr. Hussey Freke reports that his keeper shot one at Crouch Wood, near Hannington Hall, and Mr. W. Wyndham that his brother killed one at Sutton Mandeville. I also learn that it is generally to be seen in winter at Everley. The Rev. J. D. Hodgson tells me it used to frequent the neighbourhood of Collingbourne, and some are occasionally seen now on a down near Collingbourne Wood. The Rev. W. H. Awdry sometimes sees them at Ludgershall; and Mr. W. H. Fowle, about two years ago, almost invariably used to see a small flock of them at a pond on the Upavon Downs, when riding from Chute Forest to a farm he had in hand at Charlton. Mr. Grant, too, at Devizes, has from time to time received a specimen for preservation. Its true habitat is Northern Europe, where it may be seen in great abundance, for it is the representative of the *Corvidæ* there, and very tame and familiar it is there, searching the newly mown meadows for worms and slugs, and marching on the roads in front of our horses, just as its congener the rook does here. In Egypt it may be noticed as bold and self-asserting as in its northern home, bullying great Kites and Hawks, and robbing them of their prey, and driving away the huge Griffon and Cinereous Vulture, from the carrion they had appropriated.

On the eastern coast of England I have found it in some numbers, as it resorts to the sea-shore for the never-failing supply of food which it finds in shell-fish and other marine productions thrown up by the tides; and Bishop Stanley says it may frequently be seen after vain attempts to break through the hard shell of a cockle or mussel, to seize it in its bill, mount with it to a great height, and then let it fall on a hard rock, by which it is broken, and the bird has nothing more to do than to reap the fruit of its forethought. In colour the head, throat, wings, and tail are black, the rest of the plumage smoke gray. It is called the *Hooded Crow* from its black head, and the *Royston Crow*, as it was supposed to be peculiar to that district, where in truth I have seen it in considerable numbers:—

‘Like Royston Crows, where (as a man may say)
Are friars of both orders, black and gray.’*

It is also provincially named the ‘Gray-backed’ and the ‘Scaul Crow;’ and on the eastern coast, the ‘Danish Crow,’ and in the north of England, the ‘Huddie,’ which is merely an abbreviation of Hooded Crow or Hoodie. But most remarkable of all is the name of ‘Russian Nightingale,’ bestowed on it at Archangel,† where it is so abundant as to be considered one of the most characteristic birds of the district; but why so unmelodious a species should be so designated, I am at a loss to conjecture. In France, it is *La Corneille mantelée*, ‘Crow wearing a mantle;’ in Germany *Nebel-Rabe*, literally ‘Mist Crow,’ or ‘Clouded Crow;’ in Sweden, *Grä-Kräka*, ‘Gray Crow.’

97. ROOK (*Corvus frugilegus*).

In a subsequent page of this volume will be found a paper entitled ‘A Plea for the Rooks,’ which I read before the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society at Malmesbury, in August, 1862, wherein I pointed out the habits of this most familiar bird, and endeavoured to prove its value in destroying

* J. Cleveland’s Poems.

† Messrs. Alston and Harvie Brown’s ‘Notes from Archangel,’ in *Ibis* for 1873, p. 65.

grubs, so far exceeding any injury it may commit in occasionally consuming corn, so that I need add but little more about it: it is somewhat larger than the Carrion Crow, and may easily be distinguished from that bird by the bare space of rough white skin surrounding the base of the beak and on the fore part of the head. As in the young birds these parts are covered with bristly feathers, it has been by some supposed that the constant plunging of the bill into the ground in search of worms and grubs causes the abrasion of these feathers, while others affirm it to be an original peculiarity: and the question is hardly yet satisfactorily settled; '*adhuc sub judice lis est,*' though I am very decidedly of the latter opinion. The fact, however, of the existence of the rough skin which serves to distinguish it from its more sable congener, the Carrion Crow, is undoubted. This skin is also very elastic and pliable, and in the spring the Rook may be seen flying home to its nest, with its throat distended with a supply of food for its young, as if in a pouch below the chin, though none such exists.

Professor Newton has well described a curious habit of this bird, which must be familiar to many. 'Occasionally,' he says, 'mounted to a very great height, the Rooks will suddenly let themselves drop headlong, twisting as they fall, to within a few feet of the trees or of the ground, when they recover themselves, and glide onwards. One after another, as though they had all gone mad, they precipitate themselves in this wonderful way, some of them wheeling round and rising again to perform the feat a second time.*' When first I went to reside at Yatesbury, now thirty-five years ago, I was extremely anxious to see a rookery established at the Rectory, and ardently wished that some of the birds from a strong colony on a glebe near the old rectory and church, a quarter of a mile away, might send a detachment to occupy my home plantations. I had, however, but small expectation that they would do so, on account of the inferiority both in size and in age of the trees with which I was surrounded. It so chanced, however, about this time, that the branches of a Scotch fir,

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 298.

planted too near the house, were blown by the March wind (which is somewhat blustering on our downs) against the slates of the roof of the rectory, and it was deemed advisable to cut down the tree. But what was my vexation, when it fell under the axe, to find a Rook's nest, containing three eggs, securely fixed in the upper branches, though unseen from below, which would have been the nucleus of the rookery I so much desired, had I not, by my own act, unwittingly destroyed it. Now (said I in despair) there can be no farther hope of a rookery here, after so inauspicious a beginning: but the following season either the same or another pair made their nest in a neighbouring tree; and so fast did they increase under my protection, for I suffered no shooting of the young rooks for the first twenty-five years, that I now count annually at least two hundred nests all around my house. As long as the rooks confined themselves to the trees on three sides of the house, the villagers merely considered their advent as a proof of ordinary good fortune (just as the German hails as the harbinger of prosperity the selection of his house-roof for its nursery by the stork), but when they occupied the trees on the fourth side, then the villagers congratulated me warmly, and said 'it was a sign that money was coming in on all sides,' for such was a very old and true saying handed down from their fathers! which, however, I regret to add, has not yet been verified in my case. That a rookery thrives best when the young birds are annually shot is another popular delusion: but as the late Mr. Sotheron Estcourt remarked, nobody has yet shown such confidence in that opinion as to advocate a similar experiment in a human colony; and certainly I am in a position to prove the contrary by my own experience in regard to my Rooks, which are now unhappily obliged to be thinned down nearly every year, as their numbers are become too great for the locality. As with the raven and the crow mentioned above, so there are superstitions and rhymes of a like character relating to the Rook. In the north of England the notion is very prevalent that when Rooks desert a rookery which they have tenanted for a number of years, the coming

downfall of the family on whose property it stands is surely predicted. They are also said to avoid building on trees which are unsound, however fair their outward appearance; cunningly, if not too sagaciously, foreseeing their coming fall; but this in all likelihood is to be attributed to the decay which has already begun in the uppermost twigs, and which they have found by experiment to be unfit for their requirements. It is also commonly said in some places that when a rookery is near a house, and a death occurs in that house, the Rooks will not leave the neighbourhood until the funeral has taken place. The following is an old rhyme common in the northern counties of England:

‘ On the first of March
The crows begin to search;
By the first o’ April
They are sitting still;
By the first o’ May
They’re a’ flown away:
Creeping greedy back again
Wi’ October’s wind and rain.’^o

Except during the nesting season—February to May—Rooks do not roost on the trees where they breed, but wing their way from the several rookeries in the neighbourhood to some large wood, where they congregate from all the country round. But they generally call at their nesting trees as they pass to their feeding grounds in the early morning, and often halt there again as they return at the close of day. The specific name *frugilegus* signifies ‘fruit collecting,’ but let it be remembered that the seeds of weeds, together with grubs, wireworms, and many other destructive members of the animal and vegetable kingdoms are all ‘fruit’ to the Rook. In France it is known as *Le Freux*; in Germany, *Saat-Rabe*, ‘Seed-Crow;’ in Sweden, where, except in the extreme south of the country, it is rarely seen, *Räka*; in Spain and Portugal, where it is only a winter visitor, *Gralha*.

^o Dyer’s ‘English Folk-Lore,’ p. 77.

98. JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*).

This lively bird is as well-known as the preceding, with which it lives in the closest alliance, and its active bustling movements, cunning saucy look, and sharp short voice make it a general favourite. Wherever the rooks are feeding, there you may invariably see the Jackdaw strutting about with careless jaunty air, and hear its merry saucy chatter; it will also perch, like the starling, on the sheep's back, and for the same laudable friendly purpose. Towers and cliffs are its general dwelling-places, but its favourite haunts seem to be our grandest cathedrals and largest colleges, amid the towers and pinnacles of which it loves to nest. Often, however, where suitable buildings are not at hand, it will breed, as it does here, in holes of trees; and occasionally, where neither building nor trees may be found, it will occupy a rabbit burrow underground, as do also the stock-dove and sheldrake at times.* For the marvellous pillars of sticks which it sometimes builds as a support to its nest, I must refer my readers to the pages of Yarrell, Dresser, Seeböhm, and others.† As a proof that the Daw has long been regarded with favourable eyes by the inhabitants of this country, we may remark that it has received the familiar prefix of *Jack*, just as other feathered favourites are in like manner honoured, as *Robin* Redbreast, *Tom Tit*, *Jenny Wren*, etc. The specific name, *monedula*, is derived by Ovid—in his account of the nymph Arne being mythically turned into a Daw for having betrayed her country for gold—(Metam. vii. 466), from *moneta*, 'money,' and *edo*, 'I eat' (B.O.U.). Professor Skeat says that 'Daw' is the same as 'Caw,' and is derived from the note of the bird. In France it is *Choucas*; in Germany, *Dohle Rabe*, 'Drain-crow'; in Sweden, *Kaja*; and in Portugal, *Choia*, but it is very rare in Portugal and in Spain; in Italy, *Cornacchia*. Its plumage is grayish black, glossed with blue, green, and purple, with the exception of the hind part of the neck, which is light gray.

* Gilbert White's 'Selborne,' Letter xxi.

† See, too, Jesse's 'Scenes and Tales of Country Life,' p. 57.

99. MAGPIE (*Pica caudata*).

Exceedingly handsome, with bright burnished plumage, and of very graceful form, the Magpie must claim our admiration, however we may find fault with its mischievous, cunning, greedy character. To see it flit from tree to tree at a distance (and it is too shy to suffer a near approach), one might imagine its colours to be simply black and white, and even then we must admire its elegant figure; but to come upon it suddenly, and have a clear view of it in the golden sunshine, one can but marvel at the reflections of green and purple and blue which shine with metallic brilliancy on its dark plumage, wondrously contrasted with the purest white; its long graduating tail too, which it will sometimes spread like a fan, at other times move up and down, is another ornament, and adds much to its gracefulness. It seems always on the alert for an enemy, and by its loud continuous chattering, gives general warning when danger is near.

The Pie gained the name of *Magpie* from the French word *magot*, implying 'a caprice,' 'a whim,' a 'quaint little fellow or figure, or fancy,' an appellation which the Pie appears to have obtained from its drolleries.* At all events this bestowal of a pet name on the Pie, as on the daw and others mentioned above, is a proof of the warm feeling of regard which was once felt in England towards the Magpie, though now it is generally detested and ruthlessly destroyed. So it is refreshing to find in a letter from the Rev. W. Butt that 'Minety is a most wonderful place for Magpies. I should never have believed any country could so abound in them. You might see in the winter six or eight at a time, and the trees are full of their nests.' Though so common in some few wooded districts, it is rarely to be met with on our downs, and its poaching egg-stealing propensities make it no favourite with the gamekeeper. I am happy, however, to say that the plantations which surround my garden at Yatesbury, being a quiet and safe asylum where no gun is fired, and where

* Hindley's 'Tavern Anecdotes,' p. 235.

the taking of all nests is strictly forbidden, have proved for many years a successful nursery for the Magpies, which annually return to breed there, and generally bring off their brood in safety. But to see how confiding this bird can be under the most favourable circumstances one must visit Norway. There it is absolutely safe from persecution, being regarded with the utmost superstitious fear rather than reverence, and so it is the very tamest and commonest of birds, scarcely moving out of our way as we passed by, and building its nest in some bush or tree close to a cottage door. Something of the same superstitious feeling appears to have been generally entertained for the Magpie in this country, the remains of which still linger in the following well-known lines, signifying the good or ill luck foretold by the number of these birds seen together :

‘ One for sorrow, two for mirth,
Three for a wedding, four for a birth.’

Though I would explain, as I have done elsewhere, that this was a fisherman’s saying in the first place, and applied only to the season of spring, when it was unlucky for the angler to see a single Magpie, because that betokened cold and stormy weather, when one Magpie would remain on the nest, sitting on the young to keep them warm : whereas it was lucky to see two, for when both parents went out together the weather must be assuredly warm and settled.

But there is an old tradition which explains the origin of the ill luck that is supposed to arise from meeting a Magpie in the following way. It was the only bird that refused to enter the ark with Noah and his folk, preferring to perch itself on the roof of the ark, and to jabber over the drowning and perishing world. Ever since it has been regarded as unlucky to meet this defiant and rebellious bird.* Others looked upon the bird with superstitious terror, because the witches, who had sold themselves to the Evil One, and worked all manner of hurt to mankind, were supposed frequently to assume the form of the Magpie. The

* Dyer’s ‘English Folk-Lore,’ pp. 83-86.

after part of the rhyme above mentioned was doubtless added in pleasantry, and probably without meaning; just as the still farther continuation, which is known in some places :

‘ Five for rich, six for poor,
Seven for a witch, I can tell you no more.’

Or as another version, with equally meaningless intention :

‘ Five for a fiddle, six for a dance,
Seven for England, eight for France.’^o

With reference to France, to which the larger number is assigned, I may remind the traveller that as the railway train hurries him through that country, the Magpie is the only bird he will see in abundance, occupying the interminable lines of poplars, which stretch away for many a league into the distance on all sides, and seeming to be the sole representative of the feathered race there.

The nest of the Magpie is of large size and of oval shape, generally surrounded with a protective fence of thorns which partially cover over the top like a dome, and which give it an untidy unfinished appearance. And this half nest is accounted for by the following ornithological legend: ‘ Once upon a time, when the world was very young, the Magpie, by some accident or another, although she was quite as cunning as she is at present, was the only bird that was unable to build a nest. In this perplexity, she applied to the other members of the feathered race, who kindly undertook to instruct her. So, on a day appointed, they assembled for that purpose, and the materials having been collected, the blackbird said, “Place that stick there,” suiting the action to the word, as she commenced the work. “Ah!” (said the Magpie), “I knew that afore.” The other birds followed with their suggestions, but to every piece of advice the Magpie kept saying, “Ah! I knew that afore.” At length, when the bridal habitation was half finished, the patience of the company was fairly exhausted by the pertinacious conceit of the Pie, so they all left her with the united exclamation, “Well, Mistress Mag, as you seem to know all about it, you may

^o Halliwell’s ‘ Popular Rhymes.’

even finish the nest yourself." Their resolution was obdurate and final, and to this day the Magpie exhibits the effects of partial instruction by her miserably incomplete abode.' Whether there are two species of Magpie resident among us, the one smaller in bulk, and with a shorter tail, and breeding in hedges, while the larger longer-tailed species breeds in trees, is one of those long-disputed points which have never been satisfactorily decided. The English name 'Pie' is said by Professor Skeat to come from *pipere*, 'to chirp;' but the word 'pied' is derived from the bird, and means 'variegated like a Magpie.' In France it is *La Pie*; in Germany, *Garten-Krahe*, 'Garden-Crow;' in Italy, *Gazzera commune*; in Portugal, *Pega*; in Sweden, *Skata*; in Spain, *Marica*.

100. JAY (*Garrulus glandarius*).

This is another shy retiring bird, restless and noisy, of exceeding handsome plumage, and much persecuted by gamekeepers for its mischievous propensities, though gardeners have a better right to complain of its evil deeds, for fruit, rather than young birds and eggs, form its favourite food. It is, however, by no means particular whether it satisfies the cravings of appetite with animal or vegetable diet: for its scientific name *glandarius* is not distinctive, as all its congeners and several other genera partake of the 'acorn' with equal avidity with the Jay. It is even a more confirmed chatterer than the magpie, whence its specific name *garrulus*, and its note is harsh and grating; but though one of the most noisy and chattering of birds, as its name declares, the Jay becomes quite silent during the breeding season, when its caution is extraordinary.* The English name 'Jay,' the older spelling of which was 'Gay,' is derived from its brightly-coloured plumage. The French name *Geai*, and the Portuguese *Gaio*, are taken, as with us, from its gay dress, but in Germany it is *Eichel-Krahe*, 'Acorn-Crow;' in Italy, *Ghiandaja Comune*, 'Common Acorn-Eater;' in Sweden, *Nöt-skrika*; and in Spain, *Arrandajo*, and provincially *Cabazon*,

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 324.

'large-headed.' In general colour it is pale chocolate; but the black and white crest which it can elevate and depress at pleasure; the bright blue, barred with black and white, of its wing coverts; and the contrast of the white patch over the black tail, are its most striking points. It may be found in almost all woods and plantations throughout the county.

Here we may take leave of the Conirostral Tribe, and we may remark in conclusion how gradually we have been conducted through the Larks and Buntings up to the Finches, some of which display such exceeding power of beak, and live wholly on grain; and so on through the Starlings and Crows down to the Jay, omnivorous feeders as these last are, so that the transition to the next tribe, distinct though it is, will not be so rapid, and we can pass on without much hiatus and almost imperceptibly to the family standing first of the climbers, viz., the Woodpeckers, which we shall find in many points have affinities with those last described.

CHAPTER VII.

INSESSORES (*Perchers*).

SCANSORES (*Climbers*).

THIS is a small tribe, compared to the two previously described, containing but three families, the Woodpeckers, Creepers, and Cuckoos; but it yields to none in point of interest, all its members partaking of habits peculiar to the tribe, and being sufficiently scarce in point of numbers to attract attention whenever they appear. They are essentially inhabitants of the trees, procuring all their food from the insects which they find in the branches and trunks, or from the berries and fruits thereon. Some of the families in this tribe seldom touch the ground, and they are rarely to be found elsewhere than in wooded districts; they are all more or less eminent for their climbing and grasping powers, which are developed in different degrees in the various genera.

PICIDÆ (THE WOODPECKERS).

This family may well stand at the head of the climbers, for nothing can exceed the admirable structure of their bodies, and the formation of their legs, feet, tail, beak and tongue, all so eminently adapted to their requirements; the legs extremely short and strong, giving the bird a good purchase on the trunk or branch of the tree into which it is about to dig with its powerful beak; the toes long, two being directed backwards and two forwards (an arrangement peculiar to the climbers, but which adds immensely to its powers of grasping and climbing),

and furnished with strong curved claws, with which it can cling to the bark: the tail composed of twelve stiff bristly feathers, with very strong shafts, serving the bird as a fulcrum or rest on which to support itself, while bending back the head preparatory to a sharp hammering with the beak; the beak straight, long, tapering, wedge-shaped and immensely strong, in short, an instrument perfectly formed for hammering into the wood of a decayed tree: while the tongue is very long and slender, armed with a horny barbed tip and sharp bristles thereon, and extends to that degree that it is capable of being thrust out to a great length, and withdrawn again through the mandibles when the sharp point has perforated and so secured the insect prey, dislodged from the trunk or laid bare beneath the bark of the tree by the action of the beak: it is also furnished with a glutinous substance exuding from its surface, to which the smaller insects adhere, and so have no need to be transfixed. Add to these characteristics that the head is large and the body compact and small, and we have before us a structure perfectly fitted for the habits of the Woodpecker race. Members of this family are generally of solitary disposition, seldom associating in flocks; and they are perfectly harmless, never guilty of even the slightest damage to sound or healthy trees (which is a charge frequently, though quite erroneously, brought against them), but always selecting those which are hollow and worthless, and have betrayed to their keen sense unmistakable signs of decay.

101. GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER (*Picus Martius*).

I think myself singularly happy in claiming a specimen of this fine species for Wiltshire, for I have never been able to assent to the verdict of those who have pronounced all the recorded specimens in Great Britain as mistakes or impositions. I cannot, and I do not believe that all our older Ornithologists were so mistaken or deceived; and on looking over long lists of instances given on what seems to be excellent authority, I feel

persuaded that *P. Martius* has occasionally appeared in England, perhaps more frequently in former years than of late. At all events, the single specimen I adduce is now in Mr. James Rawlence's collection at Bulbridge, in the parish of Wilton, and that gentleman received it from Mr. Samuel Pope, then of Kingston Deverill Farm, who assured Mr. Rawlence it was killed when they were shooting rooks in Longleat Park. I regret that I cannot give the exact date, but it was some years ago, and it was sent to be stuffed by Mr. King, the well-known bird-stuffer at Warminster, now unhappily deceased, or he might have supplied this and other desired particulars. The Great Black Woodpecker is much larger than all the other European species, and is entirely black in colour, the top of the head only excepted, which is of a rich blood-red. It is a strong powerful bird, and is common in northern Europe, and found sparingly in the fir forests of Germany and Switzerland. When I was in Norway in the year 1850, I was so fortunate as to fall in with it in the great forest of the Glommen, and shot it as it was ascending the trunk of a fir tree. There were two in company, and I followed them as they flew screaming through the forest, but I never saw birds fly more heavily, or with such apparent exertion and such clumsy motion as these. It was surprising, too, with what loud-sounding taps they hammered with their powerful beaks on the bark of the trees they were ascending; and I could well understand how they gained the Norwegian name of *Spill-Kråka*, 'Splinter Crow,' or 'Chip Crow,' from the mass of splinters always to be found at the foot of the tree where they carry on their labours. In France, it is *Le Pic Noir*; in Germany, *Schwarzspecht*; in Italy, *Picchio Corvo*.

I conclude my account of this fine species with the following Norse legend. "When our Blessed Lord was wandering upon earth, He and St. Peter came to an old wife's home, who sat baking; her name was Gertrude, and she had a red mutch upon her head. They had walked a long way and were hungry, and our Lord begged for a bannock to stay their hunger. "Yes, they should have it." So she took a tiny little piece of dough

and rolled it out; but as she rolled it, it grew until it covered the whole griddle. "Nay, that was too big, they could not have that." So she took a tinier bit still; but when that was rolled out, it covered the whole griddle just the same, and "that bannock was too big," she said, "they couldn't have that either." The third time she took a still tinier bit, so tiny that you could scarce see it; but it was the same story over again. The bannock was too big. "Well," said Gertrude, "I can't give you anything; you must just go without, for all these bannocks are too big." Then our Lord waxed wrath and said, "Since you loved Me so little as to grudge Me a morsel of food, you shall have this punishment: you shall become a bird, and seek your food between bark and bole, and never get a drop to drink save when it rains." He had scarcely said the last word before she was turned into a Great Black Woodpecker, or "Gertrude's bird," and flew from her kneading-trough right up the chimney. And till this very day you may see her flying about, with her red mutch on her head, and her body all black, because of the soot in the chimney; and so she hacks and taps away at the trees for her food, and whistles when rain is coming—for she is ever athirst—and then she looks for a drop to cool her tongue.*

102. GREEN WOODPECKER (*Picus viridis*).

This is the most common species among the Woodpeckers, and a handsome bird withal. Its general plumage is yellowish green above, and greenish yellow beneath, with a crimson head, the crimson prolonged to the back of the neck; it is more often seen on the ground than its congeners, probably from its extreme partiality to ant-hills and their contents. Its flight is heavy and undulating; Gilbert White says '*volatu undoso*, opening and closing its wings at every stroke, and so always rising or falling in curves;' but it never need to travel far, for having ascended a tree from the bottom, in an upright or spiral direction (for it is incapable of descending unless backwards), and having concluded

* Dasent's 'Popular Tales from the Norse.'

its examination there, and cleared off all the insects in its way, it merely flies off to the next tree, on the trunk of which it will fix itself near the ground, and begin its spiral ascent as before.

If suddenly disturbed it utters a screeching laugh, and flies off with a series of long undulations to some distant tree on which it fixes itself near the roots, and immediately dodges round to the other side, clambering up all the while with a short jerking motion of the body. Its remarkable colour and appearance, its harsh cries, and its habits, have all combined to give rise to a variety of names by which it is known in this and other countries. In China, where it is very common, it is known as (but I will not attempt the long Chinese name, suffice that it signifies) the 'Tree-injurer.*' In Turkey it is called *Cham-agri*, because its note is as 'of a fir-tree in distress'; in Germany *Holzauer*; and in Sweden, *Hackspett*; and with us it is variously called in different districts 'Pick a tree;' 'Woodspite' (or more correctly 'Woodspeight'); 'Hewhole,' 'Whetile' (a corrupt form of 'Whittle,' or cutter and chipper of wood); and the Rev. A. P. Morres says that in his part of the county, near Salisbury, it is known as the 'English Parrot;' more commonly it is styled the *Yaffle* or *Yappingall*, from its loud hearty laugh-like note, and when it is more than commonly vociferous, stormy weather may be confidently expected; hence another name frequently given it of *Rain-bird*, as Bewick tells us the Romans called it *Pluviae avis*. Lloyd in his 'Scandinavian Adventures' says of it: 'In Norway this bird is considered better than a barometer. It is supposed not only to predict the coming weather, but that three days beforehand: if its notes are loud and monotonous, fine weather may be expected, but if low, on the contrary, rain and storm are at hand; and should it approach the house and cry, something like a regular tempest is to be looked for.' Thus we see that both English and Norsemen considered this bird as highly weather-wise, though they totally differ in the deductions they draw from the loudness or softness of its scream; possibly we, none of us yet quite understand what sensations are produced on many members of

* Swinhoe in *Ibis* for 1861, p. 338.

the animal kingdom by changes in the atmosphere, nor how they indicate such feelings, though that many species are extremely susceptible of such impressions, and that too considerably before man can discern any prospect of change in the weather, admits of no doubt or dispute. Though not abundant anywhere, it is very generally distributed throughout the country, the more wooded parts being of course the most attractive to it, and the most frequented by it. Here, at Old Park, it is not uncommon, and sometimes, but not often, it will pay me a flying visit and examine my plantations and trees at Yatesbury. I once very nearly involved myself in some trouble in Norway, by shooting one of these birds, which I did not then know were objects of superstitious veneration to the simple-minded peasants. But no such indignation was shown when I shot a specimen of the 'Great Black Woodpecker,' for the larger bird had not contrived to attract to itself the love or fear, and consequent protection, which its green-hued cousin, doubtless from belief in some legend, had excited in the Norwegian mind. But to return to Wiltshire, the localities given me of its more frequent occurrence are: *Minety*, where the Rev. W. Butt says it is very common, far more than in any other district he ever lived in; *Erlestoke*, where Mr. G. Watson Taylor tells me it is common; *Corsham Court*, where, Lord Methuen writes, it has had a nest on the lawn as long as he can remember; *Heytesbury*, where it comes every spring, as I learn through Lord Heytesbury; *Market Lavington*, where Mr. Bouverie tells me its laughing cry was heard near the house all last autumn; *Wardour*, as I learn from Lord Arundell; *Baynton*, as I am told by Mr. W. Stancomb, jun.; and *Monkton Farley*, as Sir C. Hobhouse informs me. The continental names for this bird are generally, as with us, mere translations of *Picus viridis*; thus in France it is *Pic vert*; in Germany, *Grünspecht*; in Italy, *Picchio verde*; in Portugal, *Pica-pau verde*; in Sweden, *Grön Hackspett*. But in Spain it is *Pito real*, 'Royal (or great) Woodpecker;' and provincially, *Carpintero*, 'the Carpenter,' from the chips it throws about in making its nest.

103. GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Picus major*).

All the Woodpeckers are so extremely alike in habits, that the same general description applies to every species; this is not so common as the last, but is seen occasionally in all wooded districts; but it so seldom leaves the upper branches of trees, and so seldom makes its presence known by any sound it utters (for it is one of the most silent of birds), that it must very often escape notice. The Rev. A. P. Morres, whose experience agrees with mine, that it is the rarest of the Woodpeckers in this county, says it used to breed regularly in the village of Bodenham, near Salisbury, though it has not been noticed there of late; but at Hurdcott he reports that their nests were often to be found in the woods. I also hear of it at Wilton, at Wardour, and at Heytesbury. In North Wilts, I have many notices of its occurrence—in Draycot Park, at Erchfont, at Erlestoke, at Lacock, at Melksham, at Keevil, in Marlborough Forest on many occasions; at Potterne, at Roundway Park, at Spye Park, where the late Major Spicer picked up one of the remarkable wing feathers and sent it to me for identification. I may perhaps say generally that though certainly rare, it does occasionally come to the notice of most observers. I have found it common enough in Germany. Its general colour is black and white, with a jet black top of the head and red occiput, but young birds have the crown of the head red, and the female has no red on the head. It may at once be distinguished from its congener next to be described by its superior size, measuring from the point of the beak to the tip of the tail over nine inches. In Sussex its provincial name is the 'French Woodpecker;' elsewhere it is known as the 'Woodpie,' the 'Great Pied,' and the 'Great Black and White Woodpecker;' and in Wiltshire as the 'Gray' and sometimes as the 'Black Woodpecker,' which latter is confusing. In France it is known as *Pic Epeiche (ou varié)*; in Germany, *Bunt Specht*; in Italy, *Picchio vario maggiore*; in Portugal, *Pica-pau malhado*; all with the signification of 'Spotted' or 'Speckled Woodpecker.' In Sweden, however, it is *Större Hackspett*, 'Great Woodpecker.'

104. LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Picus minor*).

More common, at all events of late years, but exactly resembling the last, except in point of size, being not quite six inches in length, this species occasionally visits us. It is of a very retiring disposition, and prefers the upper branches of trees to the trunk and more exposed limbs, and creeps out of sight behind some friendly bough the instant it perceives an intruder. From the observations of various authors one would say that Wiltshire was the favourite locality of this bird. Selby says 'it is well known in the counties of Gloucester and Wilts.' Montagu mentions how he observed it in Wiltshire, and found its nest and took its eggs there. Yarrell speaks of Wiltshire as one of its habitations, in addition to which I have notices of its having been killed within the last few years at Potterne, Roundway, Devizes, Clarendon Park and Draycot Woods; and Mr. Elgar Sloper says, 'I have obtained three specimens of this beautiful little bird: one caught near Devizes in June, 1840, lived for some time in confinement, fed on insects and bread and milk.' More recently, I have heard of it as shot at Collingbourne. Mr. Grant mentions several from Devizes, Wedhampton, Wilsford, Potterne, and Keevil; and Mr. A. B. Fisher writes that he watched it in his garden at Potterne, in December, 1885; and Mr. Gwatkin, that it breeds regularly at the Manor House in the same parish. The Rev. E. Goddard saw it in the garden at Hilmarton Vicarage, in 1873, and reports others seen in that parish. Mr. G. Watson Taylor says it is common at Erlestoke, and the Marlborough College Natural History Reports repeatedly mention the appearance of young as well as old birds in Savernake Forest, where they regularly breed, and which should be a very paradise for the whole Woodpecker family. In south Wilts, Mr. W. Wyndham says it is common at Dinton; Lord Arundell, that it is found at Wardour; and Lord Heytesbury, that it occurs at Heytesbury; while the Rev. A. P. Morres pronounces it not at all uncommon in his neighbourhood, and gives instances to show that sometimes it is quite abundant there.

Finally, Dr. Blackmore, not long since, picked one up dead in the Museum garden at Salisbury.

Mr. Cecil Smith says that it is known in Somerset as the 'Barred Woodpecker,' and Mr. Knox that it is called in Sussex the 'Little French Woodpecker;' but Professor Newton says that it is sometimes called the 'Crank Bird,' and the 'Pump-borer,' and used to be called the 'Wood-cracker,' from a remarkable note which it utters in the spring, the sound being supposed to resemble that of an auger when used on the hardest wood. He also adds, it is especially common in the counties of Berks, Wilts, and Somerset. In France it is known as *Pic Epeichette*, diminutive of *P. Epeiche*; in Germany, *Grasspecht*; in Italy, *Picchio sarto minore*; in Sweden, *Mindre Hackspett*. It appears to be scarcely known in Spain and Portugal.

Bewick used to assert that a third Spotted Woodpecker (*Picus medius*), which is not uncommon on the Continent, occasionally appeared in England; more modern naturalists, however, deny this, and affirm that the young of the Great Spotted Woodpecker was mistaken for that bird. The late Mr. Marsh thought that Bewick was right, and that we have three distinct species. He says: 'I have three very different from each other; they are sometimes found in Draycote Woods, where one of my specimens was shot: the largest was killed there; the next in size was killed in Clarendon Park, the smallest in Amesbury Park.'

Mr. Morres also felt convinced that the 'Middle Spotted Woodpecker' occasionally visited us, but Professor Newton will not allow that an authentic instance of its appearance in England has yet occurred, and declares that Pennant and Bewick, and all who followed them, mistook the red-headed young of the Great Spotted Woodpecker for this purely continental bird.*

105. GOLD-WINGED WOODPECKER (*Picus auratus*).

There is but one instance recorded of the appearance of this beautiful bird in England, and that was in the autumn of 1836 at Amesbury Park in this county: it was brought to M. H. Marsh,

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 484.

Esq., the late Member for Salisbury, in the flesh, immediately after it was shot; it was preserved by Mr. Edwards, of Amesbury, and came into the collection of the late Rev. G. Marsh, of Sutton Benger. It is a native of America, and in general appearance and size bears some resemblance to the common Green Woodpecker, but differs from it in having bright yellow bars on the wings, and black spots on the breast; moreover, the throat and chest are cinnamon colour, and a broad crescentic patch of black crosses the chest.

It is known in America as the 'Flicker,' and Professor Newton describes it as one of the most characteristic birds of the Eastern United States and Canada, and says that a specimen of this far-migrating bird is said to have been sent from Greenland. The Professor, however, in accordance with a principle he had laid down, refused it admission to the British list, on account of its transatlantic origin; while the compilers of the B.O.U. Catalogue insert it in their list under the name of *Colaptes auratus*—*colaptes* signifying 'a chisel,' κολάπτῃς, from κολάπτω, 'I peck with the bill,' used almost always of birds; and *auratus*, 'gilded,' from the golden-yellow colour showing under the wings and tail.

106. WRYNECK (*Yunx torquilla*).

From the variety of provincial names with which this prettily marked bird is designated, one would imagine it to be extremely common; but this is not the case, though it visits us in the spring every year, and is sparingly distributed over all wooded districts. The explanation of its many names will be a tolerably complete account of its habits. That by which it is more usually known to us, 'Wryneck,' as also its scientific name *torquilla*, the French *Torcol*, the German *Wendehals* and *Natterhals*, and the Italian *Torcicollo*, are derived from its singular habit of stretching its neck, twisting its head round so that it lies on its back, and turning up the whites of its eyes, when it wriggles like a serpent [in China it is called *Shay-ling*, or 'Snake's-neck'], and also from its habit of turning the head rapidly from side to side while feeding, the body remaining

motionless all the while, and this is especially seen when the bird is engaged at an ant-heap, extracting those insects and their larvæ which form its favourite food; hence another of its names, 'Emmet-hunter.' The manner in which it seizes its prey is by darting out its very long extensile tongue, which is even longer in proportion than that of the woodpeckers, and transfixing or securing it by means of a glutinous secretion with which it is furnished, and this it does with wonderful rapidity and never-failing accuracy: from this habit it is often called 'Long-tongue.' Again, it is known as the 'Snake-bird,' from the hissing noise made by the parent and young birds when the hole in which it has made its nest is disturbed; on such occasions they will puff out their feathers, snap with their bills, hiss like snakes, and assume the most bold and defiant aspect. It is also known as the 'Cuckoo's mate,' and 'Cuckoo's fool,' and 'Cuckoo's leader,' because it arrives a few days before the cuckoo; and in Sweden as *Göktyta*, and in Norway as *Sä Gouk*, that is 'Seed Cuckoo,' because its note is heard during seedtime. In Malta it enjoys two names, *Sultan issummiem*, or 'King of the Quails,' arriving on migration just before its subjects; and *Abu lebbiet*, 'Father of Crouchers,' I know not for what reason. The late Mr. Knox said that in Sussex it is known as the 'Rinding Bird,' so called from its appearance in the spring being supposed to indicate the proper time for felling the oak-trees, and removing the bark or rind from the trunks and branches. Now the operation of 'rinding' cannot be attempted until the sap has begun to flow; then myriads of minute insects are roused from their winter sleep in the deepest recesses of the bark, and seek the surface, where the long elastic tongue of the Wryneck extracts them rapidly from the crevices. Mr. Marsh used to say that in Wiltshire this bird is sometimes known as the 'Valiant Sparrow.' It received the name *Yunx* (in classical Greek ἕγξ) from its cry sounding like the exclamation *hū*, whence ἕξω, 'I shout;' but, according to mythologists, the nymph *Yunx*, the daughter of *Echo*, was transformed into a Wryneck through the jealousy of *Juno*. In Spain and Portugal it derives its

name from the food it loves; in the former it is known as *Hormiguero*, in the latter as *Papa-formigas*, both signifying 'ant-eater.' In Spain, however, it has a second name, *Torcecuello* 'Wryneck.' It is of shy retiring habits, in shape very like a woodpecker, with the same arrangement of feet, two toes before and two behind, but without the stiff bristly tail. Its plumage is beautifully pencilled, all the feathers most delicately mottled and marbled with bars and spots of dark and light brown, gray and buff.

Mr. Harting describes its loud oft-repeated note as like a repetition of the syllables, 'Oh, dear, dear, dear, dear, dear, dear,' and says it more nearly resembles the cry of the kestrel than that of any other bird, though it is less harsh.* It is a solitary unsociable bird, seldom seen, except in the breeding season, in company with another. The only time I ever found it in any number, was in a marshy coppice near Bordighera, in North Italy, from which I brought home some specimens; but the locality it selected was not a pleasant one, a hot, steaming, pestilential swamp which, whenever I visited it, was always swarming with adders. My personal acquaintance with it in Wiltshire has been very slight; twice only have I seen it in my orchard at Yatesbury; but I have records of it as an occasional visitor in various parts of the county, and Mr. Grant has received it from Devizes, Everley, Pewsey, Netheravon, Poulshot, etc. The Rev. A. P. Morres had one brought in alive to the Vicarage at Britford, by his cat last summer (1886), and Mr. Gwatkin tells me it was heard several times at Worton in 1880.

CERTHIADÆ (THE CREEPERS).

This family is very nearly allied to the last, and the members of it are quite as great adepts in climbing, though with a different formation of feet, the toes being disposed in the more usual manner, viz., three before and one behind; the structure of the hind-toe, however, is such as to give the bird peculiar

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 113. 'Our Summer Migrants,' p. 246.

facilities for climbing perpendicular surfaces, and even the additional power of moving in either an upward or downward direction. Members of this family are of small size, with slender bodies, moderate necks, short wings, slender arched bills, and plumage peculiarly soft and free from bristles; like the last, they live entirely among the trees, feeding on the seeds, fruits, and insects which they find there.

107. COMMON CREEPER (*Certhia familiaris*).

This is the most elegant and delicate little bird we have, and it is very common, living with us all the year round, but coming to our notice most frequently in the winter, when the trees are bare of foliage, and most of the smaller birds have left us: then it may be seen creeping like a mouse up and down the bole of a tree, hence it is known in the south of the county as the 'Tree-mouse;' or else effecting a spiral ascent by a series of jerks or runs, and constantly shifting its position, now round to the back of the tree-stem, and now again to the front; or perhaps searching for its insect food among the rough logs in a wood-yard. Hence its name *familiaris*, 'friendly,' or 'belonging to the household;' and, indeed, nothing can exceed the confidence shown by this fearless but unpretending little favourite.

Next to the Golden-crested Wren it is the smallest British bird, and the most graceful in form, with a long slender curved beak, a very diminutive elegant body, plumage brown above and white below, and a stiff sharp-pointed tail bending downwards, and supporting it in its climbings, after the manner of that of the Woodpecker. Its note is a gentle monotonous chirp, which it continues to repeat during its incessant rambles on the stems and branches of the trees; otherwise it is the most silent of birds, seldom heard at all in winter, and in summer little above the faintest whisper. Perhaps it has no time for singing, for it is one of the most restless of birds, never still for an instant; and a most expert and indefatigable climber, its long claws, well curved and strong, enabling it to cling to the rough bark, at whatever angle the branch may be, whether vertical, horizontal, or oblique.

The names it bears on the Continent of Europe have general reference to its climbing capabilities. In France it is *Le Grim-pereau*, 'the Climber;' in Germany, *Gemeine Baumlauffer*, 'Common Tree-Runner;' in Sweden, *Träd-Krypare*, 'Tree-creeper;' in Spain, *Trepatroncos*, 'a Creeper of Trunks;' in Portugal, *Trepadeira*, 'Climber;' but in Italy, *Picchio passerino*, 'Sparrow Woodpecker.'

108. WREN (*Troglodytes vulgaris*).

This is a general favourite; its diminutive size, but pert aspect, its boldness and familiarity in winter (for it never leaves us), its full rich song and engaging manners, all bespeaking our protection: in colour it is reddish-brown, well mottled and speckled with various shades, but its most striking peculiarity is the erect position of its tail, which gives it a very jaunty appearance. Some authors have placed it among the warblers, but its long tapering arched beak, long curved claws, short rounded wings and soft plumage seem to point it out as a true creeper; moreover, though not essentially a climber, it clings with apparent ease to perpendicular surfaces sideways, and is often seen on the trunks as well as branches of trees; it also frequents walls and rocks, as well as banks and ditches, and its food consists of insects, seeds, and soft fruits. Many people are not aware of the volume and richness of its song, more particularly in the early spring, and this is the more remarkable when the diminutive size of the bird is taken into account. Shakspeare was evidently ignorant of this, for he says—

'The nightingale, if she should sing by day
When every goose is cackling, would be thought
No better a musician than the wren.'

In addition to its ordinary song it has a curious note of fear, which it utters at intervals when alarmed, and which (as Mr. Harting aptly says) somewhat resembles the winding up of a clock.* With us it bears the endearing name of 'Jenny Wren,'

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 114.

and in Sweden it is in the same spirit called *Tumme liden*, or 'Little Thumb;' indeed, generally its diminutive size, pert aspect, and familiarity have bespoken its immunity from harm at the hands of man; but this has not always been the case. It was a very old pastime with the Irish to hunt the Wren on New Year's Day, following it with sticks and stones from hedge to hedge until it was run down and destroyed; and this sport (!), under the name of 'toodling,' was very often practised at Eton in my time, and in which, I am ashamed to say, I sometimes took part. It originated from the legend of a wicked fairy having, when hard pressed and on the point of destruction, escaped by taking the form of a Wren, and being condemned to reanimate the same form once a year, with the definite sentence that she must ultimately perish by human hands.* In consequence of this legend the barbarous practice of hunting the Wren was year by year vigorously kept up in Ireland, and doubtless introduced at Eton in times long forgotten by some enthusiastic sons of the Emerald Isle.

One naturally is inclined to wonder how such small and apparently delicate birds as this and the preceding brave the severity of our winters in this country, and yet, notwithstanding the insect nature of their food and the slender form of their beaks, they *somehow* manage to subsist, and the Wren at least to warble in apparent gladness of heart during the roughest winds and the bleakest weather. This is also essentially a restless bird, always on the move and never stationary for a minute; it derives its scientific name *Troglodytes* from the *cave-like* appearance of the large domed nest which it inhabits (from *τρώγλη*, 'a hole,' and *δύω*, 'I go into,' B.O.U.), and of which it is in the habit of constructing several and leaving them half finished in the neighbourhood of its real occupied nest. With what intention it follows this curious habit has never been satisfactorily explained. Professor Newton says the general belief is that they are built by the male bird for his own lodging at night, and are called 'cocks' nests' in consequence. Some suggest that they

* Dyer's 'English Folk-lore,' p. 68.

are built as houses of refuge in winter. Some that they are simply unfinished nests from disturbance before completion, and some that they are the production of inexperienced young birds.* Professor Skeat says that 'Wren' means the 'Chirper,' or 'Twitterer,' lit. the 'neigher like a horse.' In France it is *Le Troglodyte*; in Germany, *Zaun Sanger*, 'Hedge Warbler;' in Italian, *Stricciolo*; in Sweden, *Gard-smyg*; in Spain, *Ratilla*, 'Little Mouse.'

109. HOOPOE (*Upupa Epops*).

Once seen, this bird can never be mistaken by the most unobservant, its long and beautiful crest being peculiar and distinctive: this is composed of soft silky feathers of a pale buff colour, each ending in a black and white spot or eye; and this crest it can erect and depress at pleasure. When the bird is in a quiescent state and undisturbed, the crest flows gracefully back in a recumbent position, but upon the least alarm, or when excited in any way, the feathers are immediately erected. More remarkable, however, is its attitude when really frightened by a hawk, and singular indeed is the expedient to which it resorts to protect itself. Squatting down upon the ground, it spreads out its tail and wings to their fullest extent, bringing the primaries round so as almost to meet in front, and throws back its head and bill, which it holds up perpendicularly. So long as danger threatens, it remains in this odd position, probably to deceive the enemy.† The general colour of the plumage is pale buff, amply relieved by the black and white bars of the wings and tail; the beak is very slender and slightly bent. The Hoopoe prefers moist and low situations, especially where woods abound: it may generally be seen on the ground searching for worms and grubs, though it so far shows its climbing habits as to fly to trees when disturbed, and to be often observed hanging from the branches of trees, in search of the insects which dwell on the under side of the foliage. When it rises on the wing it never flies high,

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. i., p. 463.

† Harting's 'Our Summer Migrants,' p. 253.

and its flight is weak and faltering; but it will gently steal from tree to tree, when at ease, with the wavy flapping of the owl, or, when alarmed, with the more suddenly jerking flight of a woodpecker.* Often, too, it skims over the ground with long undulating flight; and sometimes two or more will toy and gambol with one another in the air, occasionally tumbling several feet downwards before they can recover themselves. When it alights on the ground, it has a habit of bending down the head till it appears to rest the point of the beak on the earth, after the curious manner of the Apteryx or Kiwi-kiwi, as seen in the Zoological Gardens. As regards its diet, it is essentially a fowl feeder, searching for its food in the dirt and filth of an Oriental village; and when in the act of swallowing it always raises its bill aloft. Mr. Seebohm points out that the young Hoopoes have short straight bills, which afterwards develop gradually into the long curved beak of the adult bird.

The only occasion on which I have had the good fortune to see it alive in a wild state in Europe, was from a railway carriage in Hanover. The bird was marching about with great dignity on the embankment, strutting with conscious pride of its good looks; and before it flew away, erected its crest, and showed itself off to great advantage. But subsequently I became very familiar with it in Egypt, watching it every day as it marched about among the village outhouses, or beneath the groves of palm-trees with which most of the towns and villages are sheltered on the banks of the Nile; just as it has done for four thousand years or more; for its peculiar form is unmistakably represented, and may be immediately recognised in the famous rock-cut tombs of Beni Hassan, and elsewhere. There it is most tame and confiding, marching about with no more alarm at man than is shown by our barndoor fowls, though elsewhere it is of a shy timid disposition; but the Arabs have a superstitious reverence for it, for they attribute to it marvellous medicinal qualities, and hence call it 'the Doctor.'† Its head, too, is an

* Canon Tristram in *Ibis* for 1866, p. 80.

† *Ibid.*, for 1859, p. 27, and for 1866, p. 80.

indispensable ingredient in all charms and in the practice of witchcraft. Moreover the *Hudhud*, as they call it, is universally believed by the Bedouins to be inhabited by the spirits of the departed.

It derives its scientific name 'Upupa,' as well as the English 'Hoopoe,' German *Ein Houp*, and French *La Huppe*, from its note, resembling 'hoop, hoop,' cooed out very softly after the manner of the dove. Professor Newton says its simple love-song is *hoo, hoo, hoo*; or *hoop, hoop, hoop*; or *hoo, poo, poo*; and that it will puff out its breast and strike its bill against its perch at each note; at other times, however, I have heard it emit a kind of hissing sound. Then it will parade the ground with a stately walk and a jaunty step, bowing its head as it marches on, and alternately raising and lowering its crest in a slow and graceful manner. In reference to its uncleanly habits, and to the fact that it is nowhere more at home than on the foulest dunghill, it was known even so long ago as the time of Montagu as the 'dung-bird;' and in France '*sale comme une Huppe*' is a proverb, proclaiming a recognition of its filthy ways; while in China it goes by the name of the 'Coffin-bird' from its habit of breeding in the holes of exposed coffins, and is execrated by the Chinese in consequence.* But though so foul a feeder, and of such evil habits, it is highly esteemed by the epicure of all lands, and many was the dish of Hoopoes with which our dragoman supplied our table in the Nile boat. It may well be called a bird of the Mediterranean, for it may be found in every country on its shores, as it retires to winter in Northern Africa in September and returns to Europe in March; hence it is called by several nations 'the March fowl,' and being the earliest of the feathered visitors to arrive at Mentone, is locally termed there *Le Coq de Mars*. In Scandinavia, where it is only found in summer as an occasional straggler, its oft-repeated cry heard in the wilds of the forest is looked upon with alarm, for it is supposed to forbode scarcity and war, and hence the name given to it in

* Fourth edition of 'Yarrell's British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 424.

those countries of *Här-vogel*, or 'Army-bird.' In Italy it is *Upupa rubbola*; in Portugal, *Poupa*; in Spain, *Put-put*; but in Moorish or Arabic, *Abubilla*, 'Father of Beaks,' which is highly descriptive. I should add that as *Upupa* is a 'Hoopoe' in classical Latin, so ἕρως is 'a Hoopoe' in classical Greek.

It is not so rare in England as some imagine, for though never permanently resident here, scarcely a year passes when some do not make their appearance. I have many records of its occurrence in Wiltshire; Bishop Stanley recounts how one was caught on Salisbury Plain in a weak and exhausted state, which must evidently have come from a distance, for its beak was filled with red clay of a quality not found in that neighbourhood. Yarrell says it has been obtained in Wiltshire. Mr. Withers informed me that it was killed by Mr. Warriner's keeper many years since near Redholn turnpike gate. The Rev. G. Marsh recorded its capture at Winterslow in 1829; and more recently the Rev. George Powell (with the ready kindness with which he continually gratifies my ornithological taste) communicated to me the capture, on September 3, 1862, of a very fine male specimen, by some labourers in the farm-yard of Mr. Marsh of Heytesbury. The bird was weather-beaten and exhausted, and appeared to have come in for its share of a great storm which on the day preceding its capture had devastated the fields at Lavington. When secured, it was carefully placed in a large cage, and though at first very shy, it gradually became more reconciled to confinement; but at the end of seven days, without any ostensible reason, it died suddenly. These are undoubtedly authentic instances of the occurrence of the Hoopoe in our county, but in 1851 the Rev. F. Goddard, Vicar of Hilmarton, who has often seen this bird in Egypt, and is well acquainted with its habits, was so fortunate as to meet with it alive in Wiltshire on several distinct occasions. His description is so graphic and interesting from the rare occurrence of the bird, that I take leave to insert it in his own words: 'Some time in the summer, I believe in the month of August, riding from Alderton to Norton near Malmesbury, to do duty on a Sunday, about one mile and

a quarter from Alderton, at the point where Alderton, Sherston, and Hullavington parishes meet, I passed an old crumbling dungheap on the Foss way, and to my astonishment on that dungheap (by-the-bye very like his native ones) sat a splendid male Hoopoe, as calm and composed as possible, exactly as I have seen them in Egypt, on *every* dungheap. I approached close to him to admire him, and satisfy myself that this stranger at Alderton (but to me familiar friend) was a real Hoopoe; he then gave one or two of his peculiar jerks, and rising with a short undulating flight like a jay, rested on a hay-rick twenty yards distant. As I approached the rick, he jerked himself impatiently once or twice as before, and took flight for his dungheap, and again from that to the rick, but no further (like the Vicar of Wakefield, who confined his migrations from the "Blue bed to the Brown"); precisely as the bird appears everywhere from November to March in lower Egypt on the banks of the Nile, only that, having in that "basest of kingdoms" an infinite choice of dunghills, he merely removes himself and his wife (who is always with him) from the brown to the black, and *vice versa*. In the case of the bird in question, on my return from church there he was as before. During the week I forgot his existence; and on the following Sunday, as I passed that way for the same purpose, up jumped my friend from the back of the dunghill, and settled on his hay-rick, and so I found him very becomingly *at rest* on my return from service. The next day I sought him, and found him *at work* upon his mixen, as busy as possible and quite at home; he seemed to imagine that he had gained a parochial settlement under my ministration, not being aware that the Foss, which divided the dunghill and the rick, is invariably the division of parishes; thus he lost the advantage of being either in my care or that of the Vicar of Hullavington, but I considered him entitled to my protection. I could not hear, however, of his having been seen after that day, though I inquired much after him.'

Again in 1854, the Rev. F. Goddard reported to me the appearance of another strange bird, supposed to be a Hoopoe, near the

same place, in the following words: 'I heard from a person residing here' (at Alderton) 'that a bird answering the description of a Hoopoe with a high crest (a stranger, unknown to anyone about the place that saw it) was shot on the top of a chimney at Hibden Farm in Luckington Parish, distant half-a-mile from Alderton, and about three miles from the spot where I saw the Hoopoe in 1851. It was during the severe frost and snow of January, 1854, that this bird, supposed to be a Hoopoe, was killed; but as he fell into an old chimney, from which he has never been recovered, I cannot be sure of his identity.' So far from the pen of Canon Goddard; but even yet more interesting is the last account of these birds *breeding* in Wiltshire, which I have received through the same gentleman from his brother Mr. Septimus Goddard, who writes as follows in answer to my inquiries on the point: 'I perfectly well recollect the circumstance of the young Hoopoes being found in a bush near the brook on the farm now occupied by Mr. Ackers (of Morden), in Rodbourn Cheney Parish; they were four in number, nearly full grown; colour that of woodcocks, with very large topknots. I am not quite certain what became of them, but I rather think that they were taken back to the brook again. The old birds laid again and sat nearly in the same place the following season; but the eggs, four in number, were destroyed by boys. I have frequently seen Hoopoes in Sussex near Eastbourne, where several have been shot on the estate of the Duke of Devonshire.' The last paragraph shows that Mr. S. Goddard is not unacquainted with the bird, and cannot therefore have mistaken any other for it. This is perhaps as full an account of English Hoopoes as has fallen to the lot of any ornithologist of this country to meet with, and it is the more satisfactory that the narrator, Canon Goddard, is not only an acute and accurate observer of birds generally, but has become personally acquainted, and that very intimately, with the bird in question during his travels in Egypt.

More recently a fine male was shot at Savernake by Mr. Ponting in May, 1877, and Mr. Grant, of Devizes, records another

which had previously passed through his hands; while, in a letter lately received from Canada, the Marquis of Lansdowne obligingly informs me that one was shot at Bowood in the autumn of 1886. In South Wilts Mr. Morres records it as having been killed at West Knoyle in May, 1865; at Breamore in May, 1869; at Dean; at Upton Scudamore; at Mere, April, 1872; and one picked up on Mr. Rawlence's farm at Wilton, in 1874; and gives evidence to lead to the belief that a brood of young Hoopoes had been successfully reared in the neighbourhood of Stratford sub Castle in June, 1877. Mr. Thomas Baker, of Mere, also informs me that another example of this bird was shot in his neighbourhood very nearly at the same spot as that recorded above, about 1868, and the Marquis of Bath writes that one was killed at Longleat some time since.

110. NUTHATCH (*Sitta Europaea*).

This active little bird is to be found in our woods all the year round; in colour it is dark gray above, and orange-buff beneath; the beak is strong, straight, conical, and pointed, and with this instrument it will hammer with repeated and most sonorous blows the nut which it has previously fixed in some chink of bark or crevice in the tree, and which it rarely finds impervious to its sharp beak, which it brings down upon it with all the weight of its body; seldom baffled even by the toughest shell, which it will turn round till it has tried every point of attack, and generally succeeds at last in extricating the kernel. Should the nut accidentally fall from the chink in which it is fixed, or fly asunder, and the kernel drop out, the Nuthatch will dart upon it with the rapidity of lightning, catch it in its claws before it reaches the ground, and return with it to its former position. It runs both up and down the stems of trees, and will descend head foremost (in which respect it differs from all other birds), and varies its nut diet with insects and their larvæ, which it extracts from the bark and leaves. When running up or down a tree, it rests upon the back part of the whole *tarsus*, and makes great use as a support of what may be called the real

heel, and never uses the tail. When roosting it will sleep with the head and back downwards, after the manner of some of the Titmice.* The nest of the Nuthatch differs from that of any other bird with which I am acquainted; and it shows very considerable ingenuity and masonic skill in constructing it. Often it will make choice of a hole in a tree, but I have found it year after year in a brick wall, where one of the bricks had been left out by the scaffold-maker; and this large hole it will plaster up with clay and small stones, leaving an orifice only just large enough to admit its entrance and egress; and this plastering of mud or clay is no mere sham for the purpose of concealment; but a strong and substantial defence, leaving the cavity within perfectly secure. Then, on removing this wall of plaster, I have found the nest entirely composed of a large quantity of the inner bark of the Scotch fir, and it is astonishing what a very soft and elastic bed this fir-bark makes. I supplied some of this material to the late Mr. Hewitson, when he was engaged in the last edition of his famous book on the 'Eggs of British Birds,' as may therein be seen, and he expressed himself as much pleased with it, as none such had previously come under his notice. Though on more than one occasion I cut away the plaster when the young birds were flown, and took away the nest, the Nuthatches, nothing daunted by such spoliation, returned annually to the same hole, where they generally reared their young brood in safety. In reference to this plastering propensity, one of the names by which this bird is known in France is *Pic-maçon* (its proper name, however, is *Sitelle Torche-pot*). In Germany its regular name is *Kleiber*, 'Plasterer,' or 'Mason.' In Italy it is *Picchio grigio*, 'Gray Woodpecker.' The generic name *Sitta* is derived from $\sigma\iota\zeta\omega$, 'I hiss,' or 'whistle' (B.O.U.). The name Nuthatch seems to be a corruption of 'Nuthack,' which the habits of the bird sufficiently explain. It is to be found in this country generally wherever woods abound, but seems to prefer large oaks and beeches. Lord Arundel says it is generally

* Yarrell's 'British Birds,' third edition, vol. ii., p. 186.

numerous at Wardour; and I should say it occurs sparingly throughout the county.

CUCULIDÆ (THE CUCKOOS).

This family is but scantily represented in this county, for we have but one species, though that one so well known, and its periodical appearance so generally hailed with delight as a harbinger of summer, that it has attracted as much attention as many families comprising several genera and many species. They all feed on insects and soft fruit, and are therefore unable to reside during winter in cold countries; their flight is singularly smooth and gliding and very rapid, and they move quickly from bough to bough, rather leaping from branch to branch than climbing like those families of this tribe previously described; on the ground they are awkward and constrained, their feet being very short and weak. The tails of birds of this family are peculiarly ample, very broad as well as long.

111. COMMON CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*).

In all languages this bird derives its name from the note it utters, which the several nations have syllabled to their own fancy. Thus in classical Latin it is *Cuculus*; in Greek, κίκυξ; in French, *Coucou*; in German, *Kukuk*; in Italian, *Cucule*; in Spain, *Cucu*; in Portuguese, *Cuco*; in English, *Cuckoo*. There is no need to assert that this bird occurs throughout the county, for who does not hear its well-known cry every April in his own parish and garden; and yet everybody does not know the appearance of the bird, so much resembling the Kestrel or Sparrow-hawk at first sight; the dark lead-coloured plumage above, the light under parts barred with brown, and the full dark yellow eye, all contributing to the general resemblance; but when we come to look nearer, we are soon undeceived, for the beak is small, soft, slender, and nearly straight, like those of other insectivorous birds, and the feet are small and weak, with two toes before and two behind, after the manner of other climbing birds, and not at all like the strong hooked beak and

powerful talons of the birds of prey. Cuckoos twenty years since were unusually abundant at Yatesbury, and remarkably tame, and one or more might frequently have been seen every spring sitting on the iron railings in my garden, while their oft-repeated cry, as they answered one another in different keys from opposite plantations, was almost continually to be heard, more especially towards evening, when (like many other birds) they became more clamorous than during the day; but their numbers are now very sensibly diminished, and they are certainly becoming more and more scarce every year. Moreover, I have noticed that they have lost the confidence they once evinced, and are much more shy and retiring than they were. In the neighbourhood of Salisbury, however, the Rev. A. P. Morres describes them as very numerous, and frequenting the water meadows and osier beds in that district, and speaks of six being in sight at one time. But in truth they are of a capricious and fanciful disposition, and, vagrants as they are, they abound for a time in one locality, and then desert it for another. When they have been here some time, their call becomes changed to a wild stammering repetition of the first syllable, though an individual which returned to my garden every spring invariably uttered this peculiar call from its first arrival, and with a pertinacity and in so loud a key as to attract the notice of every stranger.

The favourite old country rhyme which is well known to everybody, marks with sufficient accuracy the arrival, song, change of note, and departure of the bird :

‘ In April
Come he will ;
In May
He sings all day ;
In June
He alters his tune ;
In July
He prepares to fly ;
In August
Go he must.’

The singular habit of the Cuckoo of never building its own

nest, but depositing its eggs singly in those of other birds, insectivorous species being almost always selected for the foster-parents, is well known. *Why* the Cuckoos adopt this peculiar and almost unnatural habit; *how* they deposit their eggs in the nests of little birds, when the situation and size of the nests preclude, as they often do, the possibility of the egg being laid there, after the usual manner, by a bird so disproportionate in size to the nest it selects as the cradle for its young; *how* the young Cuckoo becomes the sole tenant of the nest, its foster-brethren being summarily expelled to make way for its rapidly increasing size, and to enable its foster-parents to supply its voracious appetite; *how* the young Cuckoo, when come to maturity, follows instinctively in the track of its parents, not being arrived at the requisite point of strength when its parents leave their summer haunts to accompany them on their annual migration southwards; and more especially how Cuckoo's eggs, varying from one another in colour, frequently resemble very closely the eggs of the birds in whose nests they are respectively laid—these and other similar questions connected with its strange history, I have examined in a paper which I read before the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society at Salisbury in 1865, and printed in the *Wiltshire Magazine*;* and from this I purpose now to extract the more important portions, and to enter somewhat minutely into the economy and life-history of this singular bird. For perhaps of all the commoner species with which we are surrounded in the summer, there is not one of whose habits so much misconception is abroad; certainly there is not one in which everybody evinces such extraordinary interest. Let me begin, then, by refuting and clearing out of the way some of the popular errors about it.

It is even now a very common belief, handed down from the time of Aristotle, that the Cuckoo changes in the course of the summer into a hawk; while Pliny,† who wrote on Natural History, gravely asserted (and that assertion is still upheld by many in these days) that the young Cuckoo

* Vol. x., pp. 115-130.

† Nat. Hist. (lib. x., cap. 9).

devours its young foster-brethren, and finally its most attentive foster-parents; hence the Swedish proverb, 'en otacksam gök,' implying 'an ungrateful fellow.* Even Linnæus gave credence to this absurd slander, and in our own country Shakespeare utters the same calumny. In the play of 'Henry IV.' he makes that monarch exclaim:

'And being fed by us, you used us so
As that ungentle gull, the Cuckoo's bird,
Useth the sparrow: did oppress our nest:
Grew by our feeding to so great a bulk
That even our love durst not come near your sight
For fear of swallowing: but with nimble wing,
We were constrained for safety's sake to fly.'

And again in 'King Lear,' the fool is made to say:

'The hedge sparrow fed the Cuckoo so long
That it had its head bit off by its young.'

Then, again, we are told that the fate of an individual for the current year depends on the direction in which he first hears the cry of the Cuckoo in the spring: if it proceeds from the north, for instance, it is a lucky omen; but if from the south, it portends death.† And, again, it is universally considered unlucky to be without money in your pocket on first hearing the welcome notes of this bird.‡

As the story of hedging in the Cuckoo, and so securing the permanence of spring, has been attempted to be affiliated on the moonrakers of Wilts, I must in common honesty quote from the veracious chronicle entitled 'The Merry Tales of the Wise Men of Gotham,' in which the following anecdote occurs: 'On a time the men of Gotham would have pinned in the Cuckoo, whereby she should sing all the year; and in the midst of the town they had a hedge made, round in compass, and they had got a Cuckow, and put her into it, and said, "Sing here, and you shall lack neither meat nor drink all the year." The Cuckow when she perceived

* *Gök* is no other than the old Saxon *geac*, and the Cuckoo is still often called 'Gowk' in some parts of England. [See Bosworth's 'Anglo-Saxon Dictionary.']

† Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 347.

‡ *Naturalist* for 1852, p. 84.

herself encompassed within the hedge, flew away. "A vengeance on her!" said the wise men; "we made not our hedge high enough."*

Among other errors abroad with regard to this ill-used bird, the English translators of the Bible included it in the list of unclean birds which the children of Israel were forbidden to eat (Levit. xi. 16; Deut. xiv. 15). But Bochart, Gesenius and others have long since proved that not the Cuckoo, but the sea-gull was the species intended.†

These are but samples of the many superstitions current in our day, and in our own county, with regard to the Cuckoo;‡ and it is with the hope of substituting in their stead the very interesting and peculiar economy of its real life-history, that I propose to enlarge upon it here at far greater length than I have bestowed on other species.

With the exception of the Honey-buzzard (*Buteo apivorus*) it is the largest of British insectivorous birds; for its food consists of insects of many sorts, but more particularly of the several species of hairy caterpillars which abound in the early summer, and which long-haired caterpillars are rejected by almost all birds, with the exception of the Cuckoo: so that it has been thought by some that the reason why that bird leaves this country so early, is the failure by the middle of July of its favourite food.§ I may observe, too, that it is the male bird alone which gives utterance of the peculiar note which we hail so gladly as an announcement of spring, though, among other popular errors, the following old couplet attributes the song to the *female*:||

'The Cuckoo is a pretty bird, and sings as *she* flies;
She brings us good tidings, and tells us no lies.'

Possibly, however, this may be only the indiscriminate use of the masculine and feminine pronoun so common in Wiltshire: I am bound, too, in honesty to add, that the well-known cry of the Cuckoo has been declared by some naturalists (though I think

* *Sharpe's Magazine*, vol. x., p. 6.

† Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible.'

‡ Jesse's 'Gleanings of Natural History,' p. 125.

§ Wood's 'Illustrated Natural History,' vol. ii., p. 574.

|| *Naturalist* for 1852, p. 84.

erroneously) to be common to both sexes.* Lastly, I will repeat that the female has that strange peculiarity of depositing her eggs singly in the nests of other species, which she selects as suitable foster-parents to her own young: a peculiarity not shared in by any others of our British birds, though by no means unknown among the feathered tribes of other countries—the Cowbird, for example, of America,† which belongs to the Starling tribe, several species of the African Cuckoos, and others. It is from this last eccentricity of conduct that so many strange and unlooked-for habits of the Cuckoo take their rise. Let us examine them one by one; but first let me earnestly protest against the unmeaning outcry and charge of unnatural, unfeeling conduct often preferred against the Cuckoo,‡ as if she did not follow out the instincts of her nature as truly as every other bird; and as if there was not *some* good and sufficient reason (though we may be unable to fathom it) why some species delegate the care of their young to other birds: rather, I think, should we admire the wonderful instinct which leads them to select, as foster-parents, those species only whose feeding is similar to their own, and so would provide their young with suitable nourishment; and that dexterity which enables them to insert their eggs amongst others, just at the right moment when the foster-parent is preparing to sit.§

And here I beg to state without hesitation that *never* by any possibility does our British Cuckoo either build a nest of her own or incubate her eggs on the ground. We hear constant tales of such occurrences: every year our periodicals and newspapers contain statements of such marvellous incidents, which would be marvellous indeed if true; but I venture to assert most positively, without fear of contradiction, that all such stories have originated from some error: and either the common Night-jar,|| of nearly the

* *Magazine of Natural History*, vol. viii., pp. 329-382. *Naturalist* for 1851, pp. 11, 172.

† Wilson's 'American Ornithology,' vol. ii., p. 162.

‡ Bishop Stanley's 'Familiar History of Birds,' vol. ii., p. 80.

§ Gilbert White's 'Natural History of Selborne,' Letter iv.

|| Montagu's Supplement to 'Ornithological Dictionary,' vol. ii. Rennie's 'Architecture of Birds,' p. 380. G. White's 'Selborne,' Letter vii.

same size, fluttering away from her marbled eggs at the root of an old oak, or some other bird, has been mistaken for the Cuckoo, which never, in any single instance, has been known to sit on her own eggs.

The Cuckoo then, houseless and vagabond though she is, and the veritable 'gipsy of the feathered tribes,' as she has been styled, soon after her arrival here in the spring, begins to busy herself no less than other birds in making preparations for her future progeny; but instead of preparing a nest, as other birds do, her occupation is to scour the hedgerows and plantations, and watch the busy nestmakers with more eager eye than any schoolboy;* observing day by day the progress made, and anxiously selecting those which may be most convenient for her purpose. Into these nests it is not her habit to intrude herself for the purpose of laying her egg, as all other birds do; indeed, from her superior size in proportion to the nest, such a course would be generally impossible: but she lays her egg on the ground, and then she takes it in her beak,† and gently deposits it in the nest she has chosen. And that the Cuckoo does thus avail herself of her beak to place her eggs in nests which otherwise would have been inaccessible to her, is not only *a priori* established from those cases where no other means were possible, as in certain domed nests with entrance holes at the side only, or those which are laid in the holes of trees, as for instance those of the wren, the redstart and others; but we have a very interesting account from a charcoal-burner, in the forest of Thüringer, who happened to be in his rude woodman's hut in the forest, when a Cuckoo (which he had long observed flying about in the neighbourhood) flew into the hut, not perceiving the owner, perched upon a bench near the entrance, laid an egg, then seized it in her beak, and placed it in a wren's nest which was built against the inner side of the hut, while the man looked on in amazement, and soon after related the 'wonder' to the

* Rennie's 'Architecture of Birds,' p. 374.

† *Zoologist*, 3145, 7757, 7935, 8165. Hewitson's 'Eggs of British Birds,' vol. i., p. 205. Temminck's 'Manual d'Ornithologie,' vol. i., p. 384. Rennie's 'Architecture of Birds,' p. 378.

German naturalist who recorded the event. But I believe this to be her invariable method, whether the small nest of the foster-parent be accessible to her or no: and then again, this habit of taking the egg in her beak, and so depositing it in the chosen nest, considered in conjunction with the similarity of her egg to that of several species of small birds as detailed farther on, will readily account for the frequent assertion on the part of eye-witnesses of the Cuckoo eating the eggs of small birds, which they triumphantly declare they have themselves seen between the mandibles of that bird's beak.*

It is not until after an interval of several days that the Cuckoo lays another egg in the same manner and then deposits it in another nest which she has previously selected; and so on till her whole complement of four or five or six eggs is laid.† But never on any occasion does she lay two eggs in the same nest; so that although it is true that two Cuckoo's eggs have been sometimes found in the same nest, these were without doubt from different parent birds, and by no means the eggs of the same individual.‡

But now if the egg of the Cuckoo was at all proportioned to the size of the bird, it would not only at once attract the attention and alarm of the foster-parent, but it would be impossible for so diminutive a nurse to brood over and hatch it; and therefore Nature, who never does anything by halves, but provides for every emergency, has given a strange disproportion in the egg of the bird to the size of the parent Cuckoo (the egg of the Cuckoo being no larger than that of the Lark,§ though the relative size of the two birds is as four to one)—a disproportion, however, the necessity for which is most apparent, if the little foster-parent is to be duped into believing the egg of the intruder to be her own.

The Cuckoo then, having laid her eggs of comparatively dimi-

* *Naturalist* for 1851, p. 162; for 1852, p. 33.

† Colonel Montagu dissected a Cuckoo which had in her four or five eggs ('Ornith. Dict.'). Mr. Rennie thinks it lays a second time. Blumenbach says she lays six eggs in the spring *from time to time*. [Jesse's 'Gleanings in Natural History,' p. 125.] *Naturalist* for 1851, p. 162.

‡ *Zoologist*, 8823, 9325. Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 192. Montagu's 'Ornith. Dict.,' Introduction, p. ix.

§ Yarrell *in loco*, vol. ii., p. 191. Bewick, vol. i., p. 108

native size, and entrusted each to the charge of carefully selected foster-parents, is by many supposed to leave them to their fate, and to take no further interest in the matter.* But this does not seem to be the case.† On the contrary (and for this I have the high authority of Dr. Gray, of the British Museum), the Cuckoo has been observed to frequent the neighbourhood, and watch near the nest during the whole period of incubation; and then when the eggs are hatched, whether it is the parent Cuckoo,‡ as Mr. Waterton§ stoutly maintained, or whether it is the young one, as Dr. Jenner|| and others as positively declared, which removes from the nest the young Cuckoo's foster-brethren and any unhatched eggs there may be, is a question still warmly disputed.

Whether or no there are any other offices which the parent Cuckoo undertakes for its young, I will not venture to affirm; though it is the opinion of some experienced naturalists that she really feels an anxiety for them not less than that shown by other birds:¶ while others maintain that she has occasionally, though very exceptionally, been known to feed her own young, of which several convincing proofs have been adduced;** and others again declare that she sometimes even takes the young under her protection, when they are sufficiently fledged to leave the nest.†† But be that as it may, towards the end of July the old birds are preparing to migrate, and the male has already changed his note to that stammering repetition of the first syllable which (as all observers know) heralds the cessation of his so-called song; and which an old writer, John Hayward, who flourished about A.D. 1580, has described in the following quaint but very graphic rhymes:

* *Zoologist*, p. 1638.

† *Ibis*, vol. iv., p. 384. Wood's 'Illustrated Natural History,' vol. ii., p. 572.

‡ *Zoologist*, 2589, 2603, 4895, 6676, 8166, 8195, 8235, 8681. Jesse's 'Gleanings in Natural History,' p. 123.

§ 'Essays on Natural History,' first series, p. 228.

|| 'Philosophical Transactions,' vol. lxxviii.

¶ Wood's 'Illustrated Natural History,' vol. ii., p. 572. *Naturalist* for 1851, pp. 67, 162.

** *Naturalist* for 1851, p. 11.

†† Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 197. *Naturalist* for 1851, p. 233.

'In April the Cuckoo can sing her song by rote.

In June ofttimes she cannot sing a note.

At first, koo ; koo ; koo ; sings till can she do

At last, kooke, kooke, kooke, kooke ; six kookes to one koo.'

By the beginning of August, then, the parent Cuckoos are gone southwards ; but the young Cuckoo is notoriously a tedious nursing, and indeed, having to grow from the inmate of a very small eggshell to a bird of considerable dimensions, requires time for such development, and taxes to a very large extent the powers as well as the assiduity of its foster-parents : by degrees this overgrown infant not only fills the little nest which was never meant for such a monster, but is forced to vacate it, and sits perched on the edge, while the foster-parents, unable to reach up to it from below, alight on its back in order to feed it.* It is at this period of its existence that the young Cuckoo is said to possess, or to acquire for a time, the note of its foster-parents,† whatever it may happen to be ; but this point in its history requires corroboration, as, though asserted by many, it has never yet been satisfactorily settled. And then again, when they have at length attained their full size, the young Cuckoos, though left to their own devices, and without their elders for their guides, as all other migratory birds have, follow towards the end of September in the track of their parents which have gone long before, and migrate to a warmer clime ; though what instinct teaches them when to go, and whither to bend their course, who shall say ? Indeed, to my mind this is one of the most astonishing points in their life-history which we have yet touched upon.

And now I come to the most remarkable peculiarity of all ; and indeed, amongst these so many anomalies which we have seen to belong to this extraordinary bird (and the more one studies its habits, the more numerous and the more apparent do they become), there is nothing so strange or indeed so startling as the opinion put forth, in Germany by Dr. Baldamus, and afterwards

* *Gardener's Chronicle*, 1851, p. 469. *Magazine of Natural History*, vol. ix., p. 638. *Naturalist*, 1851, p. 233 ; 1852, p. 33.

† Thompson's 'Natural History of Ireland,' vol. i., p. 361.

followed up and demonstrated by proofs of apparently the most satisfactory character, on the part of himself and his friends, that the eggs of the Cuckoo, which she lays one by one singly in the nests of other birds, *are somewhat similar in colour to the eggs of those birds whose nests she selects.** And thus it is by no means an uncommon occurrence to see the egg of the Cuckoo taken from a hedge-sparrow's nest, partaking of a greenish-blue tinge; another from the nest of a robin, of a reddish hue; another from a pipit's nest, of a brownish colour; and so on through the twenty or thirty species in whose nests the egg of the Cuckoo has been found. This was without doubt a very startling, bold statement, and it evoked, as might be expected, no small amount of opposition and ridicule when first it was propounded. To my mind, however, it seemed a very beautiful idea, well worthy of the most careful examination, so I spared no pains in investigating it. And to this end I translated the lengthy article of Dr. Baldamus,† and printed it in the *Zoologist*; and I now proceed to give a short *résumé* of that article.

Dr. Baldamus begins his treatise by calling attention to the great variety in colouring as well as in marking in a collection of Cuckoos' eggs, and the astonishing resemblance these eggs severally bear to the eggs of a variety of small birds usually chosen as the foster-parents of Cuckoos: a fact which he says was well known to the great ornithologists and oologists of Germany, including Naumann, Thiënnemann, Brehm, Gloger, von Homeyer and others; and I may add that this point was equally well known to our British ornithologists as well.‡ But Dr. Baldamus seems to have been the first to suspect that at the root of this striking phenomenon there was a fixed law, perhaps a law which might be discoverable; and his suspicions in this direction having been aroused, he proceeded to pay diligent attention to the subject. To this end he not only made most careful personal observations,

* *Zoologist* for 1853, p. 3988.

† 'Neue Beiträge zur Fortpflanzungsgeschichte des Europäischen Kuckuks (*Cuculus canorus*), von E. Baldamus.' Naumannia, 1853, pp. 307-326.

‡ Wood's 'Illustrated Natural History,' vol. ii., p. 572.

but by means of oological correspondents in various parts of Germany collected a large series of facts bearing upon the matter which were convincing to his own mind: convictions which seem to have been shared in by many of the leading ornithologists of Germany. I will not weary the patience of my readers by taking them through the several instances which Dr. Baldamus details, but pass on at once to the results he arrived at, merely remarking, by the way, that he followed up his investigations with such earnest zeal, that when he wrote his paper he had before him no less than one hundred Cuckoos' eggs, special care being taken to ascertain accurately from the nest of what particular species every one of these eggs was taken.

The first thing which Dr. Baldamus established to his own satisfaction, by means of these repeated observations, was, that the Cuckoo lays its eggs in the nests of no less than thirty-seven species, including not only every species of Chat, Warbler, Wagtail, Pipit, and Lark, but even exceptionally certain of the grain-eating Finches and Buntings: these exceptions being doubtless in cases only where the Cuckoo was deprived, by some accident, of the nest she had selected for her egg, and which, when ready to be laid, she was obliged to consign to the care of the best nurse she could find at short notice. To this seeming inconsistency on the part of the parent bird I may however add, that grain-eating species have been known to bring up young Cuckoos; and the explanation is, that even the hard-billed birds are accustomed to feed their young, at any rate at first, with insects.

From the thirty-seven species alluded to above, which have been ascertained to act as foster parents of the young Cuckoo, Dr. Baldamus enumerates no less than twenty-eight, to whose several eggs he affirms the egg of the Cuckoo will bear some similarity in colouring; and this he then proceeds to prove from the specimens lying before him, and which (as I before remarked) are all carefully authenticated, in regard to the nests from which they were taken. All these specimens he examines singly, and describes their colouring, as nearly all partaking, in a greater or less degree,

of the character, ground colour, and markings of the eggs of the species in whose nests they were severally laid : while some are so extremely similar that but for the *grain** or texture of the shell and certain characteristic specks, it would be difficult to distinguish them apart. The exceptions to this general rule are those laid in the nests of corn-eating species, and our author adds that it would be extraordinary indeed if the Cuckoo's eggs should resemble the eggs of these exceptional and never intended foster-parents.

'The fact then' (says Dr. Baldamus) 'is quite established and beyond all doubt, that there are Cuckoos' eggs which both in colour and in marking are very like the eggs of those species in whose nests they are generally laid :' and then he proceeds to argue that Nature, who never trifles, nor acts without purpose, has plainly given the parent Cuckoo this faculty in order to facilitate the continuance of the species under peculiar conditions, for (he well remarks) had this not been so, we are driven to the alternative that the Warblers and others, which generally recognise so easily all strange eggs, casting them out of the nest,† or else deserting it, in regard to the Cuckoo's eggs are quite blind, and cannot recognise the red eggs among their green clutches,‡ and vice versâ. Therefore (continues our author) I do not hesitate to set forth, as a law of nature, that the eggs of the Cuckoo are in a very considerable degree coloured and marked like the eggs of those birds in whose nests they are about to be laid, in order that they might the less easily be recognised by the foster-parents as substituted.§

* '*Das Korn*,' the German word exactly answering to our English idiom 'grain.' The grain or texture of the shell is too often overlooked by oologists, but amongst the very similar eggs of some species, as more particularly among the Duck tribe, this is one very important means of identification, more especially when the egg is placed under a low magnifying power.

† Montagu's '*Ornith. Dict.*,' Introduction, p. iv.

‡ Or 'loiters' as our Wiltshire rustics say : 'gelege' in German.

§ It is worthy of remark, that whereas it has been often asserted that the egg of the Cuckoo is by no means found in any proportion to the number of old birds (for it is not a rare species, and every female would seem to lay

The next question examined is 'whether the same hen Cuckoo lays eggs of the same colour and markings only, and is so limited to the nests of but one species? or else, does the same individual lay eggs of different colour and markings, according to the character of the eggs amongst which her own will be intruded?' Both these theories have their advocates; those in favour of the last view advancing the hypothesis that the sight of the eggs lying in the nest has such an influence on the hen which is just about to lay, that the egg which is ready to be laid assumes the colour and markings of those before her; and for this, physiological reasons are adduced, and analogies, not forgetting the well-known and successful experiments of the patriarch Jacob.* But Dr. Baldamus rejects this opinion, and contends for the other view (viz. that the same Cuckoo lays eggs of one colour and markings only, and so is limited to the nests of but one species); and this he proves by personal experience and observation; by the fact that he has found two differently marked Cuckoos' eggs in one nest; that he has also found similarly marked eggs, laid by one and the same Cuckoo, in the nests of different species; and that he has found Cuckoos' eggs (though rarely) in such nests as have not yet received any eggs of the owner;† in which case the Cuckoo is without any pattern of a fixed form of colour for its egg. All these points in the argument are very carefully worked out at considerable length, and a large array of proofs and instances brought forward to support his views; and then our author deduces the conclusion, that all experience hitherto known declares in favour of his assertion 'that every Cuckoo lays eggs of one colouring only, and consequently (as a general rule) lays only in the nest of one species:' and he sums up his argument as follows: 'every pair, or rather each individual Cuckoo, is endowed with the instinct to lay its eggs in

annually from four to six eggs), the difficulty is at once disposed of, if Dr. Baldamus' theory is correct, inasmuch as the great similarity of the egg of the Cuckoo to those of the nest in which it is placed, may deceive human eyes no less than those of the foster parents.

* Genesis xxx. 37 *et seq.*

† This is corroborated in the *Naturalist* for 1852, p. 33.

the nests of some one species of birds, which are fit to act the part of foster-parents: so, in order that these latter may the less readily observe the strange egg, it is found to be of similar colouring to their own; and for the same reasons it is also so disproportionably small. Then every pair of Cuckoos seeks its old district, or that spot where it breeds, just as all other birds do.* Here it generally finds those species of insectivorous birds which it requires for its peculiar circumstances: but assuredly they are not always in the necessary number, or perhaps they may for some cause be breeding earlier or later than its six to eight weeks' time for laying† lasts: it will therefore be unable to find for each of its eggs a fitting nest of that species to which it was prepared to entrust it, and to which it was accustomed; and so it finds itself obliged to introduce one and another egg into the nests of some other species, if haply by good chance it can do so.‡ Thus then it comes to pass that there are, and from the nature of the circumstances there must be, proportionably *many* exceptions to the rule. Thus too it comes to pass that by far the greater number of Cuckoos' eggs bear the type of the eggs of the 'White-throat' (*Sylvia cinerea*), and of the 'Pied Wagtail' (*Motacilla Yarrelli*), the most common foster-parents of the young Cuckoo;§ and perhaps, in some localities, of the 'Meadow Pipit' (*Anthus pratensis*), the 'Hedge Accentor' (*Accentor modularis*), and of the 'Reed Wren' (*Sylvia arundi-*

* Blyth's edition of White's 'Selborne,' p. 78.

† 'Legezeit' is the concise German word, for which we have no English equivalent.

‡ The Cuckoo, however, alone of British birds, is generally supposed to have the faculty of retaining her egg in the ovarium, after it is arrived at maturity, for a limited period of time. (Montagu's 'Ornith. Dict.,' Introduction to vol. i., p. 8. Jesse's 'Gleanings in Nat. Hist.,' p. 125.) If this be correct, it will account for the egg laid by the Cuckoo as it fell to the ground after it was shot, recorded by Mr. S. S. Allen (*Ibis*, vol. iv., p. 358), and by my friend Mr. Chambers (*Ibis*, vol. v., p. 475). See also M. Vailant's account of the African Cuckoo shot by himself and his faithful attendant, the Hottentot Klaas, and the frequent occurrence of the egg laid by the Cuckoo as she fell wounded from the tree. (Rennie's 'Architecture of Birds,' p. 378.)

§ The Pied Wagtail, the Meadow Pipit, and the Hedge Warbler, are perhaps most frequently chosen as the foster-parents in this country.

nacea): and that on that account eggs of such colouring form the most frequent exceptions; that is to say, are most frequently found in the nests of other species. Thus too, lastly, it comes to pass that these two above-named prevailing colours of the Cuckoo's eggs are spread over *most localities*, whilst at the same time they also appear, *almost everywhere*, as exceptions in other nests. For the diffusion of these two species (the common White-throat and the Pied Wagtail) is very extensive, and their haunts usually offer to the Cuckoo also the requirements of its existence: it is therefore not without signification that one seldom finds in their nests Cuckoos' eggs of other colours, but one does very frequently find in the nests of other birds Cuckoos' eggs of their type.'

[I will just quote, before I take leave of Dr. Baldamus, the three following deductions, which he draws from his observations, and with which he concludes his treatise.

I. 'Nature must have some special motive in the circumstances above detailed, so many, so connected together, but so peculiar.

II. 'That motive is plainly to be seen: viz., that by means of certain laws originally made she may ensure and facilitate the preservation of a species otherwise much exposed to danger.

III. 'She attains this end by a very simple method: in that she invests every hen Cuckoo with the faculty of laying eggs coloured like the eggs of the bird of whose nest she prefers to make use, according to the locality; or, in other words, every hen Cuckoo lays eggs only of a fixed colour, corresponding with the eggs of that Warbler in whose nest she lays them (as a general rule): and she only lays in other nests when, at the time for her laying, one of the species of her own peculiar type, as we may say, which is fitted for her in every particular, is not ready.']

Such is the very interesting and well sustained argument of Dr. Baldamus; and however new and startling his hypothesis, however unprecedented his conclusions, yet he supports his argument with such a battery of facts that his position seems almost im-

pregnable. Facts are proverbially stubborn things, and not to be overthrown by opinions held only from the force of habit and not from conviction of their truth.

The question before us is not to be set on one side as the dream of an enthusiast, or the fancy of a superficial naturalist. It is deliberately proposed by a leading ornithologist, of mature judgment and deep scientific attainments; it is the result, moreover, of patient research, and a long course of inquiry among men well calculated to form a right conclusion. At all events let the theory be well understood: for some have ignorantly or maliciously declared that Dr. Baldamus had given out that the Cuckoo had the power of laying her egg of what colour she pleased, which is exactly the contrary of what the Doctor had stated. A great deal of controversy and some rather warm contention arose between those who accepted and those who rejected the theory; but, as I introduced the subject to the pages of the *Zoologist*, I was permitted to sum up the evidence at the close of the discussion; and I now proceed to state what conclusions I arrived at after a careful examination of the several opinions expressed.

(1) I felt no hesitation in submitting that the balance of opinion favours the theory that the eggs of the Cuckoo *do* vary in colour to a considerable extent, but I hastened to add that there are some, and good ornithologists too, who deny this, and who even declare that the eggs of the Cuckoo are of peculiarly unvarying colour; but it will not be disputed that those who so think, or at all events who have so declared their opinion, are in a very small minority.

(2) I submitted that it was very generally allowed that the eggs of the Cuckoo strangely resemble the eggs of other birds, especially those among which the egg of the Cuckoo is frequently found. In the view of the German ornithologists, this is thought to be the *rule*, though that view is qualified by the addition that 'to this rule there are very many *exceptions*.' In the opinion of most of our English ornithologists, however, it seems to be considered that the *rule* is in favour of the colour generally (perhaps

conventionally) assigned by common consent to the Cuckoo's egg, and the *exceptions* (also allowed to be numerous) when the egg of that bird resembles those of the species in whose nest it is laid.

On these two points most of those who have examined the question are, I think, agreed; but beyond this opinions differ widely; and when we come to discuss the probable *reasons* for such variation in colour, and assimilation of colour to the eggs of the selected foster parents, there are almost as many theories as disputants, but none of these appear to my judgment so convincing, or indeed so plausible, as the original motive assigned by Dr. Baldamus and his followers.

And then I ventured to put forth a notion which had occurred to my mind, and which has since become with me a fixed opinion, that the young Cuckoo derives from its foster-parent so much of that nurse's nature (whether by the diet on which it has been brought up, on which exclusively the young of the foster-parent would, had it survived, have been fed, or otherwise) as, when its own turn for breeding arrived, to affect (though unconsciously to itself) the colouring of the eggs it laid. In support of that opinion, I would submit the following considerations.

First—I would mention as worthy of observation that the young Cuckoo has been oftentimes declared to have acquired the exact *note* of its foster-parents. Of this Mr. Thompson gives decisive evidence in the case of a young Cuckoo which was taken out of a Titlark's nest, and of which he says, 'for several weeks after the Cuckoo was placed in confinement it uttered, when in want of food, a note so closely resembling that of the Titlark that it would have been almost impossible to distinguish between them.*' It is true this may be mere mimicry, or the result of imitation; but it must be remembered that, in calling for food, the young Cuckoo can only imitate the note of its foster-parents, its foster-brethren having perished on its account in their infancy. Here then we have the young Cuckoo in one important respect partaking of the nature of its foster-parents. I do not, however, wish to push this point too far, or to lay greater stress upon it

* 'Natural History of Ireland,' vol. i., p. 360.

than it deserves. Let it be taken for what it is worth, though I think it deserves consideration in connection with the subject before us.

And now, in support of my opinion, I unhesitatingly assert that the Cuckoo about to lay her egg has no more notion of its colour than any other bird has. The *will* of the parent has nothing whatever to do with it. I am too ignorant of the process by which the pigment or colouring matter is diffused over the egg, or of the exact moment when it receives that pigment before leaving the oviduct, to be able to show by conclusive reasoning that birds, of whatever species, are wholly passive and unconscious while the colouring of their eggs is going on; but I venture to assert, without much fear of opposition, that such is the case with all birds, and with the Cuckoo not less than with other species.

What it is that influences the colouring matter, and produces a blue egg for one species, a brown egg for another, and a reddish egg for a third, I can no more describe than I can account for the varying colours in plumage in the respective species of birds. Whether the colouring process in regard to the *egg* is influenced in any degree by the kinds of food the bird eats, I do not know; though that food *has* an effect on the colour of the *plumage* of birds I do know; of this the familiar case of the Bullfinch becoming black if fed on hemp-seed is a well-known and sufficient example.

Next, I submit that in all probability the young of the several species of even our insect-eating Warblers are not fed on precisely the same diet. This in many cases is obvious; because whereas one species procures its insect-food near the banks of streams or ponds, another in our meadows and gardens, and another in the hedgerows and ditches, these must undoubtedly feed their young on the insects which abound in the districts they severally frequent. Then I think it is not improbable that the same rule holds good in regard to *all* species of birds. I mean that the Hedge Accentor will feed its young with one kind of food, the Robin with another, and the Wagtail with a third, and so on throughout the list of foster-parents to which the Cuckoo entrusts

her progeny. If this be conceded, and if it be considered possible that diet may affect the colouring matter of the eggs, we are advanced some way on the road towards allowing the plausibility of my opinion.

But I would now observe that if any hen bird of any species arrived at maturity be dissected and examined, it will be found that her ovary will contain the germs of all the eggs she will ever lay during her life-time. It is not impossible, then, that if influenced at all by the nutriment on which she was brought up, she may be *permanently* influenced, in regard to the colouring of all the eggs she will lay; not to mention that it is far from unlikely that a Cuckoo, hatched by a hedge sparrow or wagtail, might ever after affect the diet to which it was first accustomed, just as an Eton Colleger returns in after-life with extreme relish to the roast mutton which formed his daily dinner at school.

It is true that in this theory I have no precedent or even analogy in the feathered race to guide me, for how can one expect a precedent in aught that pertains to so exceptional a species as the Cuckoo? but still I have some sort of corroborative evidence to adduce from the insect world. I allude to the case of bees; and it is now an acknowledged fact that in the event of any accidental destruction or unexpected loss of the queen bee (when provision had not been made for her successor, after the usual custom, by rearing princesses in the cell specially prepared for the royal brood) the nurses will adopt the grub of an ordinary worker, and by feeding it with a special diet, reserved on other occasions for the royal cells alone, will from that worker grub develop a queen, differing in size and colour as well as vocation from the individual it would under ordinary circumstances have become.* Such a permanent effect in this case has a particular diet on the unconscious and passive infant.

I repeat that the theory I have been discussing is but a fancy, but possibly it may be worth examination. When first it occurred to me I made an effort to get it corroborated, or over-

* See Bevan on the Honey Bee, p. 21.

thrown, by laying it before one whose authority in such matters is of European reputation, and who would have carried conviction in its favour, or the contrary, by any decided opinion upon it he expressed. But when, in answer to my inquiries, the late Mr. Charles Darwin most kindly replied 'that he had no sufficient information on the point, such as would warrant him to pronounce any dogmatic judgment on it,' I thought it not altogether worthless. I should, however, in candour own that Mr. Darwin added, 'My *impression* is that differences of food would *not* produce the effects which you suppose possible; and that impression is derived chiefly from there being hardly any evidence of variations being due to slight differences in the nature of the food.' Mr. Darwin then proceeded to give me several interesting examples of change of colour in plumage, and especially called my attention to the paper (in Proc. Zool. Soc.) on the Australian Cuckoos by Mr. Ramsay, where that gentleman 'states that two of the species, when they lay their eggs in an open nest, manifest a decided preference for nests containing eggs similar to their own in colour.'

Many years have elapsed since the controversy was carried on with reference to the colouring of the Cuckoo's egg. Several leading ornithologists, Professor Newton amongst them, declared that a well-authenticated blue Cuckoo's egg, somewhat similar to that of the hedge sparrow, was wanting to complete the case as enunciated by Dr. Baldamus; and now in addition to those put forth by Dr. Baldamus, and Dr. Rey, and some instances which I and others adduced, Mr. Seebohm has published in his excellent work on British Birds a whole plate of Cuckoos' eggs, amongst which are two coloured blue, like those of the hedge accentor or redstart. But I doubt if the ornithological world of England is yet convinced. Perhaps we have not yet arrived at a full understanding of this, and of some other interesting details on the life and economy of the Cuckoo, which still maintains in some respects its character as a mysterious creature. I should not, however, close this account without observing that the only other species of Cuckoo with which I am familiar is the 'Great Spotted

Cuckoo' (*Cuculus glandarius*), which I met with in some numbers in Egypt, and which lays its eggs singly in the nests of other birds, generally of the hooded crow or the blue magpie, to whose eggs they bear a close resemblance, both in ground colour and in markings. Thus there is precedent and analogy to support our Common Cuckoo in pursuing a like habit.

CHAPTER VIII.

INSESSORES (*Perchers*).—*Continued.*

FISSIROSTRES (*Wide-billed*).

THIS last tribe of the great order of Perchers is by far the smallest of the four, for though it contains more families than the Climbers, viz., the Bee-eaters, Kingfishers, Swallows and Goatsuckers, yet two of these are represented in this country by one single species only, and the whole tribe numbers but eight individuals known in Wiltshire. The word 'Fissirostres' (*wide-billed* or *cloven-beaked*) describes at once their chief characteristic, and indeed if we closely examine those species in which this peculiarity is most developed, viz., the common swift and the night-jar, we shall be surprised to see to what an immense width the gape extends, and how apparently disproportionate to the size of the head is the enormous extent of the capacious mouth and throat, though these are admirably adapted to their habits of feeding on the wing and capturing flies and moths, as in a net, in their rapid career through the air. Their feet, being little required for use, are generally small and weak, and their flight is peculiarly smooth and easy, gliding as they do with outstretched pinions, with apparently little or no effort, and with surprising speed, and protracting their aërial rambles, as if they were incapable of fatigue.

MEROPIDÆ (THE BEE-EATERS).

In my former papers on the Ornithology of Wilts, written above twenty years ago, I was obliged to omit this family, as no reliable

instance of the occurrence of any member of it in Wiltshire had then reached me. There are indeed but two species belonging to it which have ever been known to appear in Great Britain, and these are only occasional and uncertain, if not rare visitors. But both partake of a great brilliancy of plumage, and of interesting habits; and both are hailed by me as welcome additions to our Wiltshire list; for they are old friends with whom I have become well acquainted in other countries.

112. THE ROLLER (*Coracias garrula*).

The evidence which I have of this bird's visit to Wiltshire is not quite satisfactory, as the specimen observed was not captured, and so cannot be brought forward as proof positive of its identity. It was, however, well seen and thoroughly examined by one of the masters of Marlborough College, as he was walking in Savernake Forest in 1883, and my friend, Rev. T. A. Preston, satisfied himself by careful inquiry that there was no mistake in the species alleged to have been seen. But, indeed, there is no other bird with which an intelligent observer could confuse it. I am ready therefore to accept Mr. Preston's assurance that 'we may be certain a bird of this species was seen at the place and time named.' The Roller is a common bird all round the shores of the Mediterranean, more especially in the east and south of that inland sea; and for myself, I saw it more frequently than elsewhere in the Holy Land. It is generally a shy, timid bird, of unsociable habits, retiring to the recesses of woods, whence its harsh, loud cries may be heard from time to time, for it is a most noisy chatterer, as its specific name *garrula* points out. In Northern Africa the Arabs call it *Tschugrug* or *Shrugwrug*, derived from one of its cries, which it well expresses. By the French colonists it is known as the *Geai d'Afrique*; in Malta as the 'Blue Jay'; in Sweden as the *Blå Kräka*, or 'Blue Crow'; by the Italians as *Corvo marino*; and by us, as the 'Roller,' because it rolls along in its flight. But it has also a very remarkable habit of tumbling in the air, which is well described by Canon Tristram, as he witnessed it when encamped at Ain Sultan, in the

hot valley of Jordan, not far from the Dead Sea. 'For several successive evenings' (he says) 'great flocks of Rollers mustered shortly before sunset, on some *dôm* trees near the fountain, with all the noise, but without the decorum, of rooks. After a volley of discordant screams, a few of the birds would start from their perch and commence a series of somersaults overhead, somewhat after the fashion of tumbler pigeons. In a moment or two they would be followed by the whole flock, and these gambols would be repeated for a dozen times or more. In about a week they dispersed to excavate the bank for their nests, and after this dispersal not a Roller came back to the *dôm* trees where they had roosted at first. The sand-beetles were their favourite food, and they were scattered over all the wooded districts.* In France it is, as with us, *Le Rollier*, and in Portugal *Rollieiro*; but in Germany it is *Blaue Racke*, 'Blue Roller,' and in Spain *Carranco*. *Coracias* is simply *κορακίας*, 'a kind of chough,' in Aristotle; 'like a crow,' from *κόραξ*.

113. BEE-EATER (*Merops apiaster*).

I have but one instance of a visit of this beautiful bird to Wiltshire, and that was reported to me by the Rev. G. Powell. It appears that on May 4th, 1866, a mason named Turner, engaged in the exercise of his calling on the estate of Mr. Temple, of Bishopstrow, near Warminster, observed a bird of strange appearance and brilliant plumage, amusing itself in a neighbouring orchard in catching insects, and retiring with them again and again to the same branch, against which it each time knocked its bill before swallowing its prey. For some time the mason contented himself with watching the bird from the roof of the cottage, where he was repairing the tiles, till at length, attracted by the strange beauty of the bird, he sent for a gun and shot it from the spot where he was at work. Mr. Powell adds that the specimen thus secured was a very fine male bird, in most brilliant plumage, and was quite alone when shot. The Bee-eater is a native of Southern

* Canon Tristram on the 'Ornithology of Palestine,' in *Ibis* for 1866, p. 81.

Europe, Northern Africa, and Western Asia, in all of which it breeds, retiring to winter in Central and Southern Africa, and I well recollect the day when we were moored to the banks of the Nile, during the prevalence of a gale of wind, which easily daunted our sailors; the first flock of Bee-eaters arrived in the middle of March, and immediately made their presence known by their loud, shrill, and somewhat harsh cries, and by their rapid flight, not unlike that of the swallow, as they darted backwards and forwards above the river bank. It is essentially a sociable bird, breeding often in large colonies, in holes which it excavates on the banks of rivers, and also retiring to roost in flocks, when as many as possible perch on the same branch, as close to one another as they can nestle. Montagu reported that in Egypt, where it is sought for the table, it was called *Melinoorghî*, or 'Bees' enemy,' as assuredly it is. At the Cape of Good Hope it is named 'Gnat Snapper,' and highly esteemed there accordingly, as all will believe who have really suffered under the attacks of the hateful mosquito; and then again it is honoured, because it is a guide to the Hottentots by directing them to the honey which the bees store in the clefts of the rocks. *Merops* is simply μέροψ, the Bee-eater of Aristotle, probably akin to μάρπτω, 'I seize;' or possibly from μερίζω, 'I divide,' and ὄψ, 'the face,' as if 'open-mouthed.' *Apiaster*, in use in the fifth century, is the Latin translation of *Merops*, from *apis*, 'a bee.' In France it is *Le Guépier*, 'Wasp-eater,' in Germany, *Bienfresser*, 'Bee-devourer;' in Sweden, *Bi-ätare*, 'Bee-eater;' in Spain, *Abejaruco*, and in Portugal *Abelharuco* and *Melharuco*; but the latter, meaning 'Honey-eater,' is as inappropriate as our English name 'Honey Buzzard' is to *Buteo apivorus*.

HALCYONIDÆ (THE KINGFISHERS).

Members of this family are generally remarkable for the extreme brilliancy of their plumage; they are chiefly natives of more tropical climates, as the brilliant colours of their plumage demonstrate, one species only, and that of marvellous splendour, inhabiting this country or, indeed, Europe generally. They prey

upon small fishes and insects, the former of which they procure by darting down upon them from some elevated place as they rise to the surface of the water, and the latter by pouncing upon them in their flight; their feet, like others of this tribe, are small and feeble, their beak is straight and pointed, and their flight is rapid.

114. KINGFISHER (*Alcedo ispida*).

The gorgeous colours of this, the most beautiful of all our British birds, defy description; there is on the upper parts such a mixture of the brightest blue with the most vivid green, and these colours blend with one another and are reflected with such marvellous brilliancy and with such metallic lustre, that they must be seen to be duly appreciated; all the under-plumage is of a reddish orange. The Kingfisher is not uncommon wherever there is a stream; indeed, for lack of a river, or brook, I have known it haunt the foul sluggish watercourse of a long line of water meadows, and even a stagnant pond in a cow yard at Old Park,* at least a quarter of a mile away from any running water, but where, year after year, it frequented the same hole for breeding purposes, though the pond was constantly resorted to by a large herd of cows, and hard by was the dairy farm, and its many buildings, and—far more dangerous—its many boys and men in attendance on the cattle; yet, strange to say, this bird of such attractive plumage somehow escaped general observation, and for several years, to my certain knowledge, contrived to lead out its young in safety. There has been much discussion amongst ornithologists as to whether the Kingfisher makes any nest, and if so, of what material, previous to depositing her eggs in the hole which she has prepared for her nursery; but it is now generally admitted that the indigestible portion of the food which she casts up in pellets, composed of the bones of small fishes, is the sole material of the nest. The name *ispida* is said by the compilers of the B.O.U.

* I once pointed out this strange locality for a Kingfisher's nest to Professor Newton, who has thought it worthy of mention in his edition of Yarrell. See fourth edition, vol. ii., p. 445.

'List of British Birds' to be derived from *hispidus*, 'rough, prickly,' in allusion to these fish bones in the nesting-hole. On the downs of North Wiltshire we should scarcely expect to meet with this bird, yet I have more than once disturbed it in one of the winterbournes, or watercourses, within three miles of its source, which is never more than an insignificant stream, and oftentimes is perfectly dry in summer; so that the slightest thread of running water seems to satisfy its requirements. Except in the breeding season, it is a shy bird, and generally avoids the habitations of man; it is also essentially solitary in its habits, and, except during the breeding season, is always found alone; its mode of seizing the smaller fish on which it preys is singular; it will sit for a considerable time on a rail or bush overhanging the water, and watch in patience the arrival of some victim, when with the most rapid flight it will dart like lightning beneath the surface, and seizing its unsuspected prey in its bill, bring it back to the station it before occupied, there to be devoured at leisure; at other times it may be seen shooting like a meteor over the brook, always, however, following the course of the stream, and if its quick eye catches sight of food, you may see it suddenly stop, hover with expanded wings for a moment, and then drop like a stone into the water, from which it will as quickly emerge with its quivering victim firmly held between the mandibles of its beak; and this it will either at once devour, or else beat to death against a stone and then swallow whole. And yet with this plunging propensity, and this fearlessness in precipitating itself into deep water from which it always emerges unscathed, it is essentially a land bird, and has no affinity with the water fowl, with which Bewick and some of the older naturalists classed it. Neither can it seek the water on a rough stormy day; for the fishing manœuvres above recorded to be successful, calm quiet weather is necessary, when the water is neither thickened by rain nor ruffled by wind, but as the elements are not always so propitious to its piscatory expeditions, the Kingfisher (like the true birds of prey) will gorge itself voraciously at one time, and then retire to digest its heavy meal at leisure. Another habit too it possesses in common with the

rapacious birds, viz., that it reproduces in castings, or small pellets, the fish bones and other indigestible parts of the living creatures it has swallowed, and these pellets in time cover the floor of the hole in the bank in which it dwells, and form the nest on which it deposits its beautiful transparent white eggs. On no bird have the old heathen poets and naturalists exercised their fancy more than on the Kingfisher, and among other strange tales they used to fable that this bird would sit on its floating nest for the seven days of incubation, and that it had such power over the winds and waves that, though in the depth of winter, a perfect calm always reigned during that period, when mariners might cross the sea in perfect safety; and hence came a well-known saying, 'Halcyon days,' which has passed into a proverb for any short season of tranquillity. As Dryden says:

'Amidst our arms as quiet you shall be
As halcyons brooding on a winter's sea;'

and in Wild's 'Iter Boreale' we read:

'The peaceful Kingfishers are met together
About the decks, and prophesy calm weather.'

In Sweden it rejoices in the lengthy name of *Blå-ryggig Is-vogel*, or 'Blue-backed Ice-bird,' and Professor Newton says that the Anglo-Saxon name for it was *Isern* or *Isen*, for in hard frosts it often collects in some numbers around any open water, and being conspicuous as it sits on the ice, a name signifying 'Ice-bird' has been applied to it in all the Teutonic languages.* In 1613 it was one of the victims denounced as a 'ravenous bird,' and persecuted accordingly by law; and under one pretext and another it has been hunted down ever since; so that were not its numbers recruited every year by the arrival of emigrants from Holland, this, the most brilliantly coloured of all our indigenous birds, would bid fair to become exterminated in England.† As it is, however, I do not think its numbers are much diminished in the county generally. If I am told by Rev. E. Goddard that

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 451.

† Cordeaux's 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 71.

they are becoming very scarce at Clyffe Pypard and Hilmarton, I learn from the Right Honourable E. P. Bouverie that they are still fairly common at Market-Lavington; and if I hear from Lord Arundell that they are become more scarce at Wardour, I am told by the Rev. C. F. Cooke that they are frequently seen darting over the Avon at Enford. It is surprising that it should be so, for, perhaps, no British bird has suffered more than the Kingfisher from that most cruel and barbarous fashion which cannot be too loudly condemned, and which—I am sure without thought of the consequences—was adopted some years since by English ladies, of wearing gay-coloured birds, or wings of birds, in their hats, and which bids fair to exterminate altogether some of the species of most brilliant plumage. We in England, doubtless, give a royal title to this bird on account of the splendour of its plumage, just as we name the magnificent species of Eider, ‘The King Eider,’ and the brilliant Goldcrest is dubbed *Regulus*. In Germany it is *Gemeine Eisvögel*, Common Ice-bird; in Portugal, *Pica-peixe*, ‘Seizer of Fish;’ and *Guardarios*, ‘River Watchman;’ but in France it is *Martin Pecheur*, and in Spain *Martin Pescador*, ‘Fisherman of S. Martin.’ This is in reality a nick-name, like *Robin* Redbreast, *Jenny Wren*, *Jack Daw*, etc., but the *Oiseau de S. Martin* is really the ringtail, or the hen-harrier. *Alcedo* is classical Latin for a ‘Kingfisher,’ taken from the Greek *ἀλκίων*.

HIRUNDINIDÆ (THE SWALLOWS).

This family certainly contains the most conspicuous of our summer birds, and with their first appearance we are accustomed to associate the departure of winter and the approach of summer, and therefore we are naturally predisposed in their favour: but not only do we welcome them as heralds of spring and harbingers of sunshine; in addition to this, all their movements are so graceful, they are so essentially birds of the air, seldom touching the earth, but careering all day long under the bright blue sky and through the lofty pathways of the air, that they engage our particular admiration and interest: if we stand still to watch one of these birds in its course, see with what arrowy speed it darts

over our gardens, sweeps round our houses or skims over the pool : now it will wheel and sport high up in the air, hurrying here and there on the lightest wing in the gladness of its heart ; anon it will float without effort in the vast expanse, as much at home and at ease as other birds when perched on a tree or motionless on the ground ; and for this aërial life how admirably their structure is adapted : observe the shape of the body, how full the forepart, how gradually tapering towards the tail, which is exactly the principle on which the fastest sailing ships are constructed : then see the plumage, how firmly compacted, how little liable to be ruffled by the breezes in a long and rapid flight ; mark the wings stretching out like oars of vast length, and moved by muscles of extraordinary power : note the long forked tail, supplying a never-failing rudder to guide the bird through those numerous windings in which it delights. Other characteristics of this family, in addition to those belonging to the whole tribe, are very short beak, very broad at the base and slightly bent ; head quite flat, and neck scarcely visible : their note is rather a continued twitter than a song, though some of the species will scream in a high and wild key, and others have a not unpleasing though monotonous and very gentle melodious warble. All the four species of this family with which we are acquainted are summer visitants, leaving us in the autumn. It used to be asserted by older naturalists, before the habits of birds had been so closely observed as of later years, that the *Hirundines* did not leave this country in the winter, but retired to caves or holes, and there remained dormant, like the bats and dormice. Others maintained the wilder theory that they plunged into the beds of rivers and lakes, and there amidst the sedge and mud and reeds at the bottom, slumbered away the dreary months of ice and snow, till the genial breezes and warmth of April roused them from their torpor to renewed life and activity. These idle tales have long since been exploded, and we all know that the bulk of these birds collect in enormous numbers in the autumn, migrate in vast flocks, and steer their course due south, though doubtless a few stragglers are often left behind, perhaps physi-

cally incapable of accompanying their brethren, and these would naturally seek the warmest recesses they could find, and there become torpid from cold: while the not unusual habit of these birds to seek the vicinity of water, where their winged insect prey chiefly abounds, and to roost amid the reeds on the margins of lakes and ponds, has probably given rise to the wondrous account of their voluntary immersion during winter. As an unanswerable proof that they do not hibernate, I will add that it has been satisfactorily ascertained that they annually moult in February, than which nothing more clear or decisive on the subject can be adduced: moreover, they have been frequently observed on their passage, and there is now no question that they leave us as soon as their young are strong enough on the wing for a prolonged journey, and when the supply of insect food begins to fail: and it is astonishing what an immense number of flies of various kinds a single individual of this family will consume in one day, all of which are caught with great dexterity in the air in the midst of their rapid and buoyant flight; and thus they rid us of what but for their good offices would be an intolerable plague of flies and gnats. I may well conclude my general account of this family in the words of good old Gilbert White of Selborne: 'The *Hirundines* are a most inoffensive, harmless, entertaining, social and useful tribe of birds; they touch no fruit in our gardens; delight (all but one species) in attaching themselves to our houses; amuse us with their migrations, songs, and marvellous agility; and clear our outlets from the annoyance of gnats and other troublesome insects.'

115. SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*).

There are two marks by which this species may be readily distinguished from its congeners, viz.: the long deeply-forked tail, and rufous forehead and throat; the plumage of the bird is a glossy steel blue or purple black: it is often called the 'Chimney Swallow,' and by French naturalists '*Hirondelle de cheminée*,' because it frequently selects a chimney for its nesting place, though sometimes the shaft of an old mine or the rafter of

an outhouse are deemed good substitutes: for the same reason the Germans style it '*Die Rauch Schwalbe*,' or 'Smoke Swallow,' and the Swedes *Ladu-Svala*, or 'Barn Swallow.' In Spain it is *Golondrina*, and in Portugal *Andorinha*. Professor Skeat says that our word 'Swallow,' as well as the German and Danish names for this bird, signifies 'toss about,' 'mover to and fro,' and is allied to the Greek *σαλεύειν*, 'to toss up and down like a ship at sea.'

Its great power of wing enables it to visit very distant countries. Passing the colder months of winter in the interior of Africa, as spring advances it migrates northwards and penetrates almost to the frozen seas and shores lying near the North Pole. In this country we may generally observe one or two pioneers arriving in advance of the main body; and so regularly does this occur that there is scarcely a European language which does not contain the old Spanish proverb, 'One Swallow does not make summer.' Flies and gnats of many species form its constant food, and oftentimes it has been seen to take a hive bee on the wing, to the natural indignation of the bee-master: but Mr. Harting tells us of a Swallow shot in the act of that delinquency, that was found on dissection to have its stomach literally crammed with *drones*, but not a vestige of a *working* bee was to be found there.* Perhaps the sagacious bird had discovered that the former were unprotected with stings.

In fine weather it flies so high as to be barely detected from below, and this is a well-known signal that no storms are at hand; for at such times it is in pursuit of high-soaring insects which are wonderfully susceptible of atmospheric changes, and descend to the earth when clouds begin to gather: when therefore the Swallow flies low, we know that it has followed its victims downwards, and that rain is not far off. But it is only in the bright sunshine, and under cloudless skies, that this joyous bird seems to exult; then you may see it wheel through the air, or skim over the water, and drink and bathe while on the wing, and scatter the bright drops over its shining plumage; and it is

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 124; 'Our Summer Migrants,' p. 172.

really sad to think how many of these happy, innocent birds fall victims to the thoughtless persecution of youthful gunners, who fire at them for no other object than for practice, or from wanton thoughtlessness, regardless alike of their sufferings, their harmlessness, and the benefits they confer; and one would rejoice to see them invested here with some of the love and reverence shown towards them by the inhabitants of Scandinavia, among whom the following pretty legend is a familiar household tale: 'When our Blessed Lord was crucified a little bird came and perched upon the Cross, peered sorrowfully down upon the Sufferer, and twittered '*Hugsvala, svala svala Honom,*' 'Console, console, console Him:' and hence it obtained the name of *Svala* (Swallow). In consequence of the commiseration thus evinced by the Swallow towards the Redeemer, Heaven ordained that blessings and prosperity should ever afterwards attend on those who protected it and its nest;*' and from this tradition the honest Norsemen considered it sinful in any way to injure or molest this favoured bird of Heaven. In Italy, too, there is a strong feeling of reverence for these 'Chickens of the Madonna,' as they are styled, and nobody dreams of harming them. As the autumn draws on and the Swallows begin to prepare for their departure, they may be seen congregated on the roofs of houses in thousands, giving utterance to their soft twittering note, and apparently loth to leave the house where they have reared their young; but at length, when the fitting moment arrives, away goes the vast flock, steering due south, after which scarcely a straggler is to be seen. To the question, Where do they pass the winter? it may now be confidently replied that the great body retreat far into the interior of Africa; a considerable portion prolonging their journey to the south of the Equator, and penetrating as far as Natal, where they arrive in November, and whence they depart in March or April, congregating in vast numbers just before they leave the country, alighting in crowds on trees and bushes, as if collecting their forces before they set out on their return journey north-

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 355.

wards, just as they do here when they leave us for the South.* Some few stragglers, however, remain in Northern Africa, possibly weakly birds which are incapable of a prolonged flight.

116. MARTIN (*Hirundo urbica*).

This species is even more familiar to us than the last, for whereas that is comparatively a denizen of the country (*rustica*), this is an inhabitant of the town (*urbica*), and it selects the eaves of our houses and the corners of our windows as fitting situations for its clay-built nest; hence the names by which it is so often designated of 'Window Swallow,' 'Hirondelle de fenêtre,' 'Haus-schwalbe.' It may be at once distinguished from the last by the pure white of all its under parts, and the shorter forked tail, as well as by its smaller size and more compact shape; it has also a conspicuous patch of white on the back, just above the tail, which stands out in marked contrast with the dark purple hue of all its upper plumage: its legs and feet, too, are feathered to the toes, in which respect it differs from its congeners; it hunts on the wing, wheels through the air, flocks before migration, and otherwise comports itself like the preceding, but it does not arrive in this country till a week or two later, probably owing to its lesser powers of wing, and consequently inferior speed. The Martin has generally two broods in the summer, but so strong is its instinct to join in the general migration when the fitting period arrives, that it often leaves its young, if hatched late in the year, to perish in the nest, rather than endanger its own safety by delaying its departure after the great body of its species has gone; and this apparently unnatural proceeding is not confined to one or two isolated cases, but is found to be more or less practised every year, and in some seasons to a very great extent. Lloyd in his 'Scandinavian Adventures' (vol. ii., p. 353) says that in Lapland *half* the Martins' nests of the preceding year which he examined, contained the remains of half-grown and abandoned young. The same author also observes, 'Though in England we set little value

* J. H. Gurney in *Ibis* for 1863, p. 321.

on this bird, such is not the case in the more northern parts of Scandinavia, where those pests, the mosquitoes, literally swarm; for knowing the destruction the Martin causes amongst them, the inhabitants not only protect it in every way, but very commonly fasten great numbers of scroll-shaped pieces of bark of the birch tree, somewhat resembling the sparrow-pots in use with us, to the sides of their habitations, for the bird to breed in.' Here, too, in this county we have an honourable pre-eminence for rearing these birds; for Rennie, the editor of Montagu's Dictionary, says the greatest number of House Martins' nests he ever saw together was under the north eave of Mr. Heneage's stables, at Compton Basset House, in Wiltshire. There were about fifty nests in one continuous line. The construction of the Martin's nest is well worthy of observation; the outer shell is composed of mud, or clay, collected from the puddles in the road, apparently kneaded and worked into a paste, which also derives adhesive qualities from the saliva of the bird. Of this material, a single layer only is placed each day on the rising structure, and is left to harden and dry until, on the following day, it is sufficiently firm to support another layer. When the hemispherical shell is completed, and is well lined with hay, straw and soft feathers, an admirable nursery for the young is provided, and one which often serves the parent birds for many successive seasons. The saliva mentioned above is described as a viscous fluid provided from a glandular apparatus peculiar to this family,* and, however repugnant to English taste and English prejudice, is the principal ingredient of the famous edible birds' nests, so highly valued, when transformed into a soup, by the Chinese epicure. In Italy it is known as *Rondine*; in Spain, as *Vencejo*; in Portugal it shares with the swallow the name common to both species, *Andorinha*; in Sweden it is *Hus-Svala*. Our word 'Martin,' in reality a nickname, has been applied to various animals and birds, by ourselves and Continental naturalists, as we have seen above in the case of the Kingfisher.

* Selby's 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' vol. i., p. 119.

117. SAND MARTIN (*Hirundo riparia*).

This little sober-coloured bird, dusky brown above, and dull white beneath, receives its names of 'Sand Martin,' and 'Bank Swallow,' and 'Quar Martin,' from its tendency to make its nest in holes in the banks of rivers, on the abrupt sandbank of a deep road-cutting, or the perpendicular side of a quarry; in short, the steep face of any cliff will answer the purpose, provided only the soil be soft and sandy enough to allow of excavation to the depth of two or three feet; and in some favoured spots, several of which exist in Wiltshire, the sandbanks which these birds frequent are completely riddled with their holes for a considerable space. So well known for ages has this habit been, that Pliny the elder, in his great work on Natural History, applied the term '*riparia*' to the Sand-Martin 1800 years ago, and it has enjoyed the appellation ever since. In Spain, where it is sold in the market for the table, it is called, by the country people, probably from its desultory jerking manner of flight, *Papilion di Montagna*, 'Mountain butterfly.' Many Ornithologists of modern date divide this species from the Swallows and Martins, and give it the generic name of *Cotile*, derived from the Greek *κωτιλάς*, a 'twitterer' or 'prattler,' and having reference to the continued babbling or chattering in which these little birds indulge, when they assemble in the autumn in countless numbers to roost in the reed-beds, after the manner of starlings. In France it is *Hirondelle de rivage*; in Germany, *Ufer-schwalbe*; in Italy, *Rondine riparia*; and in Sweden, *Strand-svala*—all of which are mere translations of the specific *riparia*. It arrives a few days earlier than any of its congeners, and may be met with in its favourite haunts about the second week in April, sometimes even so early as the last week in March; but as it is one of the first to arrive, so it is the earliest to depart, for by the end of August or very early in September the great body of these birds is gone, and before the end of the latter month not a straggler remains behind. It differs from the Martin in its inferior size, and browner upper plumage; the beak, though small and short, is very hard and

sharp, and admirably adapted for digging, and indeed is the only instrument employed in excavating the hole for the nest, the sharp claws being required for clinging to the face of the bank, or hanging to the roof of the half-made tunnel, while the beak perforates and loosens and excavates the sand. The gallery formed is always more or less winding, sloping slightly upwards, and contains a soft nest at the extremity. It skims over meadows, and more commonly over lakes and rivers, where it finds an abundant supply of insect food; it also drinks and bathes as it flies, after the manner of its congeners previously described, and is by far the smallest of the *Hirundines*.

118. COMMON SWIFT (*Cypselus apus*).

The scientific name of this bird (signifying 'the hole-frequenter without feet,') is intended to characterize its habits and appearance—*cypselus* rather obscurely denoting its habit of building in holes of walls (*κυψέλαι*); *apus* referring to the shortness of its feet. It has indeed, feet so short that they may almost be said to be wanting, and are quite unfit for moving on the ground, on which it never alights, for in truth the shortness of the tarsi and the length of wing render it unable to rise from an even surface. The toes, four in number, are all directed forwards, giving the foot the appearance of that of a quadruped rather than of a bird; the claws are much curved, enabling it to cling to the perpendicular face of a wall, rock or tower which form its principal resting-places—thus the feet, useless for locomotion, where they are not needed, are perfect for grasping, for which they are required. The wings are extremely long and powerful, giving the bird astonishing swiftness and endurance of flight, so that for sixteen consecutive hours, from the early dawn to twilight of a long summer's day, these indefatigable birds will career at an immense height above the earth; and there at such vast elevations they not only find innumerable insects which soar so high above our heads, but what is more astonishing, an abundance of a species of minute spider with which those lofty regions appear to be tenanted, and of whose numbers we

occasionally form some conception when in an autumnal morning we see the ground carpeted with the thinnest webs glistening with moisture: these are the webs of the gossamer spider, which, rendered heavier by the dew settling on their slender threads, fall to the ground and cover whole acres. Sometimes, says Professor Newton, half a dozen birds will race, within a few feet of the ground, through the narrow lanes, or up and down the confined courts of a small country town or village, uttering the while their singular squeaking note, which writers have tried to syllable *swee ree*. Thence it is sometimes called 'Screech Owl,' and 'Deviling.' But notwithstanding the vast powers of flight of the Swift, prolonged through the entire day, surpassing that of all our other birds, and with which the speed of the express train is not to be compared for a moment, it is one of the latest of our summer visitants to arrive, and one of the earliest to depart; its movements being doubtless regulated by the supply of the high-flying insect food which it finds in the upper regions of the air. It seems to delight most in heavy, close, thundery weather, when it darts to and fro, screeching forth its unearthly note, and is thought an uncanny bird by many a housewife even in this county and in these days. Here it loves to frequent our downs in fine weather, where it may be met with in considerable numbers; and in the evenings, uttering its loud and harsh scream, it wheels round and round the tops of old towers and steeples, before retiring to roost in their crevices and holes. Where suitable nesting-places in church-towers or elsewhere are wanting, the Swifts content themselves with holes in the thatch of cottages, and both at Yatesbury and at Potterne I have seen them in full possession of such humble nurseries. But where holes in a tower may be had, they are occupied by choice. Nowhere have I seen the Common Swift in such abundance as in the city of Turin, for in the very heart of the town, not far from the Royal Palace, and immediately opposite the Hôtel d'Europe of world-wide renown, stands a tall isolated tower, the walls of which, unoccupied by windows, contain literally many hundreds of holes, apparently left by the masons for scaffold purposes. All of these

holes are in the breeding season occupied by the Swifts, and to watch them on a summer's evening careering round the tower, several hundreds in the air at once, as they dash by on unwearied wing, and to listen to the wild screechings from so many throats, is a treat which the ornithologist will look in vain for elsewhere, and which on two separate occasions I happen to have witnessed at Turin. Its colour, with the exception of a dusky-white chin, is smoke-black; its head is peculiarly flat as well as broad, and the neck very short. It is singular that in rough and windy weather it will not sally forth on its aërial rambles, but contents itself in the dark in its retreat in some tower or wall; thus (as Bewick remarks) 'the life of the Swift seems to be divided into two extremes—the one of the most violent exertion, the other of perfect inaction; they must either shoot through the air, or remain close in their holes.' Their provincial name in Wiltshire is 'the Screech.' In France it is *Martinet de Muraille*; in Germany, *Thurm Schwalbe*; in Italy, *Rondine maggiore volgarm*, 'Common greater Swallow'; in Spain, *Avion*; and in Portugal, *Andorinhão*. In Sweden it is known as the *Ring Svala* from its habit of careering in circles round its nesting-place, and the *Torn Svala*, or 'Tower Swallow,' from the localities it frequents; also the *Sval Hök*, or 'Swallow Hawk,' because it is popularly believed to seize and eat up its relatives, the Swallows. [I much regret that I cannot include in the Wiltshire list the larger species, the 'Alpine' or 'White-bellied Swift (*Cypselus alpinus*), with which I have become very familiar on the shores of the Mediterranean and in several parts of Switzerland, for indeed it is a bird to be admired. With longer wings and even more powerful flight than its congener, it is, in my opinion, the most perfect specimen of a bird formed for living in the air, and darting on its way with the utmost velocity.]

CAPRIMULGIDÆ (THE GOATSUCKERS).

There is no family of birds so illused by nomenclature as this; not only have they received a false character, and an imputation

of crimes of which they were never guilty, but now that their innocence has been long since clearly proved and universally allowed, still they continue to be designated by the same opprobrious title; and what an absurd idea it was, even for our marvellous old naturalists, to accuse these harmless insect-eating birds of feeding on goats' milk, to obtain which, however, they are singularly ill-adapted. Their general characteristics are: very large head with enormous width of gape; large, clear and full eyes, as befit those who hunt entirely in the dark; short neck, and very small body; plumage extremely soft and full; wings and tail very long; the base of the bill fringed with large bristles, which they can move at pleasure, and which are of great assistance in securing their prey; their feet are very small and weak, and as they are not formed for grasping, when these birds rest on a branch, they seldom perch transversely, but lengthwise. But their most remarkable peculiarity is the serrated or pectinated claw of the middle toe, the comb consisting of about seven or eight teeth, supposed by some to be useful in removing the legs of beetles and moths from the bristles which surround the beak, as I have more fully detailed in my paper on the feet of birds;* by others conjectured to be employed in preventing the bird from slipping sideways when sitting length-wise on a branch. The hind toe is reversible, and can be brought round to the front, so as to make all four toes turn the same way. The food of the *Caprimulgidæ* consists entirely of insects, chiefly those which fly by night, and which they then seize in their capacious mouth as they hurry along; indeed, as this family has the closest affinity with the *Hirundinidæ*, they may well be termed 'Night Swallows,' for like them they visit us periodically from Africa in the summer, are insect-eaters, have great powers of flight, feed on the wing, and resemble them in many particulars of their formation and habits. It is to this family that the American 'Whip-poor-Will,' so dreaded by the superstitious Indians as the ghost of one of their ancestors, belongs.

* 'Supra,' p. 50.

119. NIGHTJAR (*Caprimulgus Europæus*).

This is by far the most appropriate of the many names which this much-belied bird has yet received, and it expresses one of its most remarkable habits, for when perched on a tree with its face towards the trunk, and its tail towards the outer branches, and closely concealed by the thick foliage, which is the position it most loves by day, or else squatted on the ground amid the tall fern and heather, it will utter a most singular jarring or whirring noise, somewhat resembling the hum of a spinning-wheel, while its head is bent down lower than the tail, and every feather quivers as it utters its purring note. 'Night-churr,' 'Wheel-bird,' and 'Spinner' are other provincial names given in allusion to this peculiar habit and the strange sounds it emits. It is also known as the 'Fern-owl,' a most incorrect term and one likely to mislead, for beyond the fact that it is crepuscular, and therefore has soft downy plumage, and is seldom seen abroad before 'the witching hour of twilight,' it has no affinity with the owl family. In Norway it is called *Natt Skärra*, and more popularly *Jord-geed* or 'Ground Goat,' because (says quaint old Bishop Pontoppidan), 'its note resembles the bleating of a goat'; which, however far-fetched, is at all events a more harmless sobriquet than that of 'Goatsucker,' a misleading word which implies an accusation for which there is no sort of foundation. In France it is *L'Engoulevent*, and in Germany *Tagschlafer*. Its body is small for its size, that is to say, much smaller than its general appearance would lead one to imagine, for it is clothed with such a quantity of soft light downy plumage, that it passes for a larger bird than it really is. The marking of its feathers is peculiarly fine and delicate; the prevailing colours are shades of brown, buff and gray, barred and spotted with every variety of hue; its immense width of gape at once distinguishes it from all other birds, and its full dark eye and pectinated claw are very striking features. The latter, however, belongs to the adult only, and is wholly wanting in the immature bird; nor is it peculiar to this family, for the herons and the gannets share it; and probably there are other families which are provided with a

similar instrument. It is essentially a solitary bird, seldom to be seen even in the company of its mate, which, however, may occasionally be found perched on another tree at a short distance. Deep woods and shaded valleys, as well as fern-clad heaths and commons are its favourite haunts, wherein it can retire from the glare of daylight, and emerge at twilight on noiseless and rapid wing when the moths and beetles and other night-flying insects on which it preys are abroad; its flight is generally low, for its victims are to be found near the ground, and it sweeps with great ease and power round the bushes and in and out among the trees. With a whirling phantom-like flight, wheeling round and round, and with a power of wing (says Gilbert White), exceeding if possible the various evolutions and quick turns of the Swallow genus. The same accurate observer adds: 'As it was playing round a large oak which swarmed with fern-chafers, I saw it distinctly, more than once, put out its short leg while on the wing, and by a bend of the head, deliver somewhat into its mouth; hence I do not wonder at the use of the middle toe, which is curiously furnished with a serrated claw.'*

Amongst all our summer visitants (and their name is legion) the Nightjar stands alone as the only nocturnal bird of the whole assembly, and as it checks the increase of night-flying insects, as the swallows diminish the number of those which appear by day, it is not only harmless, but actively useful to man. It lays two eggs on the bare ground, and to it may be attributed all the plausible but erroneous tales of the Cuckoo (for which bird it has often been mistaken) rearing her own young. It is to be met with sparingly throughout the county, wherever deep woods furnish it with shade and retirement, and even on our downs; it has more than once paid a visit to my plantations at Yatesbury.

This concludes the tribe of 'wide-billed' (*fissirostres*), and with it the order of 'Perchers' (*Insessores*) containing twenty families and no less than ninety-three species; all occurring more or less frequently in Wiltshire, and each of which we have now examined. In taking leave of this large Order, we may remark how

* 'White's Selborne,' Letter xxxvii.

gradually we have been conducted from the strong stout limbs of the more typical Perchers, through the Creepers, Wrens, and Cuckoos, whose habits require no great powers of perching and grasping, down to the Swallows, the almost footless Swift, and the Nightjar with very diminutive and disproportionate feet and legs; exemplifying once more what I have several times called attention to, the easy gentle transition from one Order and Family to another, after the manner in which Nature loves to harmonize her works; so that now we are prepared to pass from the Perchers to the Ground-birds (*Rasores*) whose life is passed more on the ground than amongst the branches, and who therefore need a very different formation of feet from those we have lately been considering.

CHAPTER IX.

RASORES (*Ground-birds*).

THERE is no class of birds so well known, or so highly appreciated generally, as the third Order of systematic naturalists, the *Rasores*, or Ground-birds; 'Scrapers,' or 'Scratchers,' as the scientific title may be more correctly translated. It is by far the smallest of the five orders, for the British list contains only four families—the Pigeons, the Pheasants, the Grouse and the Bustards; and one of these families is represented by one species only in this county, while the whole Order as known in these isles embraces only seventeen species; fourteen of which have appeared in Wiltshire, either as permanent residents, as regular periodical migrants, or as occasional stragglers. So far, then, our county can boast an unusually large catalogue of this highly prized order; but it will be seen in the sequel that a great proportion of this number (I may indeed say half the species) can only be considered in the light of accidental visitors, which from one cause or another have wandered out of their way to our inhospitable borders, and have generally paid the penalty of their too vagrant habits by forfeiting their lives, and yielding their skins as trophies to some exultant ornithologist.

I have said that of all classes of the feathered race, the Ground-birds are most generally known and valued; and when we reflect that they embrace the whole family of Pigeons, and the principal part of the game birds so carefully reared and so highly prized by the sportsman—the Pheasants, the Grouse and the Partridges—it will be at once apparent that, as well for the excellent eating which

their flesh offers as for the sport which the pursuit of them entails, they are very highly esteemed amongst us ; and consequently they come more frequently under our notice, and their habits are more observed and better known than is the case with any other Order.

On this account, it will manifestly be superfluous for me to enlarge on their general habits, which are known to all ; I propose, therefore, to confine my remarks in this chapter to facts and occurrences not so universally acknowledged, touching very lightly on the ordinary economy of the Order.

Briefly, then, the characteristics of the Ground-birds are these : they are all granivorous, though they vary this hard diet with softer or more succulent food, as the seasons and opportunities offer. Their beaks, adapted to the food on which they principally subsist, are hard and horny, the upper mandible arched and the tip blunt ; their heads are generally small, and their bodies large and full ; their wings short and weak in proportion to their heavy bodies ; and their legs large and strong. But the real distinguishing characteristic of the Order, which indeed is, I believe, the only general mark of distinction peculiar to this group, is an anatomical one, and is derived from the digestive organs. It may be described in plain terms as a very large widening of the œsophagus or gullet, which thus forms a crop, and lies, when distended, equally on both sides of the neck.

In regard to their habits, they live principally on the ground ; where they seek their food, where most of them nest and rear their young ; from which they are often unwilling to rise, impeded by the shortness of wing in proportion to the bulkiness of body, but over which they can run with considerable swiftness and ease. They will, however, on occasion take wing, and then their flight is strong, rapid, and continued, though heavy and somewhat laborious. In short, unless when startled, they for the most part prefer to seek safety in running rather than in flying. To this end we shall find in the more typical members of this Order a development of limb and a strength of muscle well calculated for speed and endurance ; while the feet are constructed upon a

plan widely different from what we see in other birds, 'the toes being short, and strengthened by a membrane connecting them at the base, with the hind toe either entirely wanting or but imperfectly developed. Where this latter does exist, it is not articulated upon the same plane as the other toes (as is the case with the preceding Orders), but upon the *tarsus*, at a height greater or less according to the running powers of the species.*' It is true that this peculiar formation of the foot impedes the members of this Order from grasping a perch with the same firmness and security as the regular perchers, and for this reason most of them roost upon the ground.

Such are the more prominent characteristics of the Ground-birds; I pass on now to describe the four families and their respective species of which this Order is composed.

COLUMBIDÆ (THE DOVES).

It will at once be seen that the Doves occupy an intermediate place between the Perchers and the Ground-birds; and are the connecting link, partaking of the peculiarities of both: thus, though they feed on the ground, they perch readily on trees; and though they walk with ease and even celerity, yet they have a strong, rapid and protracted flight. Thus we pass gradually and almost insensibly from the true Perchers to the typical Ground-birds, for Nature abhors an abrupt wrench as much as a vacuum, and all is orderly, gentle, and harmonious in her arrangement, and we slide on from order to order, and from family to family, and genus and species in successive steps, with no break to disconnect the regular links in our continuous chain. This is sufficiently perceptible in the Doves, even in the limited number of species which belong to this country, and almost all of which (or four out of five) are known in Wiltshire. But if we were to extend our observations through the multitudinous species and even genera which inhabit other countries, we should see this rule very much more applicable, for the Pigeons form a vast

* Selby's 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' vol. i., p. 403.

staircase of species leading from the trees to the ground, some being thoroughly arboreal, living and nesting on the trees, and enjoying a rapidity of flight almost unsurpassed; whilst others at the opposite end of the list are as completely terrestrial; with wings as short and bodies as heavy and as incapable of protracted flight as our domestic poultry, and indeed distinguished from the rest of their tribe by the appellation of Pigeon fowls.

To return, however, to our Wiltshire species, all of which belong to one genus, and partake of the same nature. We shall find them gentle, timid, shy, of powerful wing, of slender bill, and of short leg. They feed on the ground, and both sexes alternately take part in incubating the two eggs which is the normal complement of the nest. Their notes are singularly sad and melancholy, and though they vary much in the different species, all partake of this mournful plaintive character, which, however, is by no means displeasing, but, on the contrary, rather attractive, soothing and pleasant. Their conjugal fidelity is proverbial, and from the days of Noah they have been honoured as the harbingers of peace and love, both by Pagans of Rome and Greece as sacred to Venus, and by Christians as emblematic of the Holy Spirit. I am bound to add that at certain seasons they are a destructive race of birds, making great havoc in the pea-fields, and consuming an astonishing amount of grain; but while I concede thus much in regard to the injury they do to the farmer, it must not be forgotten on the other hand the essential service they render him, in the millions of seeds of a noxious character which they consume. This family is remarkable for the habit, in which all the members which compose it share, of being among the first to retire to roost, and the last to leave their night-quarters in the morning.

120. RING DOVE (*Columba palumbus*).

First and foremost of its congeners, as the largest of the European species, and commonly dispersed amongst us, wherever trees afford it a shelter, the Wood-Pigeon claims our notice. In some parts of England it is known as the Quest or Cushat Dove;

but the Wiltshire labourers invariably call it, in our fine provincial dialect, the 'Quisty.' It may readily be distinguished from its congeners by the white feathers which partially encircle its neck, and are very conspicuous, hence the specific name in English and other languages; in Germany, *Ringel Taube*; in Spain, *Paloma-torcaz*; in Portugal, *Pombo-trocaz*; in Sweden, *Ring-Dufva*; but in France it is *Colombe-ramier*, and in Italy *Columbaccio*. Professor Skeat says that the real meaning of 'Dove' is 'a diver.' During the autumn beech-mast and acorns form the principal part of its diet, when its flesh is highly esteemed for the table; but no sooner does severe weather compel it to subsist on the tops of turnips, than it becomes strong and rank and uneat-able. Mr. Cordeaux says that it is remarkably partial to salt, and that in his neighbourhood on the East Coast of England, it frequents the drains in the salt-marsh for the purpose of drinking the brackish water left by the tide.* It is abundant throughout the county, and, except when breeding, is proverbially wild and shy. It lives with us throughout the year, and congregates in winter in large flocks, which frequent the open stubble-fields of our downs, as well as the pasture-lands of the vales. Moreover, it has increased very much in numbers of late, for the hawks which used to persecute it are well-nigh exterminated by the game-keepers, and large additions are made to its ranks every autumn by the migration of vast flocks from the Continent. When it retires to the plantations to breed in early spring, its soft musical cooing note coo-coo-roo-o-o-o, is a complacent sound to which all listen with delight. The nest is of the flimsiest character, and looks a most insecure receptacle for eggs or young, for it is composed of such scanty material that its contents may often be seen through it from below. Our fellow-countryman, Montagu, gives the following curious legend regarding it: 'The Magpie once undertook to teach the Pigeon how to build a more substantial and commodious dwelling; but, instead of being a docile pupil, the Pigeon kept on repeating her old cry of "Take two, Taffy, take two!" The Magpie insisted that this was a very unwork-

* 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 77.

manlike manner of proceeding, one stick at a time being as much as could be managed to advantage ; but the Pigeon reiterated her "Two, take two !" till Mag, in a violent passion, gave up the task, exclaiming, " I say that one at a time is enough ; and if you think otherwise, you may set about the work yourself, for I will have no more to do with it." Since that time the Wood-Pigeon has built her slight platform of sticks, which certainly suffers much in comparison with the strong substantial structure of the magpie. There is another legend with regard to this bird in the North Riding of Yorkshire, where it is said that 'once upon a time, the Ring-Dove laid its eggs upon the ground, and that the Peewit made its nest on high ; but that one day they agreed to make an exchange of their localities for building. Hence the Peewit may now be heard expressing its disappointment at the new arrangement with the mournful cry—

'Peewit, peewit.

I coup'd my nest, and I rue it.'

The Wood-Pigeon, however, rejoices that she is safe out of the reach of mischievous boys, and repeats—

'Coo, coo, come now,

Little lad,

With thy gad

Come not thou.*

121. STOCK-DOVE (*Columba anas*).

Though by no means a rare bird, this species has been much overlooked by ordinary observers, and confounded with its congener last described. It is, however, to be met with in most of our large woods in this county, and may be readily distinguished from the Wood-Pigeon by its smaller size, and by the absence of the distinctive white ring on the neck which has given its name to the Ring-Dove. It derives its specific name *anas* from the vinous hue of the plumage of the neck, and *Stock-Dove* from its habit of building on the pollard head or stock of a tree, hence its German name *Holztaube*, or 'Wood-Dove;' but where such trees are not to be found, it will content itself with some rabbit-

* Dyer's 'English Folk-lore,' p. 93.

burrow or the shelter of a thick furze-bush. In Scandinavia it goes by the name of *Skogs Dufva*, or 'Wood-Dove,' whereas our 'Wood-Pigeon' is *Ring-Dufva*. It returns every year to build its nest amongst the thick ivy which covers one side of the Rectory at Yatesbury, and I have satisfied myself that it has very much increased in numbers with us within the last quarter of a century. It does not coo like its congener, but has a distinct note of its own—a prolonged drawling note, which has been not inaptly compared to a grunt. In general habits and in food the two species are alike. In France it is *Colombe colombin*, and in Italy *Columbella*; in Spain and Portugal it appears to have no distinguishing name, but shares in that of its congener, *C. palumbus*.

122. ROCK-DOVE (*Columba livia*).

This is the true wild Pigeon, the origin of all the numerous varieties which inhabit our dovecots, and have been domesticated amongst us for ages. Its natural dwelling is amongst the caves and crevices of rocks, more particularly on the sea coast; but it occasionally comes inland, and used to breed in the rocks near Roundway, whence the late Mr. Withers, the skilful taxidermist of Devizes, frequently received a specimen for preservation. It is of very rapid flight, and feeds, like its congeners, in the stubble and corn-fields as well as in the meadows. It derives its specific name *livia* from the lighter 'lead' colour which distinguishes it from other species, and it may also be easily recognised by the two distinct black bars which traverse its wings and the pure white on the lower part of the back. In Spain it is *Paloma brava*, 'Wild Pigeon;' in Portugal, *Pombo*, 'the Pigeon;' in Sweden, *Klipp Dufva*, 'Rock-Dove;' in Germany, *Haustaube*, 'House Pigeon;' and in France, *Colombe biset*. In the localities which it most affects—in the cliffs which border so many of our coasts—it may be found in large flocks; but in North Africa and Egypt, the prodigious numbers which literally swarm in certain districts are perfectly astonishing—in proof of which I may add, that in a couple of hours' shooting it was easy to bag forty head;

and that on one occasion, when I was requested by the dragoman to procure pigeons for the commissariat, a lucky shot with a green cartridge into a flock feeding on the ground resulted in picking up twenty birds, which at once filled the basket, to the inexpressible disgust of the Arab attendant, whose duty it was to carry the load through a long day's march and under a tropical sun to the Nile boat. That it is a very old inhabitant of Egypt is clear from the hieroglyphics, in which it may be unmistakably recognised—notably at the temple of Medinet Haboo, at Thebes, whereof the date is given as early as B.C. 1297.*

The late Mr. Waterton pointed out that the Rock-Dove, though it would freely perch by day, was never known to roost on trees during the night, nor to pass the night in the open air, except in cases of the greatest emergency, showing its natural propensity to retire to holes and caves in the rocks; hence its great attachment to the dovecot in which it is bred, which it seldom deserts without great provocation. There are instances of the lower stage of church-towers, immediately below the bells, having been originally built for a 'Columbarium,' of which we have one example at Collingbourn Ducis, in this county; and as there is scarcely another example in England, I am glad to add a few details, for which I am indebted to the rector, the Rev. Canon Hodgson. 'The dovecote in our church-tower,' he says, 'is evidently part of the original structure. In Mr. A. Blomfield's "Report on the Church prior to its restoration in 1877," he describes it thus: "The western tower is a substantial structure of late Perpendicular date, and has some interesting features. The walls of the clock stage are constructed with internal niches, so as to form a dovecote or pigeon-house, an entrance (now closed) being left on the south side." This entrance is an aperture through the south wall of the tower, two feet wide by one and a half feet high, with dripstone above and alighting-ledge below. It is boarded up on the inside to prevent birds from getting in and damaging the clock-works. The niches go all round the inside walls, except where the doorway is at the

* Adams in *Ibis* for 1864, p. 26.

top of the well staircase. Each niche is about six inches square.' I am told that another instance occurs at the tower adjoining the ruined chapel of Charter House Hinton, near Bath, the lower part of which was originally intended for the priest's residence, and the birds dwelt above him. In this case also the east, north, and west sides are fitted up with pigeon-holes, and a small square opening in the south wall admitted the birds.

123.—TURTLE-DOVE (*Columba turtur*).

This beautiful little species is the only migrant of the family with which we in this county are acquainted. It does not come to us till the beginning of May, and leaves us early in September; but during that short period it abounds in those spots which please its tastes, though it is fastidious in its choice, and is by no means universally distributed. In my own plantations on the downs it is extremely abundant, and its annual appearance in the spring is to me a welcome reminder of approaching summer. It is very much smaller than its congeners, has a delicate appearance, and its note is peculiarly plaintive. Like all others of the Dove tribe, it flocks in autumn, though seldom in considerable numbers. I have, however, seen above a hundred feeding together in a stubble-field. There is a beautiful legend in Scandinavia respecting the Turtle-dove, not unlike that of the swallow, quoted in a former page from Lloyd's admirable work. 'When our blessed Saviour was crucified, the Turtle-dove for a while hovered around the fatal tree and at length perched there. When looking mournfully down on the Sufferer it sighed deeply, and gave utterance to its plaintive *kurrie, kurrie, kurrie*—that is, "Lord, Lord, Lord." Since that time it has never more been joyful, but has constantly winged its flight around the world repeating its sorrowful cry.* Hence the sportsman's term a *dule* of Turtles, as he would say a covey of partridges, or a wisp of snipe, the word 'dule' being derived from the Latin *doleo*, 'to grieve.' Professor Skeat says that *turtur* is of imitative origin,

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 361.

due to a repetition of *tur*, imitative of the coo of a pigeon. From this comes the French *Tourterelle*, the German *Turteltaube*, the Italian *Tortora*, the Spanish *Tortola*, the Swedish *Turtur Dufva*; but whence comes the Portuguese *Rola* I do not know.

PHASIANIDÆ (THE PHEASANTS).

This family will not occupy us long, inasmuch as it contains but one species known in England, and that one almost in a state of semi-domestication; and consequently its habits and economy thoroughly well known: for I pass over the Turkey of American origin, and the domestic fowl and Peacock of Indian birth, as having no claim to a place in the fauna of Wiltshire. I will but call attention, in passing, to the difference in plumage which the sexes of this family exhibit; to their polygamous habits; to the precocious nature of the young birds, which are no sooner hatched from the shell than they can follow their parents and feed themselves; to their custom of dusting their feathers in any dry heap they can find; and to the horny, conical, and sharp spur with which the tarsus of male birds of this family is furnished. They derive their name, like other descendants of ancient and honourable lineage, from their ancestral seat on the banks of the Phasis, in Colchis, which flows from the Caucasus into the Black Sea at its extreme eastern point, and from Asia Minor, whence Jason is said to have imported them into Europe. It is not improbable that the Romans introduced the Pheasant into England. It is certain that it was protected by the laws of the country at a very early period, from the following extract from Dugdale's 'Monasticon Anglicanum': 'That in the first year of Henry I. (A.D. 1100) the Abbot of Amesbury obtained a license to kill pheasants.'*

124. PHEASANT (*Phasianus Colchicus*).

Alone of this family is entitled to demand admission into the ranks of British birds; for though originally of foreign extrac-

* 'Science Gossip' for 1884, p. 243.

tion, as I have shown, this handsome species has not only become in course of time thoroughly acclimatized, and capable of enduring our most severe winters, but completely naturalized, and able, when left to itself, to thrive and multiply in a wild state in our woods. Though grain and seeds form its food in winter, it feeds largely on insects and roots during the remainder of the year; but it is seldom considered in how great a degree it compensates for the partial injury it causes by the undoubted benefit it confers in thus ridding the land of noxious pests. I do not of course allude to those cases where the species is encouraged to multiply to excess; when the balance of nature being destroyed, confusion ensues as a necessity, as would be the result in the unnatural multiplication of almost any species in the whole animal kingdom. As a proof of its wholesale consumption of injurious insects, I may mention that in the crop of a cock Pheasant were found 852 larvæ of *tipulæ*, or 'crane flies,' and from that of a hen Pheasant were taken no less than 1,225 of these destructive larvæ.*

During winter the males congregate, but separate to their several domains as spring draws on. Many sportsmen have endeavoured to assign to a distinct species the Ring-necked, the Bohemian, and the Pied varieties of this bird, but as these variations are by no means permanent or hereditary, ornithologists have wisely declined to admit them to any separate rank. The Pheasant has an innate shyness or timidity, which nothing seems able to overcome; though reared under a domestic hen, and though fed from the hand from its earliest days, it never attains confidence, but hurries to the shelter of thick cover at the first symptom of alarm. Though it retires to roost on the branches of trees, when once disturbed from the position it has taken up it does not attempt to perch again during the remainder of the night; but on such occasions will crouch in the longest grass and under the densest bramble it can find. It crows, or 'chuckles,' on the least provocation, not only on retiring to roost and at early dawn, but during the night as well as

* 'Science Gossip' for 1884, p. 266.

during the day when any unusual noise disturbs it ; and a sudden clap of thunder will cause every pheasant in the wood to sound his call-note of inquiry.

In France it is *Faisan*, in Germany *Fasan*, in Italy *Fagiano* ; all of which are mere adaptations of *Phasianus* to the languages of the respective countries.

TETRAONIDÆ (THE GROUSE).

Very closely allied to the Pheasants comes the family of Grouse, a race highly prized in this country, and containing more than half the species of Ground-birds known to have occurred in Wiltshire. In habits, in their mode of nesting on the ground, and in the food they seek, they very much resemble those last described. In like manner their head is small, beak strong and convex, wings short, feet stout, and tarsus feathered, but the distinguishing characteristic consists in the elevation and diminution of the hind toe, which in this family becomes exceedingly short, and in the succeeding family disappears altogether. Their flight, though rapid and direct, is heavy, but they walk and run with great agility, and they seek their food, which consists of grain and vegetable substances, entirely on the ground.

125. CAPERCAILLIE (*Tetrao Urogallus*).

The occurrence of a single specimen of this magnificent bird within the limits of this county, as recorded by the late Rev. George Marsh, entitles me to include it within our Wiltshire list. That straggler made its appearance at Winterslow in 1841, and was supposed to have escaped from Mr. Baring's park, where several had been introduced. Indeed, it had entirely ceased to exist south of the Tweed, and was almost extinct in Scotland a few years back, till the Marquis of Breadalbane and other noblemen reinforced its fast-diminishing ranks by importing fresh colonists from Sweden, and preserved and protected it in their extensive forests, till it has now re-peopled its former haunts ; so that it is not probable that our Wiltshire visitor had wandered from its home under natural causes ; nor is it

likely that a bird of so heavy a body and such short wings would have voluntarily strayed so far south. The male Capercaillie is as large as an ordinary Turkey, and well deserves the honourable title of 'Cock of the Wood.'

Its name in all languages seems to allude to its size. The scientific term *Urogallus* (from *urus*, 'a wild bull,' and *gallus*, 'a cock') would imply a larger or coarser species of Black Cock, just as bullfrog, bullrush, and bullfinch signify a large species of their respective families. So the German *Auerhahn* has a like signification, the word *auer* having reference to the bovine Aurochs; and our 'Capercaillie,'* of Gaelic origin, is interpreted to mean either 'the horse of the woods,' or 'the goat of the woods,' or 'the old man of the woods.' In France it is *Coq de Bruyère*, 'Heath-cock.'

Its general plumage is very dark green, or almost black; and it is a native of the extensive pine forests of Scotland, Scandinavia, and Russia. It feeds on the leaves and young shoots of the Scotch fir, which impart a certain resinous taste to the flesh; but it also devours greedily the numerous ground-berries, blue-berries, whortle-berries, cran-berries, etc., with which northern forests abound; and these I have found, in incredible quantities, in the crops of several specimens whose skins I preserved in Norway.

A full account of the peculiar 'play,' or love-song, of this bird I had from the lips of a Norwegian officer with whom I spent some time in a shooting expedition on the fjeld in the summer of 1850, and who had been on more than one occasion an eye-witness of the scene he so graphically described. In the early morning, he said, the old male Capercaillie (or *tiur*) may be seen perched on the top of a pine-tree, and soon he begins to utter a harsh, grating sound, which the Norwegians call 'singing,' and which may be heard at a considerable distance. This music is repeated for some time at intervals, until the hen birds (*röi*) assemble at the *lek*, or playing place; and during the utterance

* The Capercaillie, the Ptarmigan, and the Fulmar are the only three cases in which our common English name is taken from the Gaelic. See *Ibis* for 1869, p. 35.

of his song the Capercaillie is so taken up with his own mellifluous voice, and all his faculties are so absorbed with his vocal performance, that he has no eyes nor ears for anything else; and it is then that the Norwegian sportsman, in somewhat unsportsmanlike fashion, as we think, taking advantage of his preoccupation, hurries to the spot and shoots the unconscious singer.* Young birds do not attain maturity until their third or fourth year, nor are they then suffered to intrude on the playing-place of the old birds, but are either driven away or, if they venture to resist the attack of the old bird, a fierce battle, not unfrequently attended with fatal results, ensues.

126. BLACK GROUSE (*Tetrao tetrix*).

This, too, is but a straggler to our county, though its visits have been more frequent; and from the undoubted fact that it inhabits, though sparingly, the New Forest and other suitable haunts in the neighbouring counties of Somerset and Hants, its appearance here as a veritable wild bird may be more readily acknowledged. The Rev. G. Marsh assured me that they were occasionally met with in the Winterslow woods; and I have a notice of one killed near Redholn turnpike, on the edge of the plain overlooking the vale of Pewsey, which came into the possession of Mr. Lewis, of Wedhampton; and Major Heneage has a specimen which was killed near the Upper Lodge at Compton Bassett in 1866. In South Wilts the Rev. A. P. Morres says that they used to be met with on the downs around Ellesbourne and Sutton and on Teffont Common; and Mr. W. Wyndham, of Dinton, writes that he has a pair of local specimens in his collection, both killed by his grandfather, of which the male bird was shot on the borders of the parishes of Ellesbourne and Sutton Mandeville on December 1st, 1818, and the female at Langford Down just one year later, viz., on December 1st, 1819. These were supposed to be the last native birds of this species in the county; but still occasionally one strays over from the New Forest, and Mr. Wyndham's keeper shot a hen bird at

* See my account of this in the *Zoologist* for 1850, pp. 2944-5.

Dinton so lately as November 12th, 1880. Finally, Mr. Howard Saunders says in 1884: 'They are found sparingly in Wiltshire.*' I am afraid, however, that we can only lay claim to the visit of a very rare and accidental straggler, seen from time to time after an interval of many years.

Like the species last described, it loves to frequent forests and wild uncultivated districts, where rank herbage and undrained morasses proclaim the non-intervention of man; and a truly grand sight it is to see the old male, or 'Black Cock,' as it is generally called, in all the pride of his dark glossy plumage, now appearing of jet black hue, and anon with splendid purple reflections, take flight with a startling rush of wings, when disturbed in his retreats. It is conspicuous for the outward curve of the four or five outer feathers of the tail on either side, and also for the bright red naked skin above the eyes. The female, which goes by the name of the 'Gray Hen,' is of far less pretentious appearance, being contented with a sombre dress of brown, spotted and barred with darker shades. In general habits, food, and nesting it does not vary from its congener last described. Like that species, too, it also has its 'playing-places,' or stations; and indulges in like loud singing or calling; and practises the same antics in the *lek*; and wages desperate battle, and otherwise comports itself as polygamous birds frequently do. The word 'Grouse,' which was formerly announced by Yarrell to be derived from a Persian word *groos*, is now shown by Professor Newton, who has very carefully gone into the question,† to be in all probability derived from the old French word *griesche*, *greoche*, or *griais*, meaning 'speckled,' and cognate with *griseus*, 'grisly,' or 'gray.' Other names by which these birds are sometimes designated are 'Black Game' and 'Heath Poults.' In France it has the prolonged name of *Coq de Bruyère à queue fourchue*, 'Fork-tailed Heath Cock;' and in Germany, *Gabelschwanziges Waldhuhn*, 'Fork-tailed Wood Fowl; but in Sweden it is simply *Orre*.

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 62.

† 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' ed. 9, xi., p. 221.

127. RED GROUSE. (*Lagopus Scoticus*).

This species, so peculiarly British (for it is unknown elsewhere), and in certain districts so extremely abundant, for where it has been most carefully protected and encouraged it literally swarms to an astonishing extent, is only of accidental occurrence in Wiltshire. Colonel Montagu speaks of a female taken alive near Wedhampton in this county, in the winter of the year 1794, as pointed out to that distinguished naturalist by Mr. Poore; and I have information of another killed by the late Mr. Colston's keeper at Roundway Park, near Devizes; while a third is in the possession of Major Heneage, which was killed at Compton Bassett; and the Rev. A. P. Morres, on the authority of Mr. E. Baker, of Mere, mentions a fourth which was shot by some sportsman when partridge-shooting at West Knoyle in 1848; while Mr. Grant, of Devizes, mentions a fifth killed in August, 1866, at Wedhampton, the same locality which saw the capture of the bird recorded by Colonel Montagu. These must have been stragglers from Wales, and were probably driven out of their course by the prevalence of high winds. Unlike the species previously described, the Red Grouse is not polygamous, and never perches on trees; it also differs from them in having the toes completely feathered; hence its generic name *lagopus*, 'rough-footed like a hare.' Though standing alone among birds as really confined to these islands, and so *par excellence* THE British bird, the Red Grouse is our representative here of the 'Willow Grouse' of Norway, *Dal Rype* (*Lagopus sub-alpinus*), which frequents the lower parts of the fjeld, and the mountain-side clothed with birch and alder, unlike its more hardy relative *Fyäll Rype* (*Lagopus alpinus*), identical with our Ptarmigan, which prefers the high mountain ranges, and the rocky snow-clad heights. Both of these species I have shot in some numbers in Norway, and I never could sufficiently admire the extraordinary resemblance of their plumage to the localities they severally represented, so that it was quite difficult to distinguish them on the ground, though within a few paces, so well did their colour assimilate to the herbage or lichen-

covered rocks or snow-patches around.* It is precisely the same with the Red Grouse of England, for the dark red-brown heather in which it loves to dwell is very much of the same hue with that of its plumage. It is little known outside the British Isles, but is called in France *Tetras rouge*, and sometimes *Tetras des saules*, 'Willow Grouse;,' and sometimes *Poule de marais*, 'Marsh or Moor Fowl.'

128. PALLAS' SAND GROUSE (*Syrrhaptes paradoxus*).

Up to the year 1863 this handsome species was almost unknown not only in these islands but on the continent of Europe; when suddenly in the early summer of that year a vast irruption of them occurred, more especially on our Eastern coasts; and it subsequently appeared that this strange invasion extended over the whole of Central Europe. Driven from its home in the steppes of Tartary, if not in the more Eastern countries of China and Siberia, where it also abounds, this horde of wanderers started Westwards, and spreading themselves over some twenty degrees of latitude, the more advanced portion penetrated as far as our island. What numbers migrated in this extraordinary manner; what vast flocks in all probability started on this lengthened journey; how many halted on the way—it is impossible even to guess; but in a most masterly paper on the subject drawn up by Professor Newton, at that time editor of the *Ibis*, and published by him in that journal,† he has satisfactorily proved that several hundreds are known to have reached our shores, after a flight of, at the least computation, some four thousand geographical miles. What could have caused this eccentric movement of the Asiatic species of Grouse we are considering, this 'Tartar invasion,' or 'Scythian exodus,' as Mr. Newton styles it, it is beyond my power to explain; whether the

* For a further account of the two species of Alpine Grouse or Ptarmigan, and how I met with them in Norway, see *Zoologist* for 1851, pp. 2977-9; see also in the same useful periodical for 1858, p. 6265.

† *Ibis* for 1864, vol. vi., pp. 185-222.

prevalence of unusual easterly winds, or other atmospheric commotions, impelled them on their westerly course, as some have suggested; or whether the colonization by Russia of large tracts of Eastern Siberia, and the reclaiming of waste lands, once their haunts, as others have surmised; or whether the remarkable drought that prevailed over Central Asia that summer had dried the fresh-water lakes, and scorched up all vegetation, as others have concluded; or whether, as Professor Newton inclines to think, the natural overflow of an increasing species, prolific as are all of its genus, and exempt in a great measure from the enemies and risks which are apt to beset ground-breeding birds, forced it to drive forth as colonists its superabundant numbers, I will not now stop to argue. Enough for us that, as in early times, the tide of human migrations set in steadily from the east, and starting from the shores of the Caspian and the valleys of the Caucasus, wave after wave of those prolific adventurers poured over Europe, until the Celts had penetrated her most western boundaries, and occupied our island; so a vast horde of winged strangers has suddenly swept down upon astonished Europe, and a new nomadic race has penetrated to our shores from its distant Eastern home.

I have already said that several hundreds of this Sand-Grouse reached the limits of Great Britain, and that by far the larger part of them appeared, as was to be expected with Asiatic migrants, in the Eastern counties; some, however, detached from the main body, under the general persecution which, I regret to say, followed their appearance amongst us, were dispersed all over England, and penetrated almost every county; and one at all events reached Wiltshire, and was killed on Salisbury Plain at Imber on the 29th of June, for the knowledge of which, as well as the occurrence of so many other rare birds in Wiltshire, I am again indebted to the Rev. George Powell, Rector of Sutton Veney, who most kindly and considerately sent me from time to time an account of any rarity which came under his notice. Our Wiltshire specimen of the Sand-Grouse was a female, and was alone, and in rapid flight from north to south, when it was shot by Mr.

Joseph Dean of Imber, as I described in the *Zoologist* at the time.*

Like other species of Sand-Grouse, *S. paradoxus* is remarkable for its great length of wing, slender beak, shortness of foot, and conical tail, the two middle feathers being elongated in a thread-like manner; also for the feathering of the legs and feet to the extremity of the toes with short dense feathers; the hind toe is completely wanting. That it is not polygamous; that both sexes share in the duties of incubation; and that three eggs are the full complement of a nest, I gather from Professor Newton's paper. And I may add from my acquaintance with an allied species in Africa (*S. exustus*), that so much do its colours resemble the sands of the desert it frequents, that it is extremely difficult to see it on the ground; while its sharp-pointed long wings give it a rapidity of flight almost unequalled. In many respects it reminds one of the Plover tribe.† Its scientific name is perhaps a little far-fetched; at all events its meaning is not self-evident and requires explanation. *Syrrhaptes* is derived from *συρρᾶπτειν*, 'to sew or stitch together,' because the last phalanges of the toes alone are free; and *paradoxus*, 'strange,' 'contrary to expectation,' from the curious structure of the feet.‡

129. PARTRIDGE (*Perdix cinerea*).

Unlike the preceding members of this family, the well known bird now under consideration thrives better in cultivated than in barren land, and nowhere multiplies more rapidly than in the most highly farmed districts. Its appearance and habits are so well known that it is unnecessary to enlarge upon them. I will then merely append a few notes with which I have been furnished by the late Rev. George Marsh: 'Since the introduction of the new Game Laws, the numbers of this common but beautiful and useful bird have very much declined. Their

* *Zoologist* for 1864, p. 8888.

† See an admirable figure of this bird, as well as a good general description, by Mr. T. J. Moore, in the *Ibis* for 1860, vol. ii., pp. 105-110.

‡ 'B.O.U. List of British Birds,' p. 140.

enemies are numerous, the gun, the net, the trap of man, the stoat and weasel, the magpie, crow and jay, and the mower are among the most conspicuous. The hedgehog is also no doubt one of its enemies, as the keepers at Winterslow used to tell me that an egg was the best bait for the trap intended to catch the hedgepig. In the summer of 1841, a farmer of the neighbouring parish of Langley heard two Partridges in a hedge in a grass field making a great noise; so he approached the spot, and found two old birds manfully defending their nest against a hedgehog: he killed the animal, and the eggs, eighteen in number, were soon afterwards hatched. I have witnessed myself the destruction of a nest by a magpie. In this county the poacher fixes a flue net in the corner of a field where he has roosted birds, and then under cover of a horse he gradually walks the birds into the net. These birds do better when some of them are shot every year; if all are spared, the old birds drive away the young ones.' I may add that Partridges feed shortly after sunrise, and a little before sunset, retiring to bask in the sun or dust themselves on dry banks at midday. They roost on the ground in the open field shortly after sunset, and the whole covey sits closely crowded together in a circle, tails towards the centre, heads outwards (like a watchful round-robin), for the sake of security, and in order to avoid a surprise. They are said to 'jug' when they so arrange themselves for the night. There is no question that dry weather is especially valuable for the Partridge, and very true was the saying of that excellent observer, the late Mr. Knox, 'The drier the summer, the better for the game.*' Indeed, a continuance of wet stormy weather, such as we often experience in this country at hatching-time towards the latter end of June, is most destructive to the young brood. On one occasion I was taken to see a curious instance of a Partridge sitting on her nest, on a stubble-rick, on the shelving side near the top, and about six feet from the ground. This was in June, 1853, on the farm of Mr. Hillier of Winterbourne Monkton, in the midst of open downs, and surrounded by hundreds of acres of wheat, barley, oats, clover and turnips, so

* 'Birds of Sussex,' p. 174.

that there was no lack of choice of such position as Partridges are wont to select for their nurseries. Neither could it have been from any motive of protection from inclement weather and rude winds (which not unfrequently prevail on these downs) that the Partridge was led to this strange choice, for the nest was placed on the north-east side of the stack. Colonel Hawker gives an account of a Partridge's nest on a pollard tree, and Yarrell quotes another instance from Daniel's 'Rural Sports,' of a nest in an oak pollard; but with these exceptions I have never heard of this bird varying so much from the usual habits of its species in its choice of a place for nidification. In France it is *Perdrix grise*; in Germany, *Graues Feldhuhn*; in Italy, *Starna*; in Sweden, *Rapp-Höna*. 'Partridge,'—says Professor Skeat—is from the Latin *perdix*, perhaps so named from its cry.

130. RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE (*Perdix rubra*).

It is our good fortune in Wiltshire to know but little of this bird, which has been encouraged in some districts of England, and has ended in driving away its more valuable congener, with which in flavour of flesh it is not to be compared. It is a handsome species, and is common in France and the south of Europe generally. I found it very abundant in Spain and Portugal, the markets, which I used to frequent daily in search of rare birds, being always well-stocked with them. In habits it resembles *P. cinerea*. A few stragglers from time to time have made their way into Wiltshire. The Rev. G. Marsh recorded their capture at Winterslow, and the specimen in his collection, now at Salisbury, was killed at Draycot Park. Another was killed at Winterbourne Monkton by my neighbour, the late Mr. John Brown, in whose possession I have frequently seen the specimen. Moreover, a curious instance was brought to my notice by Mr. Bull, of Devizes, of this species and the Common Partridge laying their eggs in the same nest, from which he extracted one of each sort that I might identify them. In like manner in South Wilts a straggler appears from time to time. The Rev. A. P.

Morres says it occurs occasionally, but rarely in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, and also near Warminster. A single bird was caught at Mere, in the yard of the Ship Inn, by Mr. J. Coward, on April 11, 1874, having apparently taken refuge there from a hawk. Two others were caught alive by some keepers, who were driving the game in Clarendon Woods; and again a brace were killed at Holt, near Bradford-on-Avon, in the same field, though with an interval of six years between their respective appearances before the same sportsman. Mr. Grant also mentions a specimen killed at Erlestoke in November, 1861, and thirteen others from various districts in North Wilts. I have also several instances from the neighbourhood of Marlborough, and other instances will doubtless occur to many sportsmen, for, thanks to the mistaken zeal with which their introduction to this country has been conducted, they are by no means rare now. In France, and indeed on the Continent generally, it is the Common Partridge: *Perdrix rouge* in France, *Rothe Feldhuhn* in Germany, *Pernice commune* in Italy, *Perdiz* in Spain and Portugal.

131. QUAIL (*Perdix coturnix*).

Not many years since this diminutive but plump little partridge was generally, though somewhat sparingly, scattered over the down parishes in this neighbourhood in the summer, but now it has become comparatively rare throughout the county. One nest, however, was discovered at Yatesbury since my incumbency in 1852; and I have notices of the bird's occurrence of late years at Christian Malford in 1841 and 1845; in the neighbourhood of Sutton Benger in 1847; at Langley in 1851; and at Erchfont in 1856; at Hilmarton and at Trafalgar; at Chirton in 1860; Etchilhampton, 1863; Bishops Cannings, 1867; Potterne, Cheverel, Erlestoke, and Seend, 1868; Rowde, All Cannings, Marden, 1871. The Rev. A. P. Morres reports their appearance at Britford, Stratford Tony, and West Harnham, near Salisbury; at Holt, near Bradford, and at Mere; and several of these took place as late as the middle of December, which

would seem to corroborate Yarrell's opinion that when the autumnal migration in October takes place some remain behind and winter here. Colonel Waddington says he shoots a few brace every season at Figheldean. Nests with twelve and thirteen eggs have been taken near Marlborough in June, 1871, and in 1883; and Mr. Gwatkin records two nests of thirteen eggs each sent him from Tilshead in 1886. Thus it is still to be found throughout the county, and in all probability it might be found in some part of Wiltshire every year, did not its unobtrusive and even skulking habits hinder its recognition. That Quails are in marvellous abundance in their favourite haunts, and that during their periodical migrations their flights are prodigious, is not only recorded in old time in the books of Exodus and Numbers,* but Colonel Montagu informs us that one hundred thousand have been taken in one day on the west coast of the kingdom of Naples; and Mr. Wright speaks of their numbers found at Malta when alighting to rest on that island during the periods of migration as something almost inconceivable. But Mr. Adams says their abundance or scarcity there depends entirely on the prevalence or otherwise of favourable winds, for if wafted on by suitable breezes they will pass over the island in vast flocks without stopping to rest. Mr. Cordeaux adds that the Maltese entertain the strange belief that the Quail on migration keeps one wing motionless and raised like a sail, and thus crosses the sea like a ship on her voyage.† That the long flight, however, does sometimes completely exhaust the little migrant I once had personal proof, for early one morning a Quail arrived in the garden of the 'Villa des Pins,' at Mentone, but a short distance from the shores of the Mediterranean (which I occupied in the spring of 1878), so tired and exhausted as to allow itself to be taken by hand, though after a time it recovered, when we let it go, and it flew merrily away. That, moreover, this handsome little bird is a cosmopolite, and inhabits the three continents of the Old World, I can vouch, having met with

* Exodus xvi. 13; Numbers xi. 31, 32; Psalm lxxviii. 27, 28.

† 'Birds of the Humber,' p. 124.

it in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Indeed, of the three specimens now in my collection, the first I procured in the flesh at the market of the Pantheon, at Rome, and it was admirably stuffed by an Otaheite girl, the only taxidermist then in the Eternal City; and the others I shot on the banks of the Nile, within the tropics, in Nubia. I also found it very abundant in Portugal, where Montagu long since remarked that they remain throughout the year, and even says, on the authority of Captain Latham, though I am inclined to think erroneously, that they are more plentiful in that country in winter than in summer. In Egypt, too, it is often found in great numbers, and though not considered sacred and never embalmed, it may be distinctly recognised in the bird-catching scenes on the walls of the tombs at Beni Hassan and at Thebes, so that it can prove its title to a settlement in Egypt of over three thousand years.

It is of so pugnacious a disposition that it was kept by the Greeks and Romans, as it is at this day by the Chinese, for the express purpose of fighting, after the manner of our game-cocks. Of plump form and of self-asserting manners, the Quail may well be designated a diminutive Partridge. Its flesh, too, is equally good for the table; and it is a benefactor to man by consuming the seeds of many weeds. Its eggs are perhaps more richly coloured than those of any other bird which breeds in this country, the ground colour yellowish-orange, freely blotched and speckled with rich dark brown. Whether the males are polygamous, as Yarrell asserted, or whether they pair, as Howard Saunders, Gould, and other eminent ornithologists think, is at present uncertain; but that both parent birds are undaunted in defence of their young brood is generally admitted. Among Continental ornithologists the Quail is often designated by the specific name of *dactylisonans*, and we are told that it is so called from the shrill triple note of the male, which soon makes itself heard in the evenings on the bird's arrival. That cry to the German peasant seems to say *Buck' den Rück*, 'Bend your back'; to the inhabitant of the south of France, *J'ai du blé, j'ai pas de sa (sac)*, or in Provence by *Tres (trois) per un, tres per*

un; to the Spaniard, *Clic-clic-lic*, which perhaps led to the invention of the castanets; while in England it says, 'Wet my lips, wet my lips.'* Professor Skeat says that the English 'Quail'—and in like manner the French *Caille* and the Italian *Quaglia*—signifies 'a quacker,' from the root *quachan*, 'to croak.' On the other hand, the Spanish *Codorniz* and the Portuguese *Codornis* are from the classical Latin *Coturnix*, the etymology of which is unknown (B.O.U.). Its period of arrival in Western Europe is May, and of departure October.

STRUTHIONIDÆ (THE BUSTARDS).

This is a family which used to thrive in Wiltshire more than any other county in England, inasmuch as our wide, open downs in the north, and Salisbury Plain in the south, offered such an extensive range and such an undisturbed stronghold as could not be found elsewhere in the British Isles. That was in the days when the great stretches of hill and dale were covered with the original turf, and gave the best and sweetest of pasture to the large flocks of sheep which wandered over them; but when the plough invaded these solitudes, and the down was broken up, and barley and wheat, which required hoeing in the spring, succeeded to the sheepwalks, the Bustards were gradually driven away or destroyed, and though here and there an indigenous straggler seems to have lingered on through the early part of this century, they must have been getting very scarce a hundred years ago; and though now and again of late years a specimen of either species comes over from the South of France or Spain, it is but an accidental visitor, which meets with anything but a kindly welcome when it arrives at the haunts of its relatives of bygone years. The Bustards are essentially Ground-birds, for they never perch, and unless disturbed or frightened are seldom inclined to take wing. They *can*, however, fly with considerable speed, and do on occasion prolong their flight to great distances; hence the arrival, though rarely, of visitors of

* Howard Saunders in fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 129.

both species to our shores. As both in flight and running their speed is remarkable, naturalists have been much puzzled to account for the name so commonly assigned to them, as our word 'Bustard,' the French '*Outarde*,' and the Spanish '*Abutarda*,' as also the universal scientific name for the Great Bustard, *tarda*; but in an admirable paper on that bird in *Fraser's Magazine* for September, 1854, supposed to be by Mr. Broderip, Albertus is quoted as accounting for these specific names in the following manner: '*Bístarda avis est bis vel ter saltum dans, priusquam de humo eleveltur, unde et eis nomen factum* ;*' and this alleged habit of the bird, giving two or three leaps before it rises from the ground, and thus recalling the action of ascending a staircase, is mentioned as being likewise the origin of its German name, *Trapp-gans*, or 'Stair Goose;' whence also the quaint distich:

'The big-boaned Bustard then, whose body beares that size,
That he against the wind must runne, ere he can rise.'

Pliny, too, says of these birds: '*Quas Hispania aves tardas appellat, Græcia otidas*.'

Birds of this family are accustomed to pack in the autumn, and are generally supposed to be polygamous, though (as in the species last described) this is now disputed. The generic name *Otis* is said to be derived from the Greek, meaning 'eared,' or 'with long ear feathers;' but I fail to see how this applies to the Bustards.

132. GREAT BUSTARD (*Otis tarda*).

Once the pride of our Wiltshire Downs, and which held this county as its stronghold in Great Britain, now, alas! driven out from among us by the march of cultivation, and only seen at long intervals as a rare visitor. It was my good fortune more than thirty years ago to be instrumental in recording the capture

* It is only fair to add that, according to Mr. Howard Saunders, some recent authorities object to this derivation, and in the list published by the B.O.U. Committee *tarda* is said to be a Celtic or Basque word, having no relation to *tardus*, 'slow,' though what it does mean is not stated.

of what was then the last Bustard seen in Wiltshire, and of subsequently purchasing the bird for the collection of my friend the Rev. G. Marsh, which specimen is now in the museum at Salisbury. My attention was thus very much directed to this splendid species at a period when there were many living in Wiltshire who could recollect having seen it from time to time on Salisbury Plain; and I sought far and wide for tidings of the last stragglers noticed in Wiltshire, and, indeed, of all the history and traditions that appertained to this bird, wherein, as I gratefully and proudly record, I was very much assisted by an interesting correspondence upon it, with which I was favoured by the late Mr. Yarrell, the talented author of our standard work on 'British Birds,' who also largely aided my inquiries by furnishing me with a quantity of printed papers and extracts upon it. Thus, armed with all the information I could gain, and encouraged by so high an authority, I prepared a paper on the Great Bustard, which I read before the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society during its annual meeting of 1855, at Warminster; and as everything connected with the Great Bustard is still, and always must be, of special interest to Wiltshiremen, I propose to reproduce here the substance of that paper, supplemented by an account of such further instances of its occurrence in Wilts as have taken place since, thus bringing its Wiltshire history down to present date.

First, however, let me briefly describe its general aspect and habits. The Great Bustard is the largest of the British land birds: its bill is nearly straight, but with the point of the upper mandible curved; its legs are long and naked above the knee, very muscular and strong; its toes, three only in number, and these very short, united at the base, and all directed forwards; its wings of moderate length, but also very muscular. A full-grown male, if in good condition, will attain to a weight of over 30 lb., and will measure three feet nine inches in length. Its general plumage is as follows: head and neck bluish-gray; back and tail coverts buff-orange, barred and spotted with black; upper part of the breast reddish-orange, all the under parts

white. The adult male is also furnished with long wiry feathers, depending laterally from the chin, and moustaches of the same; the female, which is only about one-third in size as compared with the other sex, has no lateral chin feathers or moustaches, and her head and neck are of a deeper gray, but in other respects her plumage is similar to that of the male. Of large and bulky form, but with powerful wings as well as legs, the Bustard likes to wander over a wide extent of country. Moreover, it is of a roving disposition, and loves vast open plains, where amidst the long coarse grass and the fields of corn and thick gorse it delights to dwell, and it will also frequent marshy ground when such tracts are to be found near its favourite haunts. Its food consists chiefly of herbage and grain, such as rye and barley, stalks as well as ears, and insects, such as beetles; but reptiles and the smaller mammalia are also greedily devoured by this omnivorous bird. The nest is a mere depression on the bare ground, and there the hen bird lays her two eggs. As autumn approaches they unite in flocks, and during deep and continued snows are sometimes driven from their open plains to more sheltered and enclosed districts. They are exceedingly bold and pugnacious, having on rare occasions been known to attack those who come near them with most determined ferocity. They are at the same time generally very wild and difficult to approach, so that sportsmen were accustomed to mask their advance, as they do at this day in Spain, by means of a stalking-horse. When in repose Bustards usually rest with one leg drawn up, and with head reclining backwards on the neck. When seen at a distance Gilbert White said they resembled 'fallow deer'—a fact corroborated by Mr. Wolley, who saw them in Spain, apparently walking in file, some with their heads down, as he was ascending the Guadalquivir in a steamboat. When they take wing they generally rise to a considerable height above the ground, and will fly, often at an elevation of a hundred yards, with a regular, but by no means slow flap of the wings, for several miles before they alight again. Older writers on birds, one after another, assured us that the Great Bustard was hunted

down by greyhounds, but that such was ever the case has been disputed by many modern ornithologists. For my own part, I do not see how we *can* disbelieve the very decided assertions of many trustworthy naturalists when relating the account of a matter with which they must have been familiar; but it is too much the fashion now to presume that our ancestors were mistaken, and in our conceit we attribute to them as errors what in reality were truths at the time they wrote them, though they may not fall in with our modern experience. Now there are three distinct opinions on this knotty point, each of which has its strenuous supporters: (1) That old and young birds indiscriminately were so hunted by greyhounds; (2) that the young only were so coursed; (3) that neither old nor young could ever have been so taken. With regard to the first, that both old and young were hunted down with dogs, Brooks in his 'Ornithology,' in 1771, says of the Bustard in France, near Chalons, 'Sometimes fowlers shoot them as they lie concealed behind some eminence or on a load of straw; others take them with greyhounds, which often catch them before they are able to rise.' Yarrell, in his article on the Bustard in his 'British Birds,' quotes the Rev. Richard Lubbock for the following: 'A very fine bird, an old male, is still in preservation as a stuffed specimen at the house of a friend in my neighbourhood, which was taken by greyhounds forty years ago, within three miles of Norwich.' Again, Mark Antony Lower, in his 'Contributions to Literature' (1854), says, 'The South Downs afford a fine field for the naturalist as well as the sportsman. One cannot but regret, however, the extinction of some of the animals which they formerly nourished, particularly that fine indigenous bird the Bustard. The grandfather of the present writer was among the last who joined in the sport, about the middle of the last century, of hunting down the last remains of the species with dogs and bludgeons;' and in a note which I received from that gentleman in answer to my inquiries, he added, 'My grandfather, John Lower, of Alfriston, was born in 1735. He was a boy at the time he went a-hunting Bustards,

and we may assume the year 1750 as about the period. My friend, the late Mr. John Dudeney, of this town (Lewes), a shepherd in his youth, and the son of a shepherd, told me that his father, who must have been contemporary with my grandfather, had also taken part in Bustard-hunting in his youthful days; and he adds, 'I have no hesitation in saying that fully-grown birds were hunted down with dogs, though I have never heard it mentioned what kind of dogs were employed.' The next witness I adduce for the hunting of Bustards generally on the ground is the Honourable Robert Curzon, in his work on 'Armenia and Erzeroum.' At p. 145 he says, 'Later in the year I risked my neck by riding as hard as I could tear over the rocky, or rather stony, plains at the foot of the mountains after the Great Bustard. I have more than once knocked some of the feathers out of these glorious huge birds as they ran at a terrible pace, half flying and scrambling before my straining horse, but I never succeeded in killing one, though I have constantly partaken of those which have fallen before more patient gunners, who stalk them as you would a deer, and knock them over with a rifle-ball or swan-shot from behind a stone or bank.' Lastly, Bishop Stanley, in his 'Familiar History of Birds,' tells us, 'The Bustard can fly, but its usual motion is on foot, running with such speed as often to rival a greyhound.'

For the second opinion, that the young alone were thus coursed with dogs, I first adduce Bewick, who lived when these birds were not yet extinct, and who (one would suppose) could not well have been mistaken as to the method of obtaining them generally adopted by sportsmen; in his lifelike woodcut of the Great Bustard in his first edition, published in 1800, we see in the background of the picture one of these birds running, pursued by greyhounds, and followed by a man on horseback; and in his subsequent editions, with the descriptions added to the figures, he says, 'They are slow in taking wing, but run with great rapidity, and when young are sometimes taken with greyhounds, which pursue them with great avidity; the chase is said to afford excellent diversion.' Mr. Howard Saunders supports

this view, showing that 'in Spain, during the great heat of August and September, young birds are sometimes run down by horsemen and dogs, as, after two or three low flights, they become exhausted, being at that season extremely fat.' That they have been captured under similar circumstances in England is probable, and indeed one case is recorded by Mr. Lubbock where the greyhounds came suddenly through a gate, and 'chopped' a Bustard; but that anything like real and successful Bustard *coursing* was ever habitually pursued is open to doubt.' Mr. Saunders, however, notwithstanding this opinion, proceeds to quote from the *Naturalist's Pocket Magazine* (1799-1800) as follows: 'But though they cannot be reached by a fowling-piece, they are sometimes run down by greyhounds. Being voracious and greedy, they often sacrifice their safety to their appetites; and as they are generally very fat, they are unable to fly without much preparation; when therefore the greyhounds come within a certain distance, the Bustards run off, clap their wings, and endeavour to gather under them enough air to rise; in the meantime, the dogs are continually gaining ground, till at last it is too late for flight. However, notwithstanding the sluggishness of their usual pace, they can, when in danger, run very fast, and once fairly on the wing, are able to fly several miles without resting.' My last authority for this opinion is Mr. Hooper, of Littleton, in the parish of Lavington, who has always lived on or near the Plain, and states that he has often heard from old men that in the days of Bustards the shepherds were in the habit of hunting the young birds with their sheep-dogs; he says, 'There can be no doubt of the matter, as far as the practice of this neighbourhood is concerned;' but, he adds, 'the older birds were too swift, under the combined help of wings and feet, thus to be taken, and they were understood not to be so followed; they hunted the young ones before they were fully fledged.' With such authority for the hunting of Bustards with dogs as I have adduced, and I might mention much more to the same effect, I do not see how we can deny the fact altogether, whether we believe that the old birds were so coursed, as well as the young,

or no ; for my own part, I incline to the belief that the old birds were occasionally so taken, though perhaps this was generally in drizzling or wet weather, which was certainly the time usually chosen for the sport, when the birds' feathers were soaked with rain.

As to those who hold to the opinion that neither old nor young birds were ever hunted with dogs at all, they found their disbelief on the supposed impossibility of the thing, and ignore altogether, or treat as idle tales, the repeated accounts given by the older naturalists. At the head of these sceptics stands Selby, the talented author of the 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' who says the Bustard 'upon being disturbed, so far from running, in preference to flight (as has been often described), rises upon wing with great facility, and flies with much strength and swiftness, usually to another haunt, which will sometimes be at the distance of even six or seven miles. It has also been said that in former days, when the species was of common occurrence, it was a practice to run down the young birds (before they were able to fly) with greyhounds, as affording excellent diversion ; so far from this possibility existing, with respect to the present remnant of the breed, the young birds, upon being alarmed, constantly squat close to the ground, in the same manner as the young of the lapwing, golden plover, etc., and in that position are frequently taken by the hand.' The same opinion, though with somewhat less confidence, is given by Mr. Nicholson (quoted by Yarrell in his paper on the Bustard, read before the Linnæan Society), who had enjoyed great opportunities of observing these birds in the neighbourhood of Seville, where they abound. He says, 'They never try to run, one that I had winged making the most absurd attempts possible to get away from me, and though a young bird, showing much more disposition to fight than to get away by running. I cannot imagine greyhounds being able to catch Bustards, though there seems to be good authority for believing they did.'

Another method of taking, or attempting to take, the Bustard in 'ye olden tyme' was by means of falcons, and I am indebted to Mr. James Waylen for the information that when Colonel

Thornton, who once rented Spye Park, sported in Wiltshire, he occasionally flew his hawks at Bustards, the apparent slowness of that bird when seen at a distance tempting him to the trial ; but the hawks had no chance.

There is another point which has been no less warmly disputed by modern ornithologists, in regard to the existence of a so-called *gular pouch*. From the days of Daines Barrington and Edwards, such a pouch or bag between the under side of the tongue and the lower mandible of the bill was supposed to exist, and to supply the bird with drink in dry places when distant from water. This statement was accepted and confidently repeated by Bewick, Montagu, Selby, and Yarrell. Subsequent research, however, and careful anatomical observations, afterwards shook Mr. Yarrell's belief in this gular pouch, and in this he was supported by the old French naturalists, with Cuvier at their head, as well as by our own Professor Owen of the Royal College of Surgeons. The question, however, is still an open one, with warm advocates on both sides: 'et adhuc sub judice lis est.' When I was in Portugal, in the spring of 1868, I was so fortunate as to procure a magnificent male bird in the flesh, which was most liberally given me by an English friend, and whose body, after I had taken off the skin, for several days formed a large item in the bill of fare of the Hotel Braganza at Lisbon; the guests of every degree at the *table-d'hôte* and in private apartments partaking of the dish, from the British Minister and his family on the first-floor to the cook-boys in the area. This bird weighed $30\frac{1}{2}$ lb. English,* and is the finest example of *O. tarda* I have ever seen. After being brought down with shot, the *coup de grâce* had been given it by cutting its throat with a knife, as is the approved method of Portuguese sportsmen; it had also been a good deal torn by dogs; but though thus ill-used, blood-stained and damaged in the outset, and though it arrived in England covered with mildew—for I sent it home direct by sea—it has been admirably cleaned and mounted by Mr. Baker, the well-known

* Lord Lilford says that a fine specimen brought to him in Spain weighed 32 lb. *Ib's* for 1886, p. 382.

taxidermist of Cambridge, and, thanks to his diligence and care, now stands in my collection as noble a specimen as may be seen of the Portuguese ORNIS. With the assistance of Dr. Suche, who had been a fellow-labourer with Vigors, and who was an experienced collector and preserver of some of the larger mammals and reptiles in South America, and whose anatomical skill was of the greatest service to me, I spent several hours in examining the soft, wattle-like protuberance which hung below the chin and throat, and gave the whole neck a thick, puffy appearance. The result was that I entertain no doubt whatever, and (what is of far more value) Dr. Suche was equally positive, that this male Bustard possessed a pouch of considerable capacity, or rather (as it seemed to me) a number of membrane-divided sacs, which appeared capable of extending to any dimensions, and the larger of which would apparently contain several quarts. I am quite aware that my own attempts at dissection were very feeble, and I should not venture to speak thus positively on so disputed a point but for the able assistance in the work, and the certain conclusions deduced therefrom, by Dr. Suche. To this I may add, that on mentioning our work and our unanimous conclusions to Professor Barbosa du Bocage, the well-known ornithologist and indefatigable director of the museum at Lisbon, to whose courtesy I was indebted for much information and assistance, he not only entirely concurred with us, but declared that it was impossible for anyone to examine the throat and neck of an adult male *Otis tarda* without being convinced by his own senses that such a pouch did exist. Even previously to removing the skin of my bird, the position and size of the large goitre-like excrescence standing out from the neck, though in great measure concealed by feathers, could be plainly discerned; and, when handled, at once betrayed the soft, yielding nature of its substance.* Perhaps it may account for the apparently contradictory opinions expressed above, if I state that the male Bustard

* For an exhaustive treatise 'On the supposed Gular Pouch of the Male Bustard,' by Professor Newton, see *Ibis*, for 1862, pp. 107-127. See also *Ibis* for 1865, pp. 143-146.

does not arrive at maturity till the fourth year, previous to which no sign of the pouch is to be seen ; also that it is the opinion of some well qualified by experience to judge, that it is only to be found in the breeding season, after which it gradually diminishes in size, till it is hardly perceptible in the winter. If this is (as I believe) correct, and the presence of the gular pouch is confined only to old male birds, and to them in the breeding season alone, then its absence on examination of younger birds, and at other periods of the year, is at once accounted for.

And now I come to the history, so far as I can ascertain it, of the Great Bustard in Wiltshire ; observing by the way that in other countries we can trace it back to very remote times, for its form appears among the Egyptian hieroglyphics, and many well-known ancient writers have thought it not unworthy of mention. Athenæus, Plutarch, Ælian, Oppian, Xenophon, Aristotle and Pliny, are some of those who have described it, and though much fable is mixed up with their accounts, the description is sufficiently clear to enable us to identify the bird. But to pass from these Bustards of ancient Greece and Asia, to those of ancient Britain, when the Celtic tribes roamed over the downs, and Abury and Stonehenge were in their glory, then this bird flourished on the unbroken Plain, and doubtless revelled in the broadly-spreading unreclaimed wastes throughout this county. Its name is preserved as '*Yr arafehedydd* ;' but to what extent it abounded, or how far it was looked upon as game, or how much it was the object of pursuit in those days of flint arrowheads, does not so clearly appear. To come down, however, to a much later period, from the earliest records we have of it in comparatively modern days—viz., three hundred years since—the price it fetched proved it to be no *very* common fowl. Indeed, I do not think it could ever have been very plentiful in England : its large size and the excellent meat it furnished must always have caused it to be greatly sought after on account of its commercial value ; and though it is puzzling to imagine how the sportsman of old contrived to bring about its capture, that they did obtain it somehow is certain, from the lists of game, and the bills of

fare, and the prices of wild fowl which have come down to us, and several of which are reproduced by Mr. Howard Saunders in the new edition of Yarrell. No species of game, however, in the sixteenth century seems to have been so highly esteemed and to have fetched a larger price than the Bustard, for the sum of ten shillings at which it was valued represents a very high figure, if we take into account the comparative value of money at that period; but, indeed, at the present day, the price of a *Batardea* in the market of Lisbon is generally equivalent to about two pounds, which will not be thought excessive, even in a country where the bird is common, when we consider that it weighs 30 lb., and that the meat, as I know by experience, is excellent. So early as in 1534 (25 Henry VIII.) it was found necessary to protect its eggs by law, 'upon paine of imprisonment for one yeare, and to lose and forfeit for every egge of any Bustarde so taken or distroid xx pence, the one moitie thereof to be to the King our Sovereigne lorde, and the other halfe to him that will sue for the same in forme aforesaide.*' Now to find and take the egg of so large and conspicuous a bird was easy enough for any idle fellow, but it must have required both skill and patience to capture, even with the crossbow, so wild and so wary a bird, frequenting such open spots, where it was difficult to stalk them, and always on the alert for any surprise. Again, in 1712, an advertisement appeared in the *Spectator* announcing in the market the seat of a deceased baronet, containing, in addition to fish-ponds, canals, etc., 'woods of large timber, wherein is game in great plenty, even to the Bustard and Pheasant.' And again, I have now before me an autograph letter of the Duke of Northumberland, bearing date May 10th, 1753, addressed to Michael Ewen, Esq., of Milton Lislebon, on the verge of Salisbury Plain, thanking him very heartily for a fine Bustard he had sent him, proving the bird at that date to be sufficiently rare to be sent as a present to a nobleman.

But Wiltshire was always allowed to be the stronghold of the Great Bustard, and our wide downs, and especially Salisbury Plain,

* *Zoologist* for 1886, p. 84.

were known to be its favourite haunts, and they are described as such by most of our older ornithologists. In 1667, Merrett notices that it was 'taken on Newmarket Heath and about Salisbury.' In 1713, Ray thus describes its localities: 'In campis spatiosis circa Novum Mercatum et Royston, oppida in agro Cantabrigiensi, inque planitie, ut audio, Salisburiensi, et alibi in vastis et apertis locis invenitur.' In 1771, Dr. Brooks says of it, 'This bird is bred in several parts of Europe, and particularly in England, especially on Salisbury Plain, etc., for it delights in large open places; the flesh is in high esteem, and perhaps the more so because it is not very easy to come at.' In 1775, Gilbert White was told by a carter at a farm on the downs near Andover, that twelve years previously he had seen a flock of eighteen of these birds, but that since that time he had only seen two; though Gilbert White's correspondent, Pennant, would lead one to suppose them far more common, for he says, 'in autumn these are (in Wiltshire) generally found in large turnip-fields near the downs, and in flocks of fifty or more.'

Up to this point, then, we may regard the Great Bustard, if not very numerous (which from its size and its value it was not very likely to be), as at any rate by no means a rare bird; and doubtless highly prized by our sporting forefathers was this pride of Wiltshire, this stately denizen of our plains.

Thus in the latter quarter of the eighteenth century, when Montagu lived in Wiltshire, the Bustard was to be found in some numbers on our downs, as that accurate naturalist says he has often contemplated it there with much pleasure. It was, however, beginning to get scarce, and was deemed worthy of protection by law, and yet must have been plentiful enough to be thought worth the effort to preserve it. Accordingly we find that a statute was enacted in 15 George III., c. 65 (A.D. 1775), whereby a close time for breeding was set apart, and it was forbidden, under a penalty of one pound, to take Bustards between March 1st and September 1st. However, the native Bustards of Wiltshire gradually but surely decreased in number, the said Act notwithstanding.

How long the native Bustards of Wiltshire lingered on, doubt-

less sheltering themselves in the most retired spots they could find, and gradually diminishing in number, is not very easy to ascertain; but from all the evidence I could gather, I have reason to think they were not entirely exterminated quite so early as has been surmised. Before, however, I proceed to record the testimony of eye and ear witnesses of the occurrence of rare specimens in Wiltshire in the early part of this century, I would quote a very interesting paragraph, headed 'The Bustard of Salisbury Plain,' which appeared in the *Wiltshire Independent* in 1854, and was afterwards copied into the *Times*: 'There are people now living in Wiltshire who recollect the time when it was the custom of the Mayor of Salisbury to have a bustard as a prominent dish at the annual inauguration feast; and these birds, once numerous on the wild and then uncultivated expanse of Salisbury Plain, could at length only be shot by means of a vehicle so covered by bushes and placed in their haunts as to enable men therein concealed to bring them down at a long range. For more than fifty years the Wiltshire Bustard has been extinct, and the Mayor of Salisbury has been obliged to forego his yearly delicacy.' I do not know who was the writer of this curious and interesting passage, but he is certainly incorrect in stating that the Bustard had then been extinct in this county 'for more than fifty years,' as I shall presently proceed to show. Maton, in his 'Natural History of Wiltshire,' says: 'A very observant and credible person, of the name of Dew, whom I knew as a sportsman in my younger days, informed me, in the year 1796, that he once saw as many as seven or eight of these birds together on the downs near Winterbourne Stoke; but I have not met with anyone since who has actually *seen* the Bustard in Wiltshire subsequently to that year.' Others, however, were more fortunate; and we have many published accounts of it since that date, as we shall see further on. Bewick, writing in 1797, says: 'Bustards were formerly more frequent in this island than at present; they are now found only in the open countries of the south and east, in the plains of Wiltshire and Dorsetshire, and in some parts of Yorkshire.' Daniel, in his

'Rural Sports,' in the year 1800, recounts how Mr. Crouch, of Burford, shot a hen Bustard on Salisbury Plain, with a common fowling-piece and partridge-shot, at forty yards' distance; and adds that there were two other Bustards in company with the one shot, neither of which appeared to be hurt. From this time, however, the breed began to decline apace, and as cultivation increased, and the Inclosure Acts came into force, and the downs began to be broken up, and the waste lands to be reclaimed and drained—and, perhaps more than all, as the system of wheat-hoeing in the spring became general—the Bustards found it more and more difficult to escape, and we hear only of stragglers rarely encountered on the Wiltshire Downs. 'In 1801' (as reported by Mr. Britton),* 'a man, about four o'clock of a fine morning in June, was coming on horseback from Tinhead to Tilshead, while at or near an inclosure called Asking's Penning, one mile from the village of Tilshead, he saw over his head, about sixty yards high as near as he could estimate, a large bird, which afterwards proved to be a Bustard. The bird alighted on the ground immediately before the horse, which it indicated a disposition to attack, and in fact very soon began the onset. The man alighted, and getting hold of the bird, endeavoured to secure it, and, after struggling with it nearly an hour, he succeeded, and brought it to Mr. J. Bartley, of Tilshead, to whose house he was going. Not knowing the value of such a bird, he offered it to Mr. Bartley as a present; but Mr. Bartley declined to accept it as such, though he much wished to have it; and after repeated solicitations, prevailed on the man to receive for it a small sum, with which he was perfectly satisfied. During the first week that Mr. Bartley had this bird in his possession, it was not known to eat anything; however, at length it became very tame, and would at last receive its food from its patron's hands, but still continued shy in the presence of strangers. Its

* I make no scruple of reproducing *in extenso* this most interesting account of a Wiltshire Bustard, which was communicated by our own Mr. Britton to Mr. Yarrell, and which that accomplished ornithologist read before the Linnæan Society, in January, 1853, in a paper 'On the Habits and Structure of the Great Bustard.'

principal food was birds, chiefly sparrows, which it swallowed whole in the feathers with a great deal of avidity; the flowers of charlock and the leaves of rape formed also other parts of its food—mice it would likewise eat, and in short almost any other animal substance. The food in passing into the stomach was observed to go round the back part of the neck. Mr. Bartley is of opinion that the idea of the Bustard's drinking is erroneous; in support of which he says that, during the time this bird was in his possession, which was from June till the August following, it had not a drop of water given it, after two or three weeks at first. This fact he considers as a proof that the generally received opinion of the Bustard's drinking is untrue. This bird was judged to weigh upwards of twenty pounds, and to measure between the extremities of its wings when extended about five feet, and its height was about three and a half feet. Its plumage was beautiful, and from its gait, which was extremely majestic, a spectator would be led to infer that it was sensible of its own superiority over others of the feathered tribe. In August, Mr. Bartley sold this noble bird to Lord Temple for the sum of thirty guineas. The Bustard inhabits the extensive downs of Salisbury Plain, but its race is now almost extirpated. It is thought that not more than three or four are now remaining. Some time in the last summer (*viz.*, 1801), while Mr. Bartley had this bird in his possession, a nest—supposed to belong to this bird, or at least to its mate, for Mr. Bartley's bird was judged to be a male—was found in a wheat-field on Market Lavington Down. It contained two eggs; they sometimes lay three, though very seldom: they are about the size of those of a goose, of a pale olive-brown, with small spots of a darker hue. The nest was made upon the ground by scratching a hole in the earth, and lined with a little grass. The eggs were rotten, and had probably undergone a period of incubation.

‘An instance of a Bustard attacking a human being, or even a brute animal of any considerable size, was, I believe, never before heard of, and that two instances of this kind should occur so nearly together may be considered very remarkable. About a

fortnight subsequent to the taking of this bird, Mr. Grant, a respectable farmer of Tilshead, was returning from Warminster Market, and near Tilshead Lodge (which is something more than half a mile from the village) was attacked in a similar manner, by, as it is thought, the mate of the same bird. Mr. Grant's horse being rather high-mettled, took fright, became unmanageable, and ran off, and consequently Mr. Grant was compelled to abandon his design of endeavouring to capture the bird.' Such is the account communicated by Mr. Britton, and, with reference to the bird kept by Mr. Bartley, I have further learnt, through the kindness of the late Rev. E. Wilton, that it was kept in a kind of staked cage, made for it in a little close belonging to the house, and that *several* Bustards used to come and congregate round their confined companion at that date, and that people often used to hear them at night. The confined bird is described to have been a kind of spotted turkey. At that date the good people of Tilshead affirm there were many Bustards haunting the flat between that village and Shrewton; they were also in some abundance near what was long known as the Bustard Inn. Mr. Coleman, of Tilshead, said he perfectly recollected how horses travelling over the plain were known to shy at the noise of the Bustards. The late Mr. Robert Pinckney, of Berwick St. James, bore witness that during his occupation of Mr. Duke's farm at Lake the Bustard used to make its nest every year in the water-meadows belonging to the estate, and was disturbed annually by the mowers. Again, Mr. Compton, of Eastcott, described as a great sportsman and bird-studier, was known to have shot two of these birds: while an old whip of Squire Tinker's, carried *nolens volens* down a steep 'linchet' in the ardour of the chase, almost rode over two Bustards, and could have struck them with his whip, had he been prepared to encounter such tenants of the linchet's base: he said 'they were spotted all's one as a pheasant.' Mr. William Wyndham, of Dinton, informs me that his grandfather saw a hen Bustard on the wing at Uphaven on November 27th, 1801. Mr. B. Hayward, of Easterton, near Devizes, more than once recounted to me that

the keeper at West Lavington often told him that when a boy, as he was on the downs with his father and the dogs, they came upon a young Bustard which he caught ; but as it was only partly grown, his father made him put it down again, saying it would be better worth taking in a fortnight, at the end of which time they came up again, found, and took it. This shows the wildness of the downs at that time, but little of them being cultivated. Again, the father of the late Rev. R. Ashe, of Langley Burrell was riding in 1806 from Broad Hinton to Chisledon, when he rode down what he then conjectured, and afterwards ascertained, to be a young Bustard: having farther to go, he got off his horse, and tied its feet with a pocket-handkerchief, and left it in a hole in a ploughed field; but on his return, to his chagrin, both the bird and handkerchief were missing. Another Bustard was killed in the early part of the present century at Langley, and came into the fine collection of Mr. Warriner of Conock. This Wiltshire specimen, and a very fine one it is, may be seen with the rest of the collection, deposited in the Museum at Devizes. In 1802 Colonel Montagu, in his 'Dictionary of British Birds,' observed that the Bustard is only found upon the large extensive plains, and that the species is almost extinct, *except upon those of Wiltshire*, where they had become very scarce within these few years.' In 1812, the editor of the last edition of Pennant says, 'The breed is now nearly extirpated, *except on the Downs of Wiltshire*, where it is also very scarce.' In the same year, 1812, in the month of June or July, a flock of seven was seen when he was a boy of nine or ten years of age, and on his way from Salisbury to Great Bedwyn, by the Rev. W. Quekett, Rector of Warrington, and whose graphic account I printed in the seventeenth volume of the *Wiltshire Magazine*, p. 127. After this I have no record with positive date on which I can rely of any native Wiltshire Bustard; but I have had many statements to which I listened attentively, from thirty to forty years ago, from old shepherds, farmers, and labourers, several of whom could well recollect seeing these birds on the downs in their early days, but from whom I could obtain no reliable in-

formation as to date; for the Wiltshire countryman, good honest soul, is not observant of detail, and as to dates he ignores them altogether; 'a long while ago' conveniently covering half a century. However, by putting together the information I gained from many sources, and by comparing the several statistics which I thought reliable, I arrived at the opinion (perhaps somewhat indistinct and hesitating) that our Wiltshire Bustard lingered on till about the year 1820. I should add, however, that this is somewhat later than the date of its extinction as given by Montagu, who, in the Supplement to his Dictionary, published in 1813, says, 'We were informed by the shepherds that they had not been seen for the last two or three years in their favourite haunts on the Wiltshire Downs, where we had often contemplated this bird with pleasure.' And Selby, in his 'Illustrations of Ornithology,' published in 1825, 'unable on repeated inquiry to hear of the reappearance of a single Bustard, since the days of Montagu, even in its most favourite haunts,' pronounces 'the breed to be extinct upon our extensive downs, of which it once formed the appropriate ornament.' But Graves (whose figure of the Great Bustard was drawn from a male bird taken alive on Salisbury Plain in 1797, and kept for three years in confinement, when it died) says in the third volume of his 'British Ornithology,' in 1821, 'The enclosing and cultivating those extensive downs and heaths in various parts of Great Britain, on which formerly this noble species was seen in large flocks, threatens within a few years to extirpate the Bustard from this country; instead of being met with in flocks of forty or fifty birds, it is a circumstance of rare occurrence that a single individual is now seen.'

Thus has this noble species, once so common in our county, dwindled and died away, and now, alas! is no more to be accounted a resident throughout the kingdom. Like the American Indian, the poor Bustard has had no chance against the march of civilization, but has rapidly retired before the advancing ploughshare, till the race (once so free to rove over its vast and retired solitudes as it listed) dwindled one by one, and the last survivor

was no more. Probably there are few, if any, now living in the county who can recollect having seen the native Bustard on Salisbury Plain, though many must have listened over and over again to the tidings which their fathers and grandfathers gave of their experiences with this noble species, even as I have heard my father-in-law, the late Rev. T. T. Upwood, recount how somewhere about the year 1820, and on his own estate in Norfolk, he came unexpectedly upon a pack of seven or eight of these huge birds, and was probably one of the last in the kingdom to fire upon so large a flock. He must not, however, be branded as an oticide, perhaps in the eyes of some as odious an appellation as that of regicide, or even vulpecide! for however anxious his desire to secure a specimen for his collection, and though generally an unerring shot, he was so unnerved by the sudden uprising of so many great birds, and the noise of so many wings, that he clean missed with both barrels, and the flock was gone, and never found again.

It was at about this date that a story, which I believe is authentic, was told of a well-known sportsman not a hundred miles from Codford, in the south of this county, who had invited a party of neighbours to shoot partridges on his well-stocked estate on the 1st of September. But, as it chanced, he had two nephews staying with him at the time, who he thought would be a hindrance to the day's sport if they accompanied him: so, to employ them in another direction, he bade them take their guns and go out on the Plain 'Bustard-shooting;' with which they in their simplicity at once acquiesced, to the no small amusement of the uncle and his friends. But when the partridge-shooters returned at the end of the day's sport to the house of the host they found the two lads had already arrived; and to the ironical inquiry of the uncle, 'Well, boys, what sport have you had Bustard-shooting?' they replied, 'Oh, pretty fair; we followed a good many, and succeeded in killing two.' At this there was a general laugh, as the sportsmen speculated what birds the lads could have found; and to satisfy their curiosity, though without a suspicion of the truth, both uncle and friends followed the

youths to the back of the house, where their game was deposited : and there, sure enough (to the utter surprise, and admiration, and envy of all), the bodies of two fine Great Bustards met their eyes. Then the laugh was indeed on the side of the boys, for to have killed one of those grand birds, now very nearly extinct in the county, both uncle and his friends would have sacrificed almost anything within their power.

For more than a quarter of a century after the extinction of the native Bustard in Wiltshire, I have no trace of the visit of a straggler to this county ; but within the last forty years our downs have been visited by it on three occasions, viz., in 1849, 1856, and in 1871, which I now proceed to describe *seriatim*. On August 31st, 1849, Mr. Waterhouse, of the British Museum, a well-known naturalist, was returning with a party of friends from Stonehenge, at about seven in the evening, when a Great Bustard rose and flew with a heavy but tolerably rapid flight, at about twenty feet above the ground. It was very wild, and would not suffer itself to be approached ; though when it rose on the wing it pitched again two or three times before it flew over the brow of a hill and was seen no more. Mr. Waterhouse never entertained any doubt of the species, and had a clear view of the bird for about ten minutes. Judging from its size he conjectured it to be a female.*

The next visit of this species to Wiltshire occurred on January 3rd, 1856, when one of Lord Ailesbury's keepers named King, seeing a large bird which he could not recognise, but supposed to be an eagle, flying over a part of Marlborough Forest called Henswood, fired a cartridge at it, though on account of the distance had little expectation of reaching it. He was not, therefore, disappointed to see the bird continue its flight, apparently unharmed, and went his way thinking no more of the matter. Subsequently, and apparently only a day or two after, a little boy of not more than seven years old saw a large bird, crippled with a broken leg, and succeeded in capturing it; and the following is his own description of the occurrence, taken at the time from his own

* See *Zoologist* for 1849, p. 2590.

lips, and obligingly communicated to me by Mr. W. H. Rowland, of Hungerford, who afterwards purchased the bird: 'I was going to Starve-all Farm with my brother's dinner about twelve o'clock, and passing along the edge of a field of turnips I saw a great red bird laid down and fluttering away; he was close to the side of the turnips, and as I went up to him he tried to flutter away. Then he came at me and bit my fingers, but did not hurt me much; and as he put out his great wings, I caught hold of one and dragged him along, pretty near a quarter of a mile, up to "Starve-all," where a man broke his neck. The bird was not dirty when I first saw him, but I made him so pulling him along the field; he made a terrible row with his wings on the barn floor, after his neck was broken. One of the men put the bird on my back, and I held his head in my hand, and carried him home to mother; he was main heavy, and I couldn't scarce get along with him.' So far we have the account of the brave little captor of this Great Bustard, but it appears further that there was a council of war held over the bird (when the boy first took it into the barn alive) by all the labourers, who were just at that time assembled at dinner, and it was very nearly decided to pick it and dress it then and there, but the boy's brother claimed it for him, so one of the men killed it, that the boy might carry it home better. Later in the day, as two young men out shooting passed her cottage, the mother of the young Bustard-catcher invited them to come in and see what a bird she had got, when one of them offered her sixpence for it, then eightpence, and ultimately bought it for one shilling, with the promise that the woman should have the carcase after the bird was skinned; but its purchase by Mr. Rowland prevented the fulfilment of that part of the bargain. The dragging across the field by the boy, and the rough handling of the man at the barn seriously injured its feathers, but owing to the care and skill of Mr. Leadbeater, its deficiencies were cleverly repaired, and it was pronounced by Mr. Yarrell, who examined it, a good specimen. The latter gentleman was extremely anxious to procure the neck for dissection, that he might satisfy himself in regard to the gular

pouch, and was much disappointed to find that all the soft parts required had been irrecoverably destroyed. Mr. Leadbeater, however, ascertained that it was a young male, in the second year only, and it was without the whiskers so conspicuous in the adult male. In all probability, therefore, it would have had no gular pouch. Though in a poor emaciated condition when captured, it weighed $13\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and measured from tip to tip of the wings 6 feet 3 inches. How so large, powerful, and pugnacious a bird should suffer itself to be mastered by a boy of tender age, seems strange at first sight; but if we take into account the broken leg (the wound in which seemed to be a stale one of some days' standing), and its consequent exhaustion from loss of blood, and if we suppose the boy to have caught hold of the *left* wing, on the same side as the broken leg, we can easily conceive how the bird was rendered powerless, and could not recover itself to offer resistance. How it came by the broken leg has been also much disputed, the limb not being shattered as if by shot, but the bone broken off as if by ball, and the fracture being too high up to have been caused by a trap. Mr. Yarrell suggested the probability of the accident occurring by the bird getting its leg entangled among the bars of a sheep-hurdle, and making efforts to get loose; but ever since I gained intelligence of the keeper's shot with a cartridge, I have come to the conclusion that that shot took effect, and that the bird so fired at, and that caught subsequently by the little boy, were one and the same; and therefore Henswood (the scene of the keeper's shot) being in Wiltshire, I claim this bird as a *bonâ fide* Wiltshire specimen, though I own it was so misguided as to cross the border to die just within the county of Berks. I am happy to add that, by Mr. Marsh's desire, I purchased this specimen for his collection, though at the high price of £20, and it may now be seen with the rest of his birds in the museum at Salisbury.* And now we pass by an interval of fifteen years during which no trace exists of the

* See Mr. Yarrell's account of the capture of this specimen in the *Zoologist* for 1856, p. 4995; and further particulars communicated by me in the same volume, p. 5061.

visit of a Great Bustard to Wiltshire; and in all that time but two stragglers are reported to have been seen in the British Isles, viz., one in Yorkshire in 1864, and one in Norfolk in 1867; but in 1871 there was quite an immigration to England of Great Bustards, which were said by some to have been driven across the Channel through alarm at the heavy firing in France during the Franco-German War; but whatever the motive which impelled them, it is certain that quite a numerous body came over to this country, and specimens were obtained in Middlesex, in Northumberland, in Devonshire, in Somersetshire, and in Wiltshire.

As regards those which visited this county, I have to thank many kind correspondents for early information on the subject, and I now proceed to put together the story as I have gathered it from the several accounts with which I have been furnished. The Rev. Canon F. Bennett, Rector of Maddington and Shrewton, wrote under date January 27th, 1871, 'You will be interested in hearing that the Bustards have returned to the Plain. A flock of seven large birds, thought to be wild geese, had been observed on the downs, and no particular notice was taken of them. On Monday last, however (23rd inst.), Stephen Smith, who was bird-keeping near the Tile Barn, on the Manor Farm, in this parish, saw four of these large strange birds flying low, and he killed one of them at the distance of 132 yards with the marble with which his gun was loaded. The three other birds are, I believe, still about. The bird which was killed is a hen Bustard, and it has been presented by Mr. Lywood, the tenant of the Manor Farm, to the Salisbury and South Wilts Museum.' The Rev. Canon Goddard, Vicar of Hilmarton, also kindly wrote to me under date January 28th: 'My son Edward reports that on the railway *en route* to Winchester there was on Wednesday last a man with the body of a Great Bustard killed at Maddington, one of the three seen there.' That of course would be the bird whose capture Canon Bennett reported. And a third notice I had from the late Mr. E. T. Stevens of Salisbury, for some time my colleague as Hon. Sec. to the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, who wrote on January 25th,

'You will be pleased to hear of the appearance of the Bustard in Wiltshire. Three were seen on Sunday last by Mr. Lywood, near Shrewton, and on Monday his bird-keeper, Stephen Smith, shot one of them. The bird is a female, small, but in good plumage; weight not quite 7½ lb.; length from point of beak to end of tail, 31 inches; and from tip to tip of wings, 62 inches. It was shot on the Yarnborough side of the Maddington Valley, and was on the wing with its companions flying about twenty yards above the ground. After it fell, one of the survivors wheeled round the spot, not more than fifteen yards from the man's head. The crop was quite empty. The skin is now being preserved for the Salisbury Museum.' A second letter from Mr. Stevens, dated February 2nd, informed me that he and nine others had met 'to partake of the body of this bird from curiosity, and that it was pronounced extremely tender and good, the breast like plover, the thigh not unlike good pheasant.' My next witness is Mr. Frederick Stratton, of Gore Cross Farm, on the Lavington Downs, a keen observer of birds, with whom I have from time to time had ornithological correspondence. He writes under date January 26th: 'Having been confined to the house for several weeks in consequence of an attack of bronchitis, I ventured out on horseback on Monday last, the weather having become a little milder, and I saw near New Copse a bird of which I cannot refrain from giving you some account, and which I have no hesitation in pronouncing to be a Great Bustard. I disturbed it on the edge of a piece of swedes, and it seemed to use its wings with great facility, flying somewhat after the manner of the Great Plover, which hereabouts is generally though erroneously called the "Curlew." The wings also seemed barred with white, somewhat in the same way as those of that bird, only it was ten or twelve times larger. I watched it alight on the ground, after a flight of seven or eight hundred yards, and while I remained in sight, it seemed intent on watching my movements. I was compelled to ride home quickly, as the snow had begun to fall; but I sent directly to a neighbour, and asked him to shoot it if possible; but though he was fortunate enough to see it twice, he could not

get within 80 or 100 yards, and failed to secure it. He describes it as running with considerable swiftness, and agrees with me in thinking that its wings would stretch at least 6 feet. It appeared to be feeding in a strip of the thousand-headed cabbage, the stalks of which were very long, thus affording, at the same time, both food and shelter.'

Two days after the capture of the Maddington Bustard—viz., on Wednesday, January 25th, as I learnt from a second letter from Mr. Stevens, as well as from several other kind friends—another Great Bustard was shot in the parish of Berwick St. James, very near Maddington. Two birds were seen together on the estate of Mr. William Pinckney, and were watched through a glass as they were feeding in a turnip-field. As they seemed remarkably shy and suspicious, precautions were taken to circumvent them; and by a little manœuvring, and by placing men so as to drive them in the required direction, one of them—a fine male—was shot in the wing, and so crippled as to be easily taken. It weighed nearly 16 lb., stood upwards of 3 feet in height, and measured from the point of the beak to the end of tail 44 inches, and across the wings 6 feet 8 inches. The female might also have been captured, but in the excitement of the moment was allowed to escape, and she went off in the direction of Chitterne.

It cannot be doubted that the female shot at Maddington on January 23rd and its three companions, and the solitary bird seen at Gore Cross on the same day by Mr. Stratton, and the fine male killed at Berwick on January 25th, and its companion which escaped, would all belong to the original flock of seven which had been observed, but no particular notice taken of them, on the Maddington Downs, and which had become scattered into several small parties, and dispersed over the neighbouring downs.

It was not, I am afraid, a very hospitable reception which these Great Bustards met with, on coming to visit the original haunts of their relatives; and if any of them survived and returned across the Channel to their own quarters they would

give but a sorry account of the welcome they met with here. Far different was the hospitality offered by my friend Mr. Upcher, when a fine male bird made its appearance on his property at Feltwell, in Norfolk, in 1876; for he not only took the utmost pains to secure it from molestation and intrusion, but procured from Lord Lilford a female companion, which he turned down on the spot, in hopes he might induce it to remain and perhaps breed on his property: but all his efforts were most unfortunately frustrated by exceptionally severe weather and most violent storms, which resulted in the death of the hen bird and the departure of the male.* All honour, however, to him who did his best to protect and provide for the stranger, instead of attacking it the moment it appeared and hunting it to death, as was done in Wiltshire and other counties whenever it made its appearance. At all events, during the sixteen years which have elapsed since the last memorable visit to Wiltshire we have seen no more of this bird, at once the largest, the noblest, and the most highly prized of all our British birds; and for which our county was so notorious, as the principal stronghold of what once stood at the head of the game list.

133. LITTLE BUSTARD (*Otis tetrix*).

I have no hesitation in admitting this interesting species into our Wiltshire list, on the authority of the Right Hon. E. P. Bouverie, of the Manor House, Market Lavington, who is a keen observer of birds, and who fell in with two of this species on August 6th, 1877, and on returning home was so good as to favour me with the following account of what he had seen: 'I was riding with some friends on Monday, August 6th, on the Plain above Netheravon, and my attention was attracted by a large strange bird, which rose off a fallow about 100 yards from me; a second rose immediately afterwards and flew in a different direction, 150 yards on to the down adjoining, and then ran,

* See account in *Zoologist* for 1876, p. 4882, also a more full account, with illustrations, in the *Field* during February, 1876.

very fast, a short distance. I pursued: it rose again and took another short flight, and alighted again, ran a short way, and then crouched. I pursued it again: it ran on, and then took flight and swung round us at about 200 or 250 yards distance, so as to be quite observable, with head outstretched. I have no doubt they were a pair of Lesser Bustards. I have looked at the plates in Bewick and Yarrell, and they correspond most closely—especially the latter—with the appearance of the one we followed. Its size and flight, as described by McGillivray, correspond exactly with our observation: the size that of a large pheasant, or say a blackcock; the flight peculiar, with neck stretched out. The head when the bird squatted, and the markings as it flew by, were exactly like the plates. In short, apart from the evidence afforded by handling them, there is the strongest proof that the Lesser Bustard was on the Plain.' Mr. Bouverie is well acquainted with the 'Great Plover' or 'Stone Curlew,' the only species with which they could be confused, and was satisfied that the birds he saw were not of that species; so that I have no doubt he was correct in deciding that they were veritable Little Bustards.

Not nearly so conclusive is another notice of its occurrence with which the Rev. A. P. Morres furnished me; for as its authenticity rests on an anonymous contribution to a local newspaper, it can only be received with extreme caution. The writer, however, certainly seems to speak with some apparent acquaintance with the bird, and it is much to be regretted that he so seriously impaired the value of his information by withholding the authority of his name. He says: 'Riding on the old driftway which leads from Salisbury to Everleigh, when near the latter place, at the back of Sidbury Hill, on the open down, I came suddenly on a pair of Bustards. I know the birds perfectly, having seen them on the plains near Casa Vischeu, half-way between Cadiz and Gibraltar, in the South of Spain. There are two sorts: the greater and lesser. It was a pair of the Lesser Bustards I saw this day. Meeting an old man shortly after, I inquired if he had ever seen such a thing. His answer

was, "I am seventy-two, and never have; but I have heard my father speak of them as having been quite common in his youth." I hope no sportsman or naturalist will think it necessary to shoot them, as they may breed.—Viator, April 4, 1867.' Mr. Morres is not disposed to put much credence in this account, because of the late date assigned to their appearance, whereas the visits of this bird to the British Isles are generally in late autumn or winter; but, for my part, I do not think the Little Bustard is so rare in this country as some imagine, though, as a shy, timid bird, and a lover of solitary places, it keeps as far as possible from the haunts of man. Mr. Howard Saunders says that altogether between sixty and seventy have been recorded as visitors to the British Islands.* These are all specimens which have been duly reported and chronicled at headquarters; but nobody can tell how many others may have escaped notice, or, at all events, have lacked an historian or biographer to report their capture. Certainly it does not include three specimens which were shot on different occasions in the north of Norfolk, near Lynn, by my father-in-law, the Rev. T. T. Upwood, two of which are still in the collection which he left at his seat, Lovell's Hall, in the parish of Terrington, and the third is in my own collection in Wiltshire. These occurrences, however, took place between forty and fifty years ago, when the neighbourhood of the Wash presented a much wilder aspect than it does now, and when ornithological prizes were continually met with, the very mention of which makes the collectors' mouth water in these degenerate days.

I found this species extremely common in Portugal; indeed, it is constantly served at table under the title of 'Pheasant.' So plentiful is it that the markets were daily supplied with it in some numbers, and its abundance is manifest from the price I paid for the finest adult male I could select, amounting to no more than 200 reis, which, however large the figure may seem to the uninitiated in Portuguese coinage, represents only tenpence halfpenny of our money. In skinning this and other specimens

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 218.

I found a considerable cellular fatty deposit very thickly covering the interior of the skin of the neck, more especially at the back of it. This I had to remove very carefully and patiently, bit by bit, with the scalpel. It gave the neck a very thick appearance, and when felt from the outside was soft, somewhat as in the pouch of *O. tarda*; but in this case there was no trace of pouch or sac.*

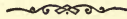
In habits, localities it frequents, and food, it very much resembles its larger congener. In Algeria it is known as 'Poule de Carthage.' At the breeding season it pours forth its cry of *prut, prut*, jumping up at the conclusion of each strain or call, and striking the ground in a peculiar manner on its descent.† For an interesting account of the manner in which sportsmen hunt the Little Bustard on the steppes or prairies of the Dobrudscha, and how they circumvent these wily birds by approaching them under cover of an araba, I would refer my readers to an able article by Mr. W. H. Simpson.‡ In France it is *Outarde canepetière*; in Germany, *Kleine Trappe*; in Sweden, *Liten-Trapp*; in Italy, *Gallina pratarola*, 'meadow-hen;' in Spain, *Sison*, and in Portugal, *Cizão*, both meaning 'pilferer.' *Tetraæ* may possibly mean 'a cackler,' or perhaps it is a Persian word (B.O.U.).

* 'Spring Tour in Portugal,' p. 208.

† Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 218.

‡ *Ibis* for 1861, p. 370.

THE BIRDS OF WILTSHIRE.



WATER BIRDS.

CHAPTER X.

GRALLATORES (WADERS).

It might be supposed at first sight that, in a county so deficient in large sheets of water as ours confessedly is, the fourth great Order of birds, comprising the Waders, would be but scantily represented. When, however, it is considered that a large proportion of this numerous class is apt at certain periods of the year not only to retire inland, but to frequent large open plains, however distant from lakes and rivers, as well as secluded valleys, watered by diminutive streams, it is evident that our wide-spreading downs, and the rich valleys which intersect and border them, offer attractions sufficiently tempting to many of this Order, and the consequence is that the list of Wiltshire Waders is by no means a scanty or a meagre one.

This class of birds may be said to occupy a middle space between the Ground birds last described, which are truly terrestrial, and the next Order, which contains the Swimmers, or true Waterfowl. The Waders known in the British Isles are comprised within six families, the Plovers, the Cranes, the Herons, the Snipes, the Rails, and the little family of Lobe-footed birds; and in this list we shall again remark the gradual advancement towards the true water-birds: those which stand at the head of the list being in many respects nearly related to the game-birds

which they succeed, while those at the farther end approach both in conformation and in habits very closely to the great Order of Swimmers which follows them. The general name assigned to them of 'Grallatores' signifies 'walkers on stilts,' and describes at once the characteristic for which they are conspicuous—the great length of leg, which enables them to wade in the shallows and marshes, whether on the sea-coast or on the banks of fresh-water lakes and rivers. Combined with this peculiar length of leg, we shall see a proportionate length of neck or beak, or both together, by means of which they can secure the food which they find in the shallow-water or mud-banks in which they delight; and in the more typical members of the Order we shall find the toes of great length, and partially connected with a membrane, by which they are the better enabled to traverse the soft oozy ground where their prey is most abundant, and to seek their food on the slimy mud into which their bodies would otherwise sink. They are generally provided with powerful wings, and their flight is rapid as well as strong. Their food consists almost, if not quite, entirely of animal substances, of which the lower classes of reptiles, fishes, molluscs, worms, and other invertebrate creatures form the principal portion. They are generally of shy and timid nature, ever on the alert for danger, and avoid the too near approach of man.

CHARADRIADÆ (THE PLOVERS).

Closely allied to the Bustards last described, and with the same peculiar formation of foot, from which the hind toe is absent, the large family of Plovers stands at the head of the Waders. Their legs are of moderate length, and their beaks of comparative shortness, as become those which connect the land and water birds; thus, too, they can, on the one hand, run with considerable swiftness, and, on the other hand, they can fly with great rapidity, and prolong their flight almost indefinitely. Being generally late, if not nocturnal feeders, they are furnished with large full eyes, which, with a corresponding expansion of

socket, give the head a bulky appearance, which is quite characteristic of the family. When in repose (and I have often seen them standing asleep) the neck is shortened, and the head drawn down between the shoulders, reminding one of a hunchback. The large majority of them lay four eggs on the ground; and when an intruder appears in the neighbourhood, the male whirls about and feigns lameness, and practises sundry manœuvres to draw away attention, until the female has stolen away from the nest unperceived. They compose a very large family, and some of the species may be found in every part of the world. During the greater portion of the year they congregate in large flocks, and most of them migrate, or partially migrate, retiring to the sea-coast when frost sets in, as is the case with many other birds. The word *Charadrius* is the Latinised form of *χαραδριός*, in classical Greek signifying 'a bird dwelling in clefts or river valleys,' *χαράδραι* (B.O.U.), though how far this description of locality suits the family of Plovers I must leave the Greek authors to explain. Our English word 'Plover' is derived from the French *Pluvier*, 'the Rain-bird.' Wedgewood remarks that the German name, too, is *Regenpfeifer*, 'the Rain-piper' (Skeat).

134. PRATINCOLE (*Glareola torquata*).

It is highly satisfactory to me that I am able to head my list of Wiltshire Waders with this extremely rare visitor to Great Britain, and that satisfaction is much enhanced by the circumstance that the individual in question has found its way into my collection through the kindness of the gentleman who killed it. As the bird is so very little known in this country, it may be of interest if I extract from the pages of the *Zoologist* the whole story of its capture, as I recorded it in that publication at the time.* 'In the middle of November, 1852, when Mr. Hussey, of Tilshead, was walking over his land, the day being very rough and cold, the wind blowing from the east, he saw a strange bird descend near him with the velocity of lightning, and settle inside a sheep-fold among the sheep. As Mr. Hussey chanced very

* *Zoologist* for 1853, p. 3843, *et seq.*

fortunately to be an observer of birds, he immediately remarked that this was one he had never seen before, and pointed it out to his shepherd who was with him, desiring him to watch the bird well while he returned to his home, at the distance of a mile, for his gun. Before he went, however, he saw the bird suddenly rise from the ground, and after a short flight of the most marvellous velocity, return again to the fold, where it seemed to enjoy the shelter from the bleak east wind, and to care nothing for the presence of the sheep, the men and the dogs. This short excursionary flight was renewed several times, which made Mr. Hussey hesitate whether he should take the trouble to return home on so remote a chance of still finding on his return so singularly restless and swift a bird; however, as the bird always came back to the same spot after each successive excursion, Mr. Hussey hesitated no longer, but hurried home for his gun, giving strict charge to the shepherd to keep quiet, and on no account to lose sight of the bird. Now the shepherds of Salisbury Plain (in the midst of the bleakest part of which the parish of Tilshead lies) are not remarkable for their sharpness; indeed, I fear we must own them to be the perfection of all that is dull, heavy, and ignorant; no wonder, then, that a bird so very rapid in its movements as the Collared Pratincole should soon elude the slow gaze of the heavy-eyed Argus, and that on Mr. Hussey's return, in answer to his inquiries as to the whereabouts of the strange bird, he should be met with the provoking reply—"Doant know, zur; he flee'd away so terrible sudden that I could'n zee 'en nowhere, I could'n: I never zee sech a bird to flee." Upon this, it may be supposed that Mr. Hussey walked on somewhat disappointed, when, in a moment, at the distance of about thirty yards, up sprang the bird, and was darting off at a prodigious rate, but a well-aimed shot laid it dead on the ground. On picking it up, the long wings and forked tail caused Mr. Hussey and others to suppose it to belong to the Swallow tribe; and the dull-eyed shepherd, seeing no brilliant hues in the dead bird, as if to excuse his slowness, exclaimed with a sneer of contempt, "Well, zur, 'taint much of a bird, arter all, I'm zure." In

addition to the above narrative, Mr. Hussey tells me that 'the land on which I found the bird was a stiff clay soil. I shot it close to the sheep-fold, where there were sheep feeding off turnips; the bird appeared to be rather tame, but whether from exhaustion or nature, I cannot tell.'

I have also a notice—but an unsatisfactory one—which I have not been able to verify, and without detail of time or place or circumstances, that a second specimen was killed at Avebury about 1860. Possibly this notice may enable some traces of it to be discovered.

The home of the Pratincole seems to be the steppes of Tartary and the central parts of Asia; but when we look at its marvellous length of wing and deeply-forked tail, we are prepared to find that it is of frequent occurrence in Southern Europe, as well as Northern Africa, vast distances being soon traversed by a bird of such enormous powers of flight. It can also run rapidly on the ground, and it catches coleopterous and other insect prey on foot as well as on the wing. It roosts on the ground, and flies late at night, its large eyes being well adapted for seeing in the dark; in all these respects it shows its affinity to the Plovers. Its prevailing colour is dove-brown above, and buff and white below; and its distinguishing mark, whence it derives its specific name, is a collar or crescent of black, which in a narrow line encircles its throat to the eyes.

Its scientific name, *glareola*, is derived, according to the B.O.U. Committee, from the localities it loves, from *glarea*, 'gravel,' because it inhabits 'gravelly places'; and 'Pratincole,' from *pratium*, 'a meadow'; and *-incola*, 'an inhabitant,' because it frequents open meadows. Our earlier British ornithologists called it the 'Austrian Pratincole.' In Italy it is known as *Pernice di mare*, 'Sea Partridge'; and in Malta as *Perniciotta*, 'Little Partridge'; in France it is *Glareole à collier*; in Germany, *Das rothfussige Sandhuhn*, 'Red-footed Sand-fowl'; in Spain, *Canastera*; and in Portugal, as in Italy, *Perdiz do mar*. It frequents the margins of lakes and rivers, as well as marshes in the interior of the country. Those who are acquainted with it

in its own haunts speak of its fearless manner and familiar habits. Others find it not so easy to approach by walking straight up to it, but say that it will squat if one makes a circuit round it, gradually lessening the distance, and will then allow itself to be trodden upon before taking wing.* Mr. O. Salvin found it on the tablelands of the interior of the Eastern Atlas, frequenting the salt-lakes and freshwater marshes, and gives the following graphic description of its behaviour: 'When in proximity to their nests, the whole flock come wheeling and screaming round, while some dart passionately down to within a few feet of the intruder's head, retiring again to make another descent. When the first transports of excitement are over, they all alight, one by one, on the ground. Some stand quite still, watching with inquiring gaze; while others stretch themselves out, first expanding one wing, then the other, and sitting down extend both legs. In this position they remain some seconds, as if dead, when suddenly springing up, they make another circuit overhead, and the whole flock passes quietly away. The bird makes no nest, but deposits its three eggs in a slight depression of the bare sand. The eggs are usually placed with their axes parallel.†

135. CREAM-COLOURED COURSER (*Cursorius isabellinus*).

It is somewhat strange that the second species of this family should also have occurred in Wiltshire, inasmuch as it is one of the very rarest of the accidental visitors to this country, the straggler whose appearance I will now relate being only the fifth individual whose occurrence in Great Britain had then been recorded. It was met with by Mr. Walter Langton, of Wandsworth, Surrey, when out shooting on the estate of Mr. Stephen Mills, at Elston, near Tilshead, on Salisbury Plain, on October 2nd, 1855 (very near the same spot where the Pratincole, last described, was found). It was first seen on an open piece of down land

* Lord Lilford in *Ibis* for 1860, p. 239.

† O. Salvin in *Ibis* for 1859, p. 355.

called Eastdown, which was particularly bare of vegetation, as is generally the case at that season of the year with all down lands. The day was somewhat stormy, the wind south-west, and Mr. Langton and his companion were following a wild covey with a brace of young pointers, when one of them stood on the open down, and suddenly a Cream-coloured Courser took wing, almost immediately under the dog's nose, and apparently flew at the dog's face, who snapped at the bird. Indeed, in a second letter with which Mr. Langton most obligingly favoured me at the time, he calls particular attention to this strange fearlessness on the part of the bird; which, however, is quite in accordance with its general character. It then flew with a lazy kind of flight about two hundred yards, and again settled on the open down, and began to run at a moderate pace, reminding Mr. Langton of the gait of the Landrail. That gentleman immediately followed it, and, when within forty yards, shot it as it ran upon the ground. It was not heard to utter any cry, and the keepers who were present conjectured it to have been wounded; but as they seem to have arrived at that conclusion solely from the unwillingness of the bird to take flight, and its apparent disregard of danger, for which its natural disposition fully accounts, no regard need be paid to that surmise. When first found by the dog, it was lying so close that, until it rose, though from the bare down, nothing was seen of it. It was sent to Mr. Gardner, the well-known taxidermist in Oxford Street, who stuffed it, and who kindly communicated with me on the subject.

The Cream-coloured Courser, Swift-foot, or Plover, is a native of the sandy deserts of Africa, to which its pale bluff plumage closely assimilates in colour: hence the name *isabellinus*, 'sand-coloured,' which is most appropriate, for the colour of its plumage is so well matched with the sand of the desert which it inhabits, that it is as difficult to distinguish it when squatted on the ground, as it is to see the Ptarmigan amidst the rocks and snow patches of Norway. This remarkable assimilation in colour to the warm-tinted sand it shares with many other species of birds which frequent the same localities, and struck me as very ob-

servable, when I wandered into the desert on the banks of the Nile. Several species of Chats, more especially *Saxicola deserti* and *S. isabellina*, partook of this hue, but above all the 'Bush Babbler' (*Crateropus acaciæ*), of which I once shot two specimens perched in an isolated 'sont' bush, and though they both fell quite dead on the sand beneath the tree, it will hardly be believed that I searched for twenty minutes, and very nearly gave up the search in despair, though they were both lying on the sand just before me, so marvellously did their colours match with that of the sand. Though I kept a constant look-out for the Cream-coloured Courser when in its native land, and though it was occasionally seen by some of my companions, I was never so fortunate as to fall in with it. It is notorious for its surprising fleetness of foot, as its name would lead us to infer; and shows a strange confidence, or rather carelessness, of man, so unusual in other members of the family, to which I have already called attention.

Its cry of alarm is said to resemble that of the Plover; it rests and sleeps in a sitting posture, with its legs doubled up under it. When disturbed, it will run off with astonishing swiftness, manœuvring to get out of sight behind stones or clods of earth; then, kneeling down and stretching the body and head flat on the ground, it endeavours to make itself invisible, though all the time its eyes are fixed on the object which disturbs it, and it keeps on the alert ready to rush off again if one continues to approach it.* The name *Cursorius*, or 'runner,' is, as we have seen, applicable enough, but *Gallicus*, as it used to be styled, was most unfortunate, for it was bestowed upon it by Gmelin under the erroneous impression that it only occurred in France. Still more misleading is the name in use among the Maltese, who call it the 'English Plover' (*Pluviera ta l'Inghilterra*), than which a more inappropriate term could scarcely be devised. In North Africa, where it is well known to the Arabs, they call it the 'Camel Pricker,' *Song el Ibel*,† but on what ground I know not. In France it is *Court-vite isabelle*, 'Sand-coloured Courser'; and

* M. Favier, of Tangier, quoted in 'Yarrell,' 4th edition, vol. iii., p. 244.

† Canon Tristram in *Ibis* for 1860, p. 79.

in Italy *Corrione biondo*, 'Flaxen Runner'; but in other countries of Western Europe it appears to be almost unknown; at all events, I can find no name for it in the bird lists.

136. GREAT PLOVER (*Edicnemus crepitans*).

This is the largest bird of the family with which we are acquainted in this country: and is elsewhere known as the Thick-kneed Bustard, the Stone Curlew, and the Norfolk Plover. It may still be seen on our open downs during the summer months, for it leaves this country for warmer latitudes in the autumn, and I have met with it within the tropics in Nubia in winter. Colonel Montagu imagined that it never penetrated to the western parts of England, but was confined to the eastern counties, where undoubtedly it is most abundant: but I have information from many quarters that it was once very generally known in Wiltshire, whose wide-spreading downs indeed offered it the retirement as well as the space in which it delights. The late Rev. G. Marsh told me that up to 1840 it was still common on the downs near Salisbury. Mr. Benjamin Hayward, of Lavington, spoke of it as becoming more scarce, but still occasionally to be seen on Ellbarrow and the higher hills. The late Mr. Withers, of Devizes, mentioned that it had on several occasions been shot on Roundway Down, and brought to him for preservation; and Mr. Wadham Locke, of the Cleeve House, Seend (to whose intimate acquaintance with birds I owe many a lesson), wrote me word that he had seen a very large flock of these birds in the air, migrating from north to south at the fall of the year, when they made a most melodious whistling noise. In addition to this satisfactory evidence, I will now add that for several years past I have seen these birds on the downs of North Wiltshire in a particular locality, which for obvious reasons I do not desire to specify more minutely, and that during the summer I can generally find them in or near their favourite haunts. Still more interesting is the fact of their rearing their young in our county, an instance of which was given me by the Rev. Alexander

Grant, Rector of Manningford, from whose letter, dated Sept. 2nd, 1864, I quote the following particulars: 'I think you will be glad to hear that the Norfolk Plovers I mentioned are alive and doing well: my son picked them up on our downs between Manningford and Everleigh. F. O. Morris says that "the young when fledged will squat, and allow themselves to be picked up. If disturbed from the nest, the parent runs off very swiftly, with the head stooped.' This, my son states, is exactly what occurred when he found the birds. About ten days after he had taken them, a person called at my house with another young Norfolk Plover, picked up on the Rushall or Charlton downs: and about the same time I saw at least two pairs flying and hovering about the downs near Sidbury Hill, not far from the old track from Marlborough to Salisbury.

The Marlborough College Natural History Reports also state that the egg was taken in June, 1866, in that neighbourhood, and again on Overton Down in 1868, and again in May, 1874. Mr. George Butler says that it still breeds on the downs near Kennett; Mr. G. Watson Taylor that it sometimes nests on the downs above Erlestoke, where the keepers have caught the young birds; and Lord Heytesbury, on his keepers' authority, that they come annually early in March to breed on the downs above Heytesbury.

The Rev. A. P. Morres has also had the young birds as well as the eggs brought to him from the immediate neighbourhood of Salisbury, and used to consider it by no means uncommon on the downs near him; but he laments, what I fear is also the case in North Wilts, that it is rapidly decreasing in numbers. I have, however, many notices of its recent appearance in Wilts. In letters sent me this year (1887), Mr. F. Stratton says that whereas it was getting scarce at Gore Cross Farm on the Lavington downs some ten years since, it is now somewhat more numerous there. The Right Hon. E. P. Bouverie informs me that his son shot one last autumn on the downs above Cheverell. Mr. W. Stancomb, jun., writes that they are often seen on the downs above Colston, and Lord Arundel that he has

seen it on the downs near Wardour, while Mr. Grant's list mentions specimens from Netheravon, Manningford, Everley, Lavington, Erlestoke, Tilshead and Chitterne. Thus it is clearly established that the Great Plover is no stranger to Wiltshire, albeit of not very frequent occurrence in the present day: and I have entered fully into the evidences of its appearance on our downs, because it has been doubted by some whether the species has not been mistaken. That such, however, is not the case, I am perfectly convinced, and indeed there is no other bird with which it can be readily confused. It is of fine stately form, of considerable size and of erect carriage, and its large prominent yellow eye is the principal feature which attracts attention. It is a nocturnal feeder, as the size and prominence of its eye indicates, and rests by day on the wide hilly downs, which are its chosen haunts; but it is of a wild and shy disposition, and if disturbed in its retreat, flies off with its legs stretched out behind after the manner of the heron; and after a short flight alights again, and then runs off with great rapidity. It is a migratory bird, arriving here in the spring, and retiring in autumn to pass the winter in Africa. Like the Bustards, it lays but two eggs, and in its insect and animal diet, as well as general habits, it follows the custom of its congeners.

Its generic name *Edicnemus*, from *οἶδος*, 'a swelling,' and *κνήμη*, 'the leg,' is very descriptive of the remarkable swelling of the tarsal joint of the leg in the young bird, which reminds one of a gouty man, and which is a very characteristic feature in this species. I was informed by Mr. Parsons, of Hunts Mill, Wootton Bassett, when looking over my collection of birds in 1870, that there is an old saying in Wiltshire, having reference to the value of the Stone Curlew in olden time:

'Let the curlew be white or black,
He carries ninepence on his back.'

A somewhat high price when the value of money, if only a hundred years ago, is taken into account; but there is no question that it is of excellent quality for the table. In France it is *Edicneme criard*, 'Clamorous (or noisy) Thick-knee;' in

Germany, *Lerchengraue Regenpfeifer*, and *Grosser Brachvögel*, 'Great Fallow-bird;' in Italy, *Il gran Piviere*; but in Spain, *Alcaravan*; and in Portugal, *Alcaravão*, which carry with them a strong Moorish flavour.

137. GOLDEN PLOVER (*Charadrius pluvialis*).

The Wiltshire sportsman on the downs will not need to be told that here we have a winter migrant which favours our county when frosts and snows drive it from more northern latitudes, but which retires again as spring draws on, to breed in the mountain districts it loves so well. It is a handsome bird even in winter, when the golden hue which overspreads its plumage gives it a bright appearance; but when met with in full breeding dress in summer, as I have seen it in Norway, on the high fjelds of that wild country, it assumes such altered colours that we can scarcely recognise it: for in place of the grayish white which prevails on all the under-plumage, a glossy black now appears, while bright golden yellow tips the edges of the upper feathers, and the contrast of dark below and light above is extremely pleasing. Its flesh is very highly esteemed by epicures, and therefore it is diligently sought for by the fowler, but thanks to its innate shyness, it is not very easily approached, except during a fog.

I found these birds very plentiful on the upper fjelds in Norway; and instead of the timidity they exhibit here, they seemed perfectly fearless. On one occasion we were overtaken by a snowstorm on a wild and desolate fjeld, more than twenty miles from any human habitation, and took refuge during the night in a goat-shed, where we vainly tried to keep out the cold by heaping up a fire of heather and brushwood, round which our shivering horses as well as ourselves were glad to crouch, notwithstanding the suffocating smoke which filled their noses and throats, and the bright flames which the crackling heather gave out. Here the Golden Plovers abounded, and neither snowstorm nor bitter wind, nor clouds of smoke, nor crackling flames, dismayed them. All round the hut and during the entire night

they were constantly uttering their plaintive melancholy cry, most congenial with the circumstances, but most trying to the listener. As we rode away next morning, these beautiful birds in full breeding plumage were so tame that they would run along the stony ground within a few yards of my horse, then fly a few paces, and then stand and stare and run along as before. It is very seldom that these pathless fjelds are trodden by the human foot; and this accounts for the absence of timidity displayed by these birds. Our route was marked out (as it always is in such fjelds) by small stones being placed upright on some large conspicuous pieces of rock: these little pyramids of stone are excellent landmarks to show the way; the snow does not obliterate or conceal them; and being readily formed, they are numerous enough to guide the traveller from one to another. It was while passing between two of these landmarks that I discovered a nest of the Golden Plover, placed right in our path: the nest was a mere depression of the scanty grass, unprotected by bush, heather or rock: the eggs, four in number, and with the small ends towards the middle (as is usual with all the Plover tribe), had been sat upon for some time, but I succeeded in bringing them away without damage, and they are now in my cabinet.* In Scandinavia this Plover goes by the name of *Ijung-Pipare*, or 'Heath Piper.' There are several reasons adduced for the specific name *pluvialis*; because it comes in the rainy season, say some; or because it frequents places damp from rain, and marshes, say others; but without doubt, as it seems to me, because it shows an extraordinary restlessness before bad weather, and so announces the approach of rain-storms. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, than whom there can be no better authority as a field observer, says: 'Peewits and Plovers are excellent weather prophets; when they are heard and seen screaming and wheeling in the evening, it is a sure sign of a dirty night, as this is their usual hour to settle on the ooze or meadows to rest or feed.†' But Yarrell says that the French term *Pluvier* has been applied to the Plover, '*pour ce qu'on le*

* *Zoologist* for 1851, p. 2979.

† 'Fowler in Ireland,' p. 14.

prend mieux en temps pluvieux qu'un nulle autre saison. Our word 'Plover' is derived from the French *Pluvier*.* This is also a nocturnal feeder, and can run very fast: during the day it will squat or stand asleep, with its head drawn down between its shoulders: it flies in large flocks, and if disturbed, the whole flock will perform many aërial evolutions and rapid wheelings before they again settle on the ground.† Sir R. Payne-Gallwey remarks that it has a pretty habit of trotting nimbly along a few steps, and then stopping motionless for some seconds, ere resuming its run, and he adds that Curlews at a distance, notwithstanding their much greater bulk and long peculiar bills, bear such a wonderful resemblance to the Golden Plover, from the way they sit, especially when herded together, that it is very difficult to identify them.‡ I need not specify localities, for it may be said to be distributed in flocks, though sparingly and uncertainly, all over the county. In France it is *Pluvier doré*; in Germany, *Goldregenpfeifer*; in Italy, *Piviere dorato*; in Spain, *Chorlito*; and in Portugal, *Tarambola*.

138. DOTTEREL (*Charadrius morinellus*).

This, too, is, or perhaps I ought to say *was*, a thoroughly Wiltshire bird, our county being one of the few enumerated by Yarrell as its regular haunts. At the beginning of this century, Colonel Montagu described it as a bird which annually visits us in spring and autumn in its migratory flights to and from its breeding-places in northern Europe; and he adds, 'On the Wiltshire downs it resorts to the new-sown corn or fallow ground for the sake of worms, its principal food: in the autumn they fly in families of five or six, which we have observed to be the two old birds and their young; but sometimes a dozen or more flock together.' They generally rested but a few days amongst us, but during that period they were often so numerous that sportsmen now alive have killed from forty to fifty. Now

* Yarrell's 'British Birds,' 3rd edition, vol. ii., p. 449.

† Selby's 'Illustrations of British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 234.

‡ Sir R. Payne-Gallwey's 'Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 174-182.

they are rarely to be met with, and though scarcely a year passes without a notice of the capture of one or more on some portion of our downs, it is but an accidental straggler, which has wandered out of its way. My good friend, Rev. W. C. Lukis, chanced to see such an one, as he was driving with the Rector of Manningford Bruce, between Upavon and Enford in May, 1857; it was close to the roadside, standing on a clod of earth, all alone in its glory, and did not care to move out of the way. My own specimen, now in my collection, was shot on the Lavington downs. It came to me in the flesh in 1841, and is one of the few Wiltshire birds of my own preparation and mounting, handled in those early days, which has survived to the present time. Lord Nelson possesses a specimen killed at Trafalgar. Lord Heytesbury, on the authority of his keeper, reports that they are often on the downs in that neighbourhood; but Mr. G. Watson Taylor says that though often seen in former years on the downs above Erlestoke, none have been observed there of late. The late Mr. Withers had many pass through his hands for preservation; and indeed everybody conversant with our Wiltshire birds will know something of its occurrence.

Mr. Morres speaks of them as not uncommon on the downs near Salisbury some years since, though now seldom seen, and mentions a trip* of three as observed in the spring at Stockton in 1873. Mr. Baker writes me word that an immature specimen was killed at Fonthill on October 1st, 1876, and that others were seen by him on two or three occasions on Mere Down, the last on March 7th, 1881. However, of quite recent date, the Rev. T. N. Hart Smith, President of the Marlborough College Natural History Society, tells me that in their museum are two specimens which were shot on the Kennet two years ago. Mr. Gwatkin records a Dotterel taken at Tilshead in the spring of last year (1886). The Rev. W. H. Awdry saw a trip of Dotterel near

* A small flock of dotterel is known as a *trip*; and it is worthy of observation how various are the terms applied to the several species when in company: Thus we have a *cast* of hawks, a *flock* of sparrows, a *flight* of starlings or pigeons, a *dole* of doves, a *nid* of pheasants, a *covey* of partridges, a *bevy* of quail, a *brood* of grouse, a *flight* of woodcocks, a *wisp* of snipe, a *wing* of

the Druid's Head on Saturday, March 12th of this year (1887), and the Hon. Gerald Lascelles reports a good-sized flock near Everley, also in March last (1887). These recent occurrences prove that it is not yet extinct, but I fear it is every year becoming more scarce in this county, and will soon be as completely wanting on our downs as the Great Bustard itself.

Its flesh it considered a great dainty, and in the days of its abundance on our downs it was eagerly sought for by fowlers. It may be readily known by the dark orange brown of the breast, which deepens into black lower down; and by the streak of black and another of white which cross the breast. It is a nocturnal feeder, and rests by day, and has a habit of stretching out its legs, wings and head, as many other birds do, when roused from a state of repose; but from this habit, wherein it has been credited with aping the actions of the fowler who was in pursuit of it, it derives its specific name *morinellus*, 'little fool,' or 'simpleton,' as if the actions above described were in imitation of those of human beings, and were peculiar to this species alone. The Arabic name for it is *El Mohr*, 'The Rich,' but I know not the origin of that appellation: I should rather incline to think that *μωρός*, 'a fool,' was the root of that word too. Our English word 'dotterel' is interpreted by Professor Skeat to signify 'a foolish bird,' from the old word *dote*, 'to be foolish,' remains of which we may see in *dotage*, *dotard*, etc. In France it is *Pluvier guignard*, 'Gaping (or Leering) Plover;' in Germany, *Der dümme Regenpfeifer*, 'The Stupid Plover;' in Italy, *Piviere de corrione*, 'Simpleton Plover;' but in Spain, *Chorlito marismeño*, 'Plover of the Salt-water Lake;' and in Sweden, *Fjäll-Pipare*, 'Fjäll-Piper.' It is a smart dapper little species, and its dwindled numbers and rapid extinction from among our down birds is much to be lamented.

The tenth of May, says Mr. Howard Saunders, quoting from Hone's 'Every-Day Book,' used to be known on the borders of

plover, a *sege* of herons, a *covert* of coots, a *herd* of swans, a *skein* of geese (when flying), a *gaggle* of geese (when at rest), a *team* of wild duck, a *sprig* of teal, a *dropping* of sheldrake.

Hertford and Cambridgeshire as 'Dotterel day;' but in Wiltshire it certainly used to arrive at least a fortnight earlier. Its appearance in the autumn was regarded by the shepherds as a sign of coming winter, hence the following rhymes :

' When dotterel do first appear,
It shows that frost is very near ;
But when the dotterel do go,
Then you may look for heavy snow.*

139. RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*).

Common enough on the seashore all round our coasts, this species is such a lover of salt-water that it very rarely is seen far inland. I have a notice by the late Rev. G. Marsh of a specimen which was killed near Malmesbury, in 1838, and which I have seen in his collection; and that was the only individual which had come to my notice as having appeared in Wilts, until, on August 13th, 1881, a small flock of seven were seen in my parish of Yatesbury by Mr. C. A. Tanner's shepherd, near the sheep-fold. As the man happened to have a gun, he shot at them and knocked down three, two of which he secured, and by the courtesy of Mr. Tanner they were at once sent to me in the flesh, and are now in my collection. Mr. Grant, of Devizes, tells me that one was killed at Lavington at the same date. The Rev. A. P. Morres once, and once only, saw a single bird in some water-meadows immediately behind the Vicarage at Britford; and I now learn that Mr. Grant had received specimens from Netheravon in 1869, and from Ufcot in 1873; and the Marlborough College Natural History Society's Report speaks of one shot at Kennet on August 12th, 1881, probably one of the flock which came to Yatesbury. It is a prettily marked little bird, light brown above and white below, and is conspicuous for the distinct collar of white and then of black which encircles its neck. It is indigenous in our island, and I have met with it at all seasons on the Norfolk coast in considerable abundance; like other shore-feeding birds, it follows the tide, and runs rapidly at the edge of the advancing or retreating waves, with neck outstretched and head thrown well back between

* Dyer's 'English Folk-Lore,' p. 96.

the shoulders: it also flies very swiftly, but seldom to any great distance. Its cry is, like that of so many other members of this family, wild, mournful, and plaintive. The specific name *hiaticula* is given by the B.O.U. list as derived from its habit of haunting the mouths of rivers, *hiatus*; and the generic name *Ægialitis* (which it has received from some modern ornithologists, in lieu of *Charadrius*), has the meaning of 'belonging to the shore:' but neither of these names seems to me very happy, as they may, with equal propriety, be applied to a large proportion of the Order of Waders. In Sussex it bears the provincial name of 'Stone-runner.' Sometimes the cavity in the sand in which it deposits its eggs is lined or covered with a number of small stones about the size of peas, upon which the eggs are laid, and this habit has gained for it in some counties the provincial name of 'Stone-hatch.*' In Norway and Sweden, where it is very common, both on the coast and on the sandy shores of the lakes of the interior, it is known as the *Större Strand-Pipare*, or 'Greater Strand-Piper.' It also ascends to very high latitudes, having been found in Lapland and Iceland, and even occasionally in Spitzbergen,† and in Greenland, where it has been known to breed.‡

It is often known in England as the 'Ring Dotterel' and the 'Sand-lark.' In France it is *Grand Pluvier à Collier*; in Italy, *Piviere col Collare*; and in Germany, *Halsband Regenpfeifer*; but by some authors *Buntschnabliger Regenpfeifer*, 'Plover with Parti-coloured Beak': in allusion to the orange-yellow base and black point of the beak of the male in summer dress. In Spain it is known as *Anda-rio*, 'Stream Rover,' and sometimes as *Correplaya*, 'Shore-runner'; in Portugal it is *Lavadeira*, 'Washer.'

140. LAPWING (*Vanellus cristatus*).

Here we have the true Plover of the downs of modern days; and what Wiltshireman does not know the peculiar call-note of

* Howard Saunders' 4th edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 258.

† Professor Newton in *Ibis* for 1865, p. 504.

‡ Reinhardt in *Ibis* for 1861, p. 9.

the Peewit, or the remarkable flight of the Lapwing (for both names belong to one and the same bird), as he traverses any portion of the downs? Resplendent with a metallic gloss on its dark green upper plumage, capped with a crest or tuft of long narrow curling feathers; elegant as it runs forward at a rapid pace, and as suddenly stops, and then runs forward again in spasmodic jerks,—the Lapwing arrests the attention of the most unobservant. It is indigenous in England, and breeds on our downs; but assembling in large flocks as autumn approaches, it retires to the sea-coast in November, and returns again at the end of February or beginning of March: and I have long been accustomed to watch for its arrival as the first harbinger of spring in my upland home. Mr. Cordeaux informs us that immense flocks of this species arrive in autumn on the eastern coast from the North, and in Wiltshire Mr. F. Stratton gave me the gratifying intelligence on June 29th, 1875, that he had noticed a most extraordinary increase of this bird on his land at Gore Cross, on Salisbury Plain: for whereas he used to see five or six pairs breeding there annually, that year there were hundreds. The previous week he was scarifying a piece of rough land, when the men destroyed forty nests in that place only. The following day he found a Peewit on that same piece of ploughed land sitting on four eggs, whence he concluded that four hen birds must have laid their eggs in that one nest since the previous day. The fact, however, probably was that the bird had been disturbed from its original nest, and had removed its eggs one by one, and was sitting on them. Its eggs are very highly esteemed in the London market, and though doubtless the majority of veritable Plovers' eggs, as the dealers declare, are the produce of the Black-headed Gull, the Peewit's nest is still the object of diligent search: fortunately, however, it is so difficult to find in the extensive corn-fields or wide-spreading expanse of turf, and the parent birds are so cunning in their artifices to entice away the intruder, that it is not very often found—in this county at least, where the search for its eggs has happily not become a regular trade. The bird and its habit of pretending lameness, and the

various devices it performs to attract the attention of the intruder on its nest, and entice him and his dog away from its young, are so well known that I need not further describe them. As regards feeding, it is altogether a nocturnal bird. In Ancient Egypt it is the head of a Lapwing that is so often represented in the hieroglyphic figures, and on the walls of the tombs and temples, upon the 'augural staff' of the gods; but though thus honoured by the divinities, I am not aware that any mummied specimens have been found, or that its body was ever embalmed. It derives its generic name, *Vanellus*, and the French *Vanneau*, from *vannus*, 'a fan,' in allusion to the peculiar slow flapping motion of its long wings. The French also call it *Dixhuit*, as we call it 'Peewit,' in imitation of its note. In Sweden it is known as *Vipa*, and is one of the first of the migratory birds that appears in the spring, and as it often happens that a sharp frost sets in after their arrival, the peasants call such a frost *Vip-winter*, or 'Lapwing-winter,' when the birds suffer severely. It has been observed there that, if they fly away altogether, the frost will be of long continuance, but if they remain it will soon be over.* In England, in old times, it bore the name of 'Egret,' which has occasioned no little confusion to modern ornithologists; for when we read of a thousand Egrets being served up at a single entertainment (temp. Henry IV.), we marvel at the abundance of a bird now so rare in this country; but when we remember the long tuft on the head of the Lapwing, we see how that bird also became thus designated. Its flesh was highly esteemed for the table, both in this country and in France; in the latter they have a proverb:

' Qui n'a mangé grive ni vanneau
N'a jamais mangé bon morceau.'

In Lancashire they are called the 'Seven Whistlers' and the 'Wandering Jews,' and are looked upon with horror, and their cry listened to with dismay as the omen of ill-luck; for there is a tradition that they contain the souls of those Jews who assisted at the Crucifixion, and in consequence were doomed to float in

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 370.

the air for ever.* Montagu tells us that in his time it was sometimes called 'Peeseweep.' This is one of those birds which wears a spur or horny tubercle on the carpal joint or elbow of the wing, but which is more especially noticeable in the fine species, *Hoplopterus spinosus* or 'Zic-zac,' of which I shot many specimens in Egypt. In Germany it is *Gehäubte Kiebitz*; in France, *Vanneau huppé*, 'Crested Lapwing;' in Italy, *Pavoncella Comune*, sharing the name with the Peacock; in Spain, *Ave fria*, 'Bird of Tribute,' and also *Judia*, 'Jewess,' probably from the same tradition as that of Lancashire mentioned above; but in Portugal it is *Bibes*, from the Moorish word *Beebét*, at Casa Blanca on the coast of Morocco; but in the North of Portugal it is known as *Gallispo*, from *gallus*, 'a cock,' in allusion to the crest-plume.†

141. OYSTER-CATCHER (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*).

This robust powerful species is a true salt-water bird, and seems to have no place in our inland county: but an account of its capture at Bradford on Avon in September, 1859, as recorded in a newspaper at the time, permitted me to include it in the Wiltshire catalogue in my former papers on the birds of the county. More recently Mr. Grant has recorded a second instance of a Wiltshire-killed specimen which came into his hands for preservation. It was taken in August, 1877, at Enford, a spot even farther from the sea than Bradford; but doubtless in each case the birds wandered up the rivers on which they were respectively found until they lost themselves, and knew not how to return: but how they came to follow the rivers so far from their haunts on the seashore, and what they found to subsist on during the journey, I am at a loss to conjecture. Its plumage is striking, from the pleasing contrast of black and white which it displays: and its bright orange-red bill, of a peculiar wedge-shaped form, to enable it to wrench open the shell-fish which constitutes its food, and its vermilion legs, give it a handsome

* Dyer's 'Folk-Lore,' p. 96.

† W. C. Tait on Birds of Portugal in *Ibis* for 1887, p. 83.

appearance. It is a very common bird in those localities on the coast which abound in the molluscs on which it feeds, and its loud ringing whistle, as it hurries shrieking away, must be familiar to all who are acquainted with the seashore. From its parti-coloured plumage it is sometimes (says Montagu) known as the 'Skeldrake,' or 'Skelderdrake': sometimes, too, it is called the 'Sea Pie,' and 'more correctly' (says Mr. Cecil Smith), 'for it does not catch oysters;*' and Mr. Harting is of opinion that its long bill, powerful though it is in detaching limpets from the rock and breaking open mussels and small crabs, is altogether baffled in attempting to open an oyster.† Selby, however, maintains that it will insert the wedge-shaped point of its bill within the valves, as the oysters lie partially open in shallow water, and thus wrench them apart and extract the shell-fish: and that they sometimes attempt this and are caught in so doing is notorious, for instances have been known of the unfortunate bird being made prisoner by the oyster closing upon its beak. In Scandinavia it is known as *Strand-Skata*, or 'Strand-Magpie,' and in some parts of England as the 'Mussel Picker,' which it certainly is. The scientific name, *Hæmatopus*, signifies 'with feet the colour of blood'—which is sufficiently, though not very accurately, descriptive—from *αἷμα* + *πούς*; and *ostralegus* is derived from *ostrea*, 'an oyster,' and *lego*, 'I collect' (B.O.U.), and from this are derived most of the names by which it is generally known; as in France *L'Huîtierier Pie*; in Germany, *Geschackte Austern-Fischer*, 'Pied Oyster-fisher;' and in Portugal *Ostraceiro*.

When alighting at the edge of the water (says Harting), the flocks always pitch with their heads to the wind, and no doubt the reason for this is, that were they to alight with the wind at their backs they might be carried over the edge into the water. When wounded they will swim with great buoyancy, and even dive when occasion requires.

* 'Birds of Somerset,' p. 343.

† 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 161.

GRUIDÆ (THE CRANES).

The magnificent birds which comprise this family may be said to occupy the position among the Waders which the Bustards enjoy among the Ground-birds. Of great size, tall and erect, they are a stately race, and stalk among their fellows with elegant and lordly mien: the few species known in Europe are all migratory; and their chief peculiarity consists in the long, flowing, flexible, and arched feathers (reminding one of the plumes of the Ostrich); which, curled at the end, and springing from the wing, overhang the tail, and which the bird can erect or depress at pleasure.

142. CRANE (*Grus cinerea*).

Though once known in England as the *Common Crane*, this specific title is a sad misnomer, for this handsome bird is now become exceedingly scarce; indeed, an occasional straggler alone visits us at rare intervals. But a hundred years ago it formed an important item at all state banquets, and was the noble quarry at which falconers were wont to fly their largest hawks. As with the Bustard, so with the Crane, by an Act passed (25 Henry VIII., cap. xi.) A.D. 1534, to 'avoid the destruction of wilde fowle,' it was prohibited to 'take the egges upon peine of imprisonment for one yere, and to lose and forfeit for every egge of any Crane so taken or distroid xx pence.*' But even as late as 1780 it must have continued to breed in England, for it was decreed by the Fen Laws of that year 'that no person shall bring up or take any Swan's egg, or Crane's egg, or young birds of that kind, on pain of forfeiting for every offence three shillings and four pence.†' It was pretty generally distributed over all unenclosed districts, whenever uncultivated tracts enabled it to roam undisturbed; and doubtless our wide-spreading downs afforded it a welcome retreat: but now the ornithologist must go to foreign lands to see this noble bird in a wild state. In Egypt

* J. E. Harting in *Zoologist* for 1886, p. 84.

† Cordeaux's 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 100.

I have watched it for hours on the mud-flats and sandbanks of the Nile, as it walked with majestic step a very king amidst the smaller Waders, striding about with commanding air, strutting as if in self-conscious superiority, arching its long neck and demeaning itself as the very queen of the shallows; but the most complete monograph on any bird with which I am acquainted is the story of the Crane in its breeding-place in Lapland, as detailed by my lamented friend, the late Mr. John Wolley, in the *Ibis*,* a most perfect description of this now uncommon bird. When migrating, as all known species of Cranes do, it collects in large flocks, and is said to fly at a great height, and to keep up a perpetual hoarse scream, or trumpet-like shrill cry, which, owing to the very remarkable structure of the windpipe, is louder than the note of any other bird, and which may be heard when the birds are far out of sight. Mr. James Waylen has most obligingly furnished me with the following interesting anecdote of a Wiltshire Crane: 'In 1783 it was recorded in the Salisbury paper that a gentleman shot a Crane, on whose leg was found a piece of copper which he himself had attached in the year 1767, after having caught the same bird by means of a hawk: the copper plate bore his initials, and the date 1767.' I am afraid that I have no more modern instance of the occurrence of the Crane in Wiltshire.

The English word 'Crane' is derived from the Latin *grus*, and that, as it seems, from the Greek *γέρπavos*, which in all probability arose from the cry of the bird. So in France it is *Grue cendrée*; and in Germany *Aschgrauer Kranich*, 'Ash-coloured Crane;' in Italy, *Grue*; in Spain, *Grulla*; in Portugal, *Grou*; but in Sweden *Trana*.

ARDEIDÆ (THE HERONS).

Though wholly incapable of swimming, the various species which compose this large family may certainly be ranked as Water-birds, so entirely are their haunts and habits aquatic. Conspicuous for the excessive length of their legs, and for their long

* *Ibis*, vol. i., pp. 191-198.

and sharp-pointed beaks, with which they can transfix their prey, or seize it in shallow water, the various members of this truly elegant family roam wherever marsh, lake, river or brook offers a suitable fishing ground: and there they may be seen standing motionless in shallow water, the very emblems of patience, carefully watching till the prey they seek comes within reach of their powerful beak, which they dart with unerring precision on the hapless victim. Many of the true Herons are adorned with elongated flowing plumes, which spring from the back of the head, the neck, and the back; the occipital crest is composed of soft loose pendant silky feathers; and the dorsal plumes have long hair-like webs or barbs, all of which give an air of elegance and finish to these gracefully formed birds. Notwithstanding the immense length of their wings, their flight is heavy; and as they flap slowly overhead to and from their hunting grounds, their progress seems slow, and the exertion laborious. And yet on occasion, or when prompted by fear, they can show great speed; but the race seems somewhat indolent and disinclined for unnecessary exertion. During their progress on the wing, their neck is bent back, so that the head rests upon the shoulders; and the long legs are extended behind as a counterpoise to preserve the balance of the body; thus the Herons present a peculiar appearance in their flight, and may readily be distinguished at a great distance. There is a popular delusion still prevalent amongst the ignorant (however ridiculous it may seem), that the Herons when sitting on their nests project their legs through holes formed for that purpose at the bottom: now, not to mention the very awkward and uncomfortable, not to say impossible position which the poor bird would thus be condemned to assume, I will merely point out that the thighs of the Heron being of a length exactly proportioned to that of the legs, the bending of the knee causes the leg to recede sufficiently towards the tail to allow the feet to come to the centre of the body (as has been most ably demonstrated by Mr. Water-ton in his essay on the Heron); and therefore it is not one whit more irksome to the Heron to perform its task of incubation after

the accustomed manner of other birds, than it is for the sparrow, the finch, or the domestic fowl. Their habits are generally solitary, except at the period of breeding, when they usually congregate in large companies.

143. COMMON HERON (*Ardea cinerea*).

This is the only species of the whole family which we can really designate an inhabitant of Wiltshire; those others which I have to mention being now mere stragglers of very rare occurrence. But the Common Heron is known to everybody, and we have all seen this majestic bird on the wing to and from its roosting-places, or surprised it standing motionless in shallow water watching for its prey. It bears a bad character with those who preserve fish, but Mr. Waterton has pointed out that this is quite undeserved, as the benefits it confers by destroying rats, reptiles and insects more than compensate for the few fish which it will devour when it can find them in the shallows. At one time it was in high favour, and indeed protected by law as the most noble game at which hawks could be flown; *royal* game it was then, and a severe penal statute was enacted for its preservation; the taking of its egg subjecting the offender to no less a penalty than twenty shillings, which was an enormous fine in those days. Even now it is designated in Spain and Portugal as *Garça real*. From a list of the game served at a wedding-dinner in 1530 we learn that the price of a heron was at that time 12d., of a swan 6s., of a crane 3s. 4d., of a bittern 14d.; and these prices will appear much higher when we read that at the same feast an ox cost 30s., a calf 3s., a sheep 2s. 4d., and a lamb 1s. 6d., while chicken were 1s. 6d. per dozen.*

In those days its flesh was greatly esteemed as a most dainty morsel; but those palmy days when it stood high in the estimation of English gentlemen are gone by, and now it is despised alike by the epicure and the sportsman, and persecuted by the gamekeeper and the fisherman. At that happy period it was much more numerous than at present; but even now one may

* Cordeaux's 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 102.

sometimes steal unawares on this wary, suspicious bird, though always on the alert against surprise. In Wiltshire it is known by the provincial name of 'Jack,' and unfortunately is generally known to the country people as the 'crane,' which it is difficult to persuade them is a misnomer, and which creates no little confusion of species. The middle claw of each foot of this bird is serrated on the sides, like the foot of the nightjar. In France it is known as *Heron huppé*, 'Crested Heron,' and *Heron cendré*; and in Germany as *Aschgrauer Reiher*, 'Ash-grey Heron;' in Italy as *Aghirone* and *Airone*; and in Sweden as *Häger*. Professor Skeat says that all these, as well as our English word 'Heron,' are probably derived from the harsh voice of the bird. That the Common Heron breeds in colonies is well known to everybody; but it will, I think, be a surprise to many, as I own it was to myself, until I investigated the matter carefully, to find that we have no less than seven Heronries in Wiltshire, in addition to some outlying nests or small colonies which have been noticed in various localities. As I made the existence of Heronries and their details a special object of inquiry, and as I have received the information I sought from a large number of obliging correspondents in all parts of the county, I believe I am now able to offer a pretty accurate account of all the existing Heronries in Wiltshire, and I proceed to enumerate them in order, beginning with the most northern district.

1. *Crouch Wood, Highworth*.—The largest Heronry which flourishes at this day in the county is of very recent origin, and is situated at Crouch Wood, in the parish of Highworth, but on the Hannington Hall property, and belonging to Mr. Hussey-Freke. The covert at Crouch was planted with gorse as a fox-cover some fifty-four years since, and amongst the gorse were scattered a certain number of trees, chiefly larch. It was only about eight or nine years ago that the Herons began to occupy these trees, just before Mr. Hussey-Freke bought the wood and the farm adjoining. The Herons are very carefully protected here, and last year the nests were computed to amount to between sixty and seventy; but—as elsewhere in the county—

when the birds leave home for the banks of streams, more especially where there are trout fisheries (as in this case, where the river Colne enters the Thames, or rather Isis, not far from Crouch), they are special objects of persecution at the hands of keepers, and many are destroyed. The consequence is there is this year a great falling off in the number of inhabited nests at Crouch. For all the above particulars I have the authority of the owner. I have since been informed that the number of inhabited nests this year (1887) is probably only between twenty and thirty.

2. *Bowood*.—Next in order as we proceed from north to south is the well-known old-established Heronry at Bowood, situated on an island in the lake, within sight of the house. This was for many years the only recognised Heronry in North Wilts, and used to contain from forty to sixty nests, but from the same cause as that just mentioned in regard to Crouch Wood, the Herons have been so persecuted and destroyed that but fifteen nests, as I learn from Mr. Herbert Smith, are occupied this year: a sad and rapid falling off indeed, which is very much to be deplored.

3. *Savernake*.—There is in North Wilts a third small Heronry or little colony, the offshoot or nucleus of a Heronry at Savernake. This at present consists of only six nests, as I am informed by my friend Mr. C. Tanner, jun., who kindly took the trouble to count them on my behalf. Until about four years ago, when the high trees thereof were cut down, the Herons occupied a wood called 'Bedwyn Brails,' but when the trees were felled they removed to the pleasure-grounds at Savernake House, and at one time mustered as many as ten or even more nests.

4. *Longleat*.—We have mentioned a Heronry at the seat of the Marquis of Lansdowne, and another at that of the Marquis of Ailesbury; it is remarkable that my next instance is at the seat of the Marquis of Bath: so that each of our three noblemen of highest rank in the county has a Heronry attached to his estate. That at Longleat is on an island on the lake at the back of the house, and I have the authority of Lord Bath for saying that it

is unquestionably in Wiltshire, though very near the borders of Somerset. From 'time immemorial,' up to about 1852, there had always been from one to two nests, the Herons being kept down by a reward of five shillings paid for every Heron killed. But about 1852 the present Marquis discontinued the reward for killing them, and encouraged the Herons; in consequence they very soon began to multiply, and there have been as many as from twenty to thirty nests. But of late years they have again decreased in number, in consequence of the birds being waylaid and killed down the river Wylye, and the number of nests now varies from ten to fifteen.

5. *Fonthill*.—There is a small Heronry situated near the lower end of the lake at Fonthill, the seat of Mr. Alfred Morrison, which generally numbered from ten to twelve nests yearly, as I learn from the head-keeper, or from eight to ten, as Mr. Ernest Baker estimates them. As in all the other Heronries previously described, the numbers here too are diminishing, and last year eight nests only were occupied.

6. *Compton Park*.—Mr. C. Penruddocke has most obligingly communicated to me full particulars of this interesting Heronry, which has been established in some part of Compton Park as far back as the memory of living men can penetrate, and which its owner recollects for more than fifty years, during which time it has, on the whole, neither increased nor diminished. The number of nests varies from fifteen, which appears to be the maximum, to eleven, which seems to be the minimum. This year (1887) there are twelve nests. The name of the covert in which the Heronry is situated is 'Sellwood,' commonly called 'Sillars,' or 'Sellars,' and it is distant about 250 yards from the river Nadder. The nests have been built for the most part in oak trees, but of late years many are found on larch fir-trees, of the age of thirty to thirty-five years, while occasionally they have been built on plane trees and elms in the park itself. Mr. Penruddocke's experience is that five or even six young may generally be reckoned as the produce of each nest; and he has known seventy-five young birds, in favourable seasons, hatched

out in this Heronry. Mr. Penruddocke also adds his valuable testimony, founded on experience, that the Heron, though undoubtedly an occasional consumer of fish, is also a destroyer of some of the worst enemies of the fish; and at a meeting at Salisbury of Conservators of Fisheries in that neighbourhood, he has heard Mr. Marryat—a great fisherman and authority on the subject—defend the Herons from the accusations generally made against them, and declare the compensating benefits they confer.

7. *Longford Castle*.—This is but a small colony, which Lord Radnor does not dignify with the title of Heronry. Still, as a certain number of nests has now been established there for many years, and as there is no large Heronry in the immediate neighbourhood of which it can be considered an offshoot, I submit that it has a right to rank as a Heronry, and I claim it as such. The spot selected for the nests is a clump of the highest trees in the park—viz., some lofty beeches about equi-distant from the Avon and the stream which runs through the Chalk valley, the Ebbe as it is called, perhaps half a mile or so from the water, and in the very middle of the park. I do not know how long this Heronry has existed, but when the Rev. A. P. Morres visited it twelve years ago there were at least ten or a dozen nests. Since that time the keeper says there were always five, or four at the very least, but oftentimes, and of late years, seven or eight nests. But here, too, as we have seen in other Wiltshire colonies, the old birds, wandering off in search of food, are ruthlessly shot, and their numbers are everywhere decreasing.

I have now enumerated all the Heronries which exist in Wiltshire at this present date. But I have several instances to record of their having bred in small parties, 'offshoots,' as I may call them, from the established breeding-places, or 'outlying nurseries,' colonized by a few birds only; and also of their frequenting certain districts more determinedly than as passing visitors.

a. *Easton Piers, or Percy*.—I have the authority of Aubrey ('Natural History of Wilts,' p. 65) for saying that 'Heron bred heretofore (*sc.*, about 1580) at Easton Piers, before the great

oaks were felled down near the Mannour House, and they do still (about 1690) breed in Farleighe Park.' I have made diligent inquiry in both these localities, but in neither can I trace a vestige of a Heron's nest within the memory of living man.

b. Heytesbury.—A small outlying colony, in all probability an offshoot from the Heronry at Longleat, established itself four or five years ago at Heytesbury. This little colony consisted of only two nests, which were carefully protected by the tenant, who also did all in his power to keep their existence a secret, for fear they should be disturbed. The two nests were not close together, but one was on some trees in the water-meadows, and the other in a plantation near the house, believed to have been built in a fir tree. These particulars were most kindly collected for me by Lord Heytesbury.

c. Amesbury.—Two nests were established last year (1886) near the water on the property of Sir Edmund Antrobus, and both hatched out their broods in safety. This year, however, from some unaccountable reason, they are not breeding there, though the keeper has seen the old birds flying out of the wood. One of these nests was on an ash, the other on a beech-tree. For the above interesting information I am indebted to the Rev. A. W. Phelps, Vicar of Amesbury.

d. Herons' Corner, Mildenhall.—The Rev. C. Soames tells me that there is a spot in his parish called 'Herons' Corner,' within the borders of Savernake Forest, but he never heard of any Herons nesting there. It is almost certain, however, that they must have done so at one time, when they gave their name to the locality.

e. Noke Wood, Savernake Forest.—Mr. C. Tanner, jun., informs me that there was a very small offshoot of a Heronry established for four consecutive years in an outlying part of Savernake Forest called 'Noke Wood.' It consisted of two nests only, and it has been deserted some three or four years.

f. The Lawn, Swindon.—I am indebted to Mrs. Ambrose Goddard for the information that Herons very often visit the

ponds on the estate here; and that on one occasion a pair tried to build on some high trees near the water, but they disappeared before the nests were completed, and in all probability one or both of them were shot.

g. Badminton.—To the kindness of Mr. Lowndes, of Castle Combe, and to the courtesy of the Duke of Beaufort, I am indebted for the knowledge of a Heronry which formerly existed at Badminton, in a wood called 'Allengrove,' which, though it adjoins the park, is itself in Wiltshire, for the park fence which divides the park from Allengrove is the boundary between the two counties. Here, in the extreme north-western corner of the county, the Herons used to breed year after year, but the Duke has not known a Heron's nest there now for some years.

h. Erlestoke.—I learn from Mr. G. Watson Taylor that, though Herons have never been known to breed there, some remain all the year round, and roost in Hemming's Wood, in the park, and in the pleasure-grounds, close to the wellhead or pond; and in the summer nine or ten Herons may often be seen circling above Hemming's Wood. This looks extremely like the produce of two nests which have escaped the notice of the keepers, and I should not be surprised to hear that such a colony was established; more especially as Erlestoke is too far from Bowood and Longleat to be so constantly visited by birds belonging to either of these distant Heronries.

i. Estcourt.—A few Herons may generally be seen in this park and the adjoining meadows; and on one occasion, as I am told by Mr. G. Sotheron Estcourt, seven Herons were observed to be staying about the lake for some months. This has a strangely suspicious appearance of a pair of old birds and their five young. Mr. Estcourt also says that Herons are to be found all down the banks of the Avon, in the neighbourhood of Malmsbury and Christian Malford.

k. Christian Malford.—Sir Henry Meux informs me that he often sees Herons at Dauntsey, and that they sometimes roost in the winter in Christian Malford Wood, but that he has never heard of their building there. This is corroborated by the Rev.

A. Law and by the keeper, who says that two Herons only roosted in the wood during the winter before last, and that he has not seen any since, and that they certainly never bred there.

l. Grittleton.—Mr. Algernon Neeld says, ‘Herons are often seen about here and on the stream at Castle Combe, and the upper Avon above Malmesbury, and sometimes they roost in the woods all the winter, but they never breed here.’

m. Charlton.—Lord Suffolk informs me that the Herons infest his trout-water, and that it is only within the last dozen years, since he succeeded in getting up a good stock of trout, that they have taken to visiting him with any regularity. He does not know where they come from, nor where they breed; certainly not at Charlton.

n. Corsham.—Lord Methuen writes me word that, though Herons are often seen at Corsham Court, they *all* come from Bowood, the distance being not much more than five miles as the crow flies. He has never heard of any Herons’ nests nearer Corsham than Bowood.

o. Burderop.—I learn from Mr. Calley that though Burderop is frequently visited by stray Herons, and he is not sure whence they come, there are no nests in the immediate neighbourhood. He has no doubt, however, that if unmolested they would nest at Coate Reservoir, at the end of Burderop Wood.

p. Rodbourne.—Sir R. H. Pollen is sure there is no colony of Herons at or near Rodbourne, though one or two may be occasionally seen near the river there.

q. Ramsbury.—Sir F. Burdett says his Kennet water is occasionally visited by Herons, but not many are seen there. He does not know where they come from, and has never heard of any colony near Ramsbury.

r. Minety.—The Rev. W. Butt writes me word that it is the rarest thing with him to see a Heron in that district, though he is frequently wandering along the banks of the Swill. They are, however, common three or four miles off, visiting the so-called Thames.

s. *Holt*.—I am told by Mr. Medicott that Herons are in the habit of congregating near Holt, and that a farmer of that neighbourhood informed him that sometimes fifty might be seen there together. This is very remarkable, for Holt is at a distance from any Heronry. Mr. A. Mackay, of Holt Manor, observes that they may constantly be seen in the valley between Bradford and Bath.

t. *Baynton*.—Mr. W. Stancomb, junr., reports that though Herons frequently come to the pond in front of the house at Baynton, he thinks they come from Bowood, as their flight is always in that direction. At all events, he knows of no colony nearer than Bowood.

v. *Bulkington*.—I am informed by Colonel Wallington that Herons occasionally come to the mill in this place, and are often shot by the miller, who almost every year sends one to a friend who appreciates the old-fashioned dish.

v. *Wilcot*.—The Rev. C. Soames remarks on the fact that Herons appear in great force between Townsend, at Wilcot, and the canal; and wonders whence they come and where they roost and nest!

w. *Breamore*.—Mr. E. H. Hulse tells me that occasionally he sees a Heron in the water-meadows at Breamore: but these are Dorsetshire and Hampshire birds, which come over the border into Wilts from the Heronries at Mottisfort, the seat of Lady Barker-Mill; and Somerley, the seat of Lord Normanton.

I conclude my account of the Herons of Wiltshire with an anecdote communicated to me by the Rev. A. P. Morres. 'Dr. Humphrey Blackmore, some time since, found a Heron with its beak firmly fixed through a large eel: the eel had twined itself round the Heron's neck so firmly as to strangle it, and the Heron had been unable to extricate its bill. They were both quite dead, and frozen hard.' This is an exact counterpart of a similar case mentioned by Yarrell, to which I refer my readers for a clever vignette illustrating the catastrophe.

144. SQUACCO HERON (*Ardea comata*).

I have the unexceptionable authority of Yarrell for the fact that this beautiful species has been taken in Wiltshire, but no particulars of the capture, the locality, or the date are recorded by him: I presume, however, that he derived his information from Colonel Montagu, who relates that a bird of this species was shot at Boyton, in Wiltshire, by Mr. Lambert, in 1775, and that mention is made in the Minutes of the Linnæan Transactions, vol. iii., that Mr. Lambert presented a drawing of the bird, April 4th, 1797.* It is an Asiatic and African bird: the delicate buff-colour streaked with dark lines of the upper plumage; the pure white of the under parts; the hair-like feathers of the back, whence the specific name *comata*; and the general shape and bearing of the bird, combine to give it an elegance unrivalled even in this graceful family: but it is a very rare bird in the British isles, and its appearance is annually becoming more and more infrequent.

The only locality in which I have met with it in its own haunts was on the causeway which crosses the upper end of the Lake Bourget, at Aix-les-Bains, in the South of France, when driving in company with Mr. H. M. Upcher, a brother member of the B.O.U., an able ornithologist, and notorious for the laudable efforts he made to retain the Great Bustard which visited his estate at Feltwell, in Norfolk, in 1876. We were both equally delighted to watch this rare species, as it sat unconcernedly perched on a pole in the lake, within a short distance of the carriage as we drove by; and when it did take wing it flapped gracefully away with slow easy movements, a true Heron in all its ways and appearance. Canon Tristram found it breeding in large colonies in a dense bed of reeds at Lake Halloula, in North Africa, each nest piled up to a height of three or four feet above the mud, supported on tufts of reeds, and composed of great heaps of weeds and rushes.† Mr. Seebohm, too, fell in with a

* Montagu's Supplement to 'Ornith Dict.' *in loco*.

† *Ibis* for 1860, p. 163.

colony breeding on pollard trees and bushes in the immediate neighbourhood of a swamp on the Lower Danube. By Continental naturalists it is generally known as *A. ralloides*, 'like a rail'—from *rallus*, 'a rail,' and *οἶδος*, appearance (B.O.U.). So in Germany it is *Rallen Reiher*, 'Rail Heron;' but in France *Heron Crabier*, 'Crab-eating Heron;' and in Italy *Scarza ciufetto*, 'Tufted Heron.'

145. LITTLE BITTERN (*Botaurus minutus*).

This is a very rare bird in England, though common enough in France and Germany, and I have met with it on the Simplon Pass in Switzerland: it is a diminutive member of the great Heron family, and a very prettily marked species. I have a record of one mentioned by Montagu as killed in the neighbourhood of Bath in 1789, but whether in Wilts or Somerset there is no evidence to show; but I have information of several undoubted specimens being taken in this county: one killed about 1850 in the parish of Seend, and in the possession of Mr. Taylor, of Baldham Mill, as I was informed by the late Mr. Withers: another shot by Mr. Jervoise's keeper at Britford, near Salisbury, about 1851, in the month of June; for the knowledge of which I am again indebted to my good friend, the Rev. George Powell, rector of Sutton Veny. One, an adult male, killed at Stourton, in 1820, by Jacob Riddick, gamekeeper to Sir R. C. Hoare, as I am informed by Mr. Baker; and one procured at Wilton, by Mr. C. Parham, on September 8th, 1869, as I learn from the Rev. A. P. Morres.

The chief characteristic of the Bitterns, wherein they differ from the true Herons, consists in the plumage of the neck, which, in the hinder part is bare, or scantily clothed with down, but the front and side feathers being long and extending backwards completely cover the naked space; these feathers can also be expanded laterally at will, when the bird assumes a strange appearance, reminding one of the voluminous folds of cravat in fashion in the palmy days of Beau Brummel; the neck is also considerably shorter, and the beak stouter than in the preceding species. The

Little Bittern is common in the south-east of Europe, as well as in Asia and North Africa ; is a migratory bird, of solitary habits, and its usual position when at rest amidst the reeds or aquatic herbage of a marsh is that of sitting upon the whole length of the *tarsus*, with the neck bent and contracted, the head thrown back, and the beak pointing almost perpendicularly upwards.*

In Sweden it is called *Dverg Häger*, or 'Dwarf Heron.' Its note is remarkable, unlike that of any other bird, and both loud and harsh, resembling the barking of a large dog, when heard at a distance, says M. Vieillot ; or like the grunt a pavior gives when dropping his rammer, says the Rev. T. Frere.† In France it is *Heron Blongios* and *Blongios de Suisse* ; in Germany, *Kleiner Reiher* ; and in Portugal *Garça pequena*, 'Little Heron ;' but in Italy, *Sgarza guacco*.

146. BITTERN (*Botaurus stellaris*).

Fifty years ago this species was not uncommon in this country, wherever marsh or swamp or fen invited its approach. My father killed it in Gloucestershire in his sporting days, and my father-in-law, the Rev. T. T. Upwood, shot several in Norfolk, of which one is in my collection. Even then, about 1820, it was beginning to be regarded as a rare bird ; now, however, it is gradually disappearing before the march of agricultural improvements and the reclaiming of waste lands, and bids fair to be very soon exterminated from amongst us. I have notes of its occurrence in many parts of the county, north and south ; and the late Rev. John Ward, Rector of Great Bedwyn, informed me that a specimen taken in that parish exceeded in beauty of plumage any he had ever beheld. One of the finest specimens which I have ever seen was killed at Enford, and was in the hands of Mr. Withers, at Devizes, who was preserving it for Mr. Stratton. On January 23rd, 1875, a notice appeared in the *Field* newspaper that Mr. J. J. Estridge, of Bradford-on-Avon, had killed a fine specimen half a mile from that town, and one hundred yards only from the railway. On January 12th, 1883,

* Selby *in loco*.

† *Zoologist* for 1849, p. 2498.

the Rev. E. Peacock informed me that three weeks previously one was caught while hiding in some brambles by a small stream in one of his fields at Rockfield House, near Frome. This will have been on the extreme borders of the county. And again this year a fine specimen, in good plumage, was sent me for identification by Mr. William Mackay, of Trowbridge, who described it as shot on January 15th, 1887, at Hilperton Marsh, within a mile and a half of Trowbridge. The Rev. A. P. Morres says that in the winter of 1875-76, three were killed on the river Avon in his immediate neighbourhood; and in the same season five more were procured from the neighbouring river, the Test. This is in accordance with Yarrell's statement, that in one year it may be tolerably common, and then for several successive seasons scarcely to be found at all. I have also notices from Lord Nelson of two killed at Trafalgar, the first about 1836, and the last about 1876; of two killed on Fonthill, recorded by Mr. Morrison's keeper; of one, if not two, killed at Longleat, as I am informed by Lord Bath; of one shot in a wood called West Park, near Corston, last winter (1886), by Mr. Chubb, while pheasant-shooting, as I am informed by Mr. Algernon Neeld, and Sir R. H. Pollen; of one shot at Lyneham in 1850, and now in the collection of Major Heneage, at Compton Bassett; and of one shot and preserved at Corsham Court, as I learn from Lord Methuen. It is a very handsome bird, and the mixture of various shades of buff and brown, spotted, speckled and barred in every direction is particularly pleasing. The cry of the Bittern, which is a hoarse, booming sound or bellowing, when heard on a dark night in the lonely retreats which the bird loves, has a startling effect on the hearer, and is strangely weird and unearthly. The Welsh for Bittern is—like most other Welsh names—wonderfully descriptive, viz., *Aderyn-y-bwn*, 'the Bird with the Hollow Sound;' from *bwmp*, 'a hollow sound;' hence probably the English word 'boom,' so generally applied to the noise made by this bird. Our word 'Bittern,' and the French *butor*, are evidently taken from the generic *botaurus*, and thus has been generally thought to be derived (as Professor Skeat observes) from *bos taurus*, from the

note of the bird, which bellows like an ox. The B.O.U. Committee, however, denies that it is so derived. The specific, *stellaris*, 'marked with stars (*stellæ*),' not inaptly describes its plumage; so in Italy it is *Sgarza stellare*. In some countries it takes its name from the reed beds it frequents, as in Germany *Grosse Rohrdrommel*, and in Sweden *Rördrum*; but in Spain it is *Garza mochuelo*, literally 'Red Owl Heron,' and in Portugal *Gallinhola real*, literally 'Royal' or 'Great Woodcock.' Like many other members of this family, it is a solitary bird, and lies concealed in the rank herbage of a swamp during the day, emerging at twilight to hunt for food in the marshes. Its flesh was very highly esteemed when the bird was better known than it is now.

147. NIGHT HERON (*Nycticorax griseus*).

I am indebted to the Rev. E. Duke, of Lake, for information of the occurrence of a single specimen of this bird, which was killed on his property many years ago, and added to the small collection illustrative of the Fauna of the district formed by Mr. Duke's father, and still preserved at Lake House. The Night Heron is but a rare straggler to the British Isles, its home being in the Southern and Eastern parts of Europe; but its range is very extensive, for it has been found in all the quarters of the globe. It is, as its name imparts, a night-feeding species, remaining quietly at rest in the reeds on the margins of streams, or on the tops of high trees, during the day, and as evening comes on seeks its food in the marsh, the meadow, and the river. In Egypt I frequently found it in the palm groves, and have shot it as it flew from some lofty palm when disturbed in its day-dreams on the banks of the Nile. This is a bird which has been and is the subject of much superstitious reverence and fear. In Ancient Egypt it was considered the emblem of Osiris, and as such was venerated, if not worshipped with divine honours. We may see its portrait now, depicted on the walls of the tombs at Thebes, with two long plumes depending from its head. In China it is at this day looked upon with superstitious dread, and is thought to have some connection with evil spirits; and under the name of

Am kong cheow, or 'Bird of Darkness,' is both propitiated and protected. Our great authority on Chinese ornithology, Mr. Swinhoe, has given an admirable account of the breeding of this sacred bird in the fine old banyan trees in the courtyard in front of the great Honam temple at Canton, where it is encouraged and protected, and to his graphic description I would refer my readers.* *Nycticorax* is strictly 'the night raven,' from νύξ + κόραξ; and *griseus*, 'gray' or 'grizzled.' Some of our older ornithologists used to call it the 'Night Raven,' and Bechstein describes it under the name of *Nacht Reiher*; not that it was ever supposed to have any affinity with *Corvus corax*, but simply by way of literal translation of the scientific name. The young bird was for a long time considered a distinct species, and was called *A. Gardeni*, and 'Gardenian Heron,' and 'Spotted Heron,' the plumage of the immature bird being brown, covered with light coloured spots, and resembling in no slight degree the plumage of the immature Spotted Eagle, and of the immature Gannet. In France it is *Bihoreau à manteau noir*; in Italy, *Sgarza nitticora*; in Spain, *Martinete*.

148. WHITE STORK (*Ciconia alba*).

It is very sad that this bird, so ready to be familiar with man, and which may be seen in Holland and Germany building its nest on the roofs of houses, and meeting that encouragement and protection which its confidence deserves, should be scared away from England by the persecution it has met with here. And yet the White Stork is not only harmless, but positively useful, and acts the scavenger to perfection. In Scandinavia, we are informed by Mr. Lloyd† that it is looked upon with a kind of veneration similar to that entertained towards the Swallow and Turtle-dove, because (so the legend runs) it flew over the Redeemer at the Crucifixion, crying in a sympathising tone, '*Styrk, Styrk, Styrk Honom*,' 'Strengthen, strengthen, strengthen Him.' Hence it derived the name of *Stork*, and

* *Ibis* for 1861, pp. 53-56, and for 1863, pp. 423-425.

† 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 390.

it was in remembrance of the affectionate solicitude it evinced on this occasion that the gift was bestowed upon it of bringing peace and happiness to the roof where it was allowed undisturbed to rear its young.

This attribute is also equally assigned to it by the inhabitants of Germany, but whether resulting from a similar legend to that accepted in Sweden, or from some other conceit, I am unable to determine.

It has also been fortunate enough to secure the good-will of the Crescent as well as of the Cross, for in the East it is protected by the Mahommedans; in the first place probably from a recognition of its value in consuming the refuse and garbage of the streets, and since then as a bird of good omen, which it would be not only impious but dangerous to molest; and so its nest may be seen on the mosque towers and other buildings, and its selection of them hailed by the owners with delight, just as in Europe. In some German villages, especially in Bavaria, I have seen an old cart-wheel firmly fixed on the top of a house, and a very tempting site it appeared to be in the eye of the Storks, to uphold the mass of sticks which forms the foundation of the nest.

It is so frequently seen on the Continent by every tourist, and its fearlessness permits such close observation, that it will be needless to describe its appearance. It is migratory, arriving in Europe in the spring, and retiring to Africa, where I have met with it in large flocks, in winter, fishing on the shallows and sand-banks of the Nile. When at rest, it stands upon one leg, with the neck bent backwards, the head resting on the back, and the beak resting on the breast: and when alarmed, it is apt to snap the mandibles of its beak together with a loud clattering noise. I have the authority of Yarrell for stating that an individual of this species has been killed near Salisbury. I have also a newspaper notice of an immature bird, supposed to have flown over from Holland, shot in August, 1789, by Mr. Selfe, as it was seen feeding in a meadow, near Downton; so that a hundred years ago it was considered of sufficient rarity to deserve special notice in print. But the Rev. A. P. Morres is able to

record quite a recent occurrence, as one was shot at Codford by Mr. Cole, of that parish, on a chimney-stack on his premises, on September 5th, 1882, and is now in that gentleman's possession. Our English word 'Stork,' and the German *Storch* and Swedish *Stork*, may perhaps signify *stark*, 'the strong one,' from *στέρεος*, 'firm'; or perhaps 'the tall one,' from the Anglo-Saxon *steale*, 'high'; for 'stork' and 'stalk' appear to have the same derivation. (See Skeat's Dictionary *in loco*.) In France, *Cicogne blanche*; in Italy, *Cicogna bianca*; in Spain, *Cigueña*; in Portugal, *Cegonha*; but the origin of the specific word *ciconia* (which is classical Latin for Stork) is unknown.

149. GLOSSY IBIS (*Ibis falcinellus*).

The long arched beak of this bird, with a blunt rounded tip, at once commands recognition, and its dark brown plumage, glossed with a metallic lustre of green and purple reflections, equally arrests attention. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says that the plumage of a recently-killed specimen is a beautiful shade of shadowy black-green, and that it soon fades, but for some time resembles in its metallic sheen the body of a large fly or beetle.* Moreover, the portion of the head from the beak to the eyes is quite bare of feathers, and the naked skin is of a green colour. It is the only species really known in Europe, for though the celebrated Sacred Ibis (*I. religiosa*) has obtained a place in Mr. Bree's excellent work,† yet the author candidly owns that its right to figure there is extremely doubtful; moreover, it is so rare even in Egypt, that only an occasional straggler, at long intervals, appears in that classic land: and the black and white Ibis ('the Father of the Bills,' as the Arabs expressively term it) must be sought for in Abyssinia, or still nearer the equator. The Glossy Ibis, though certainly an uncommon bird, is not amongst our rarest visitors, as scarcely a year passes without the notice of the occurrence of one or more in different parts of England, the fenny districts of Cambridgeshire, Lincoln and

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 238.

† 'The Birds of Europe not observed in the British Isles,' vol. iv., p. 45.

Norfolk being generally favoured; and I have the authority of the late Rev. George Marsh for stating that a specimen was killed at Whetham near Calne, the residence of the then Rector of Yatesbury, Rev. W. Money, in the year 1825. The hook-shaped beak, which is so striking a feature, and whence it has derived the title of 'Sickle-bill,' enables this bird, which is a true Wader, the better to probe and search in the soft mud where it seeks its prey. It was venerated in Egypt no less than its more distinguished relative, and I brought home the embalmed bodies of these birds both from Memphis and Thebes, some of which are enclosed in red earthenware pots, with their covers still cemented to the top, and having externally a very modern appearance; but if one is opened and examined there is no mistaking the bird within, swathed and bandaged though it has been for 3000 years or more. By some modern ornithologists the 'good old generic name of *Ibis* is discarded, and *Plegadis* substituted in its place; and though the meaning of that word, 'of a sickle,' is appropriate enough, it is but a repetition of the specific name, *falcinellus*, which also means 'a little sickle.' It is the 'Black Curlew' of European sportsmen, and the *Svart Ibis* of Sweden. In North Africa, Canon Tristram found a Glossy Ibis here and there among clouds of Buff-backed and Night Herons, like a black sheep in a flock; and the Arabs, seeing this dark-plumaged stranger among so many white birds, have named it *Mâazet et Mâ*, 'the Devil's Crow.*' Hence it is known in Spain as *Garza diablo*; in France it is simply *Ibis falcinelle*; but in Germany *Sichelschnabliger Nimmersat*, 'Sickle-billed never satisfied;' and in Italy, *Chiurlo*, 'Dolt.' 'Ibis' is said to be a word of Coptic or Egyptian origin (Skeat).

It was our countryman, Colonel Montagu, who made careful investigation into the subject, and unravelled the mystery which then prevailed in regard to the several so-called species of Ibis, and proved that the Bay, the Green, and the Glossy were all one and the same species, but differing in plumage according to sex, season and age.†

* *Ibis* for 1860, p. 78.

† See supplement to Ornith. Dict. *in loco*.

SCOLOPACIDÆ (THE SNIPES).

Many of the species which compose this large family are well known to the sportsman as well as to the epicure. The most observable characteristic of the race is the long and slender round-tipped beak, with which they are enabled to probe the soft earth or mud and extract their prey, which consists of worms and various insects and grubs; for the Snipe family does not live on air, or on nourishment derived by suction from muddy water, as is very often popularly supposed. And yet these birds are in one sense truly designated 'birds of suction,' for their beaks are marvellously formed for the purpose required, by means of an unusual development of highly sensitive nerves to the extreme tip, thus endowing them with an exquisite sense of feeling; while at the same time that member is further provided with a peculiar muscle, which, by the closing or contracting of the upper part of the mandibles, operates so as to expand them at the point, and enables the bird, with the beak still buried in the ground, to seize its prey the moment it is aware of being in contact with it. Thus the delicate sense of touch down to the very point of the beak, and its capability of seizing as in a forceps the worm which it cannot see, renders that admirable organ complete for its purposes, and enables it to serve the place of eyes, nose, tongue, and hand. Hence the name *Scolopacidae* from *σκόλοψ*, 'anything pointed,' or 'a stake'; which well applies to the beaks of all the members of this family. Birds of the Snipe family have also for the most part long and slender legs, large and prominent eyes, and well-developed wings. They are all migrants, and also move from one chosen locality to another, as the frost compels them; for soft damp ground in which they can bore with their sensitive beaks without difficulty is absolutely essential to them.

150. CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*).

This was a common bird on the downs within the memory of many living sportsmen. The late Mr. Butler, of Kennett (from

whom I derived much practical information on the Ornithology of Wilts), told me that he could recollect the time when they were frequently killed here : and others assure me they used to breed regularly in certain districts on the downs. Possibly they may still occasionally do so, as Mr. Im Thurn pointed out in his 'Birds of Marlborough,' showing that they had been reported to breed on the Aldbourne downs, and for which the Rev. A. P. Morres gave corroborative evidence, saying that they had lately nested on the downs within seven miles of Salisbury. Indeed, though I have no positive proof to bring forward, I do not know why this assertion should be questioned, seeing that the habit of the bird is to retire in the breeding season from the coast, and to resort to heathy and mountainous districts ; seeing, too, that *N. arquata* is still occasionally seen on our downs ; and that it did, though not so regularly as *Ædicnemus crepitans*, breed in the more retired districts of our Wiltshire downs.* Mr. Howard Saunders says : 'A few pairs in the breeding season may be scattered through Wilts and Hants,' and he adds, 'It is the most wary of all birds, with the keenest sense of smell and sight, and its shrill scream soon spreads the alarm among other fowl.†' The Marlborough College Natural History Reports mention eggs taken on Aldbourne Down in 1876, and a specimen taken from the grasp of a hawk, by a keeper, in West Woods in the same year, and one killed on Monkton Down in April, 1877. Major Heneage has a specimen which was killed at Compton Bassett in 1881. Lord Nelson possesses one killed at Trafalgar. Lord Heytesbury's keeper has seen it occasionally on the downs in his district ; and Mr. Grant reports one from Coate, near Devizes, in January, 1862 ; another in December of the same year from Bulkington, and one from Upavon in January, 1864. These are all the records I have now before me of the occurrence of single birds in various parts of the county ; but they are only stragglers and by no means regular visitors now. Everybody knows the wild, mourn-

* Compare *Zoologist* for 1877, pp. 38 and 106.

† Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iii., pp. 501-504.

ful whistling cry of the Curlew, as it rises from the marsh or mud-bank on the sea-shore; and equally well known is the peculiar long curved beak with which it is provided. As is the case with so many other birds with beaks of unusual length or shape (*e.g.* the Crossbill, Spoonbill, Avocet, Hoopoe, Shoveller, etc.), the young when hatched have the ordinary short beak of other species, and it is not till they advance towards maturity that their beaks develop, until they attain the shape and dimensions of that of the adult. It is of a shy timid nature, and avoids the proximity of man, and is so wary, vigilant, and withal so quick-sighted, as to be the first to discover and give notice of the presence of an intruder, as every shore-shooter knows to his vexation and cost. And as it seeks out for its retreat the most retired and lonely spots, I conclude that the breaking up and cultivation of our wild downs has been the cause of banishing it from amongst us.

The English word 'Curlew,' and the French *Courlis* are supposed to represent the strangely wild note of this bird. In the B.O.U. list we find that *Numenius* is derived from 'the new moon,' *νέος* + *μήνη*, and has reference to the crescent-shaped beak. *Arquata*, too, has much the same signification, meaning 'bent like a bow,' *arcus*. It was in old time highly esteemed for the table, but my experience of one which I obtained on the Norfolk coast is decidedly the other way. Mr. Cordeaux, who is intimately acquainted with it on the Yorkshire coast, says: 'To modern taste its flesh is bitter and unpalatable; but it is curious, showing the estimation in which it was held by our forefathers, that the price of the 'Kerlew,' as set forth in the Northumberland Household Book (begun in 1512) was twelvepence, an extraordinary sum for that day: Pheasants, Bitterns and Herons being valued at the same price, while such modern delicacies as the Woodcock and Teal were fixed at 1d. and 1½d., and Mallards and Partridges at 2d. each.* I conclude this account of the Curlew with some remarks on it by Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, whose keen observation is only equalled by his graphic descrip-

* 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 109.

tion of the birds of which he writes : 'The bill of a Curlew is a mere bundle of delicate nerves of the most sensitive order enclosed in a thin skin : by reason of this tender soft bill it feels the effect of frost sooner than any other bird. Their bill being adapted for feeding on soft ground only accounts for their preference for the mud of estuaries and harbours, and for their seeking the oozy flats just uncovered by the tide. But how Curlews can tell from inland fields, far from and out of sight of the tide, the exact moment to make for the shore, is more than I can guess at. But they are more regular in repairing to their haunts than any other birds. To the minute they will desert the moors and meadows to leave for the coast : and they will arrive just as the ooze is sufficiently uncovered to enable them to get their food whilst wading. I have watched them, several miles from the tide, cease feeding, call to one another, collect, and then point for the sea, and this, too, at the very moment I knew the shallows must be nearly exposed. Spring tides they will hit off exactly, never late, always on the spot just as the banks begin to show. They may at these times be seen travelling in long strings to their favourite haunts.* In Continental languages it bears the title of 'Great,' in reference to its congener the 'Whimbrel,' next to be mentioned. Thus in France it is *Grand Courlis cendré*; in Germany, *Grosse Brachvogel*, 'Great Fallow-Bird'; in Italy, *Chiurlo maggiore*; in Spain, *Chorlito real*; in Portugal, *Maçarico real*; in Sweden, *Stor-Spof*.

151. WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*.)

Doubtless this bird is often confounded with the preceding, to which it bears a very close resemblance in all points, and from which it differs in little else than in size. It is about one-third less than its congener, and hence has derived the names of Half-Curlew and Jack-Curlew. The first instance I adduce of its occurrence in Wilts is the specimen in the Rev. George Marsh's collection, which was obtained in his own parish in 1838, killed in Sutton Mead, where it had been observed alone for some time.

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 232-237.

Lord Nelson possesses a specimen killed at Trafalgar. Mr. Grant records a pair shot at Swindon in April, 1865, one at Overton in May, 1873, and one at Enford by Mr. Sargent in May, 1882. Then in 1876 a flock of six was seen at Berwick Bassett on May 13th, and one of these was shot by a labourer who was scaring birds. It was an adult male, in very fair plumage, and extremely fat: its gizzard contained the remains of earthworms with a blade or two of grass, and a few small stones; all of which particulars were recorded in the *Zoologist*.* Since that date Mr. Swayne, of Wilton, in a letter dated November 14th, 1883, informed me that about the middle of October Lord Pembroke shot a Whimbrel on the hill above Butteridge, and said that he had seen four or five fly over his head the previous year in the meadows just out of shot, but, except that they looked too small, he thought they were Stone Curlews, of which there are generally some about the hill, and several of which Mr. Swayne has seen killed. The specific name, *phæopus*, means 'dusky-foot,' from *φαλος*, 'dusky,' and *πούς*, 'a foot,' and marks one point in which it differs from its larger congener, whose feet are light blue. Mr. Cecil Smith says that they are called by the fishermen on the Somerset coast 'Young Curlews'; and Mr. Knox that in Sussex they are locally designated 'Titterels,' from the trilling note which they utter while on the wing. Elsewhere they are known as the 'May Bird,' because they arrive on migration so regularly in that month. These, too, are the genuine 'Seven Whistlers,' a term which is now applied to several other species, but belongs by right to the Whimbrel alone, whose whistle is supposed to be repeated just seven times. Mr. Cordeaux gives the 'Knot Curlew' as one of its many names in Yorkshire, and adds: They are very partial to washing and bathing; coming down to the tide edge each day and wading out breast deep, they scatter the water with their wings in sparkling showers over their backs and bodies. After the bath they stand on the fore-shore, gently fanning their wings to and fro, or preening and arranging their plumage. When migrating they advance at an

* For 1876, 2nd series, p. 5166.

immense height, generally in line, one leading, the rest following, not directly, but *en échelon*, and are constantly repeating their call-note.* In France it is *Le petit Courlis* or *Courlis Courlieu*; in Germany, *Regen Brachvogel*; in Italy, *Chiurlo minore*; in Spain, *Zarapito*; in Portugal, *Maçarico*; and in Sweden, *Små-Spof*.

152. REDSHANK (*Totanus calidris*).

This species is thoroughly well known on the coast, and little beloved by the shore-shooter, for its wary eye is the first to detect the intruder, and its shrill note of alarm, as it hurries off on rapid wing, puts every bird in the marsh on the alert. So well known is this its regular habit in every country it frequents, that in Greece it is nicknamed *μάρτυρος*, or the 'Tell-tale,' and in Sweden *Tolk*, or the 'Interpreter.' Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, indeed, says that this is 'not from timidity, for it will continue its search for food within a few yards of your punt, but from pure restlessness of disposition, which never allows it to remain long in one spot; and on the wing it always calls loudly, whether near or far, and whether frightened or unsuspecting.† I must, however, own that this is contrary to my experience, for I always found it to be the most timid and the first to take alarm of all the birds on the shore; and, indeed, that such is its general character the nicknames mentioned above sufficiently prove. One writer has observed that he was much struck with the curious manner in which Redshanks dart their bill into the sand nearly its whole length, by jumping up and thus giving it a sort of impetus, by the weight of their bodies pressing it downwards. It is a bird of erect, somewhat martial bearing, and used to be known in England, according to Bewick and others, as the 'Red-legged Horseman,' and in France, according to Temminck, as *Chevalier gambette*, and, according to Cuvier, as *Le grand Chevalier au pieds rouges*. By Italian authors it is described as *Gambetta*, which signifies a 'small thin leg,' and

* 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 111.

† 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 239.

by old British writers, Latham and others, it was known as *Tringa gambetta*. The meaning of *calidris* is unknown, but it is as old as the time of Aristotle, who designated *some* speckled water-bird under this name, and it was applied by Linnæus to the Redshank, which it is to be hoped will retain it to the end of time. This species seldom comes far inland except in the breeding season, and I have but two instances of its occurrence in Wiltshire, both communicated to me by Mr. Grant, who received the two specimens in the flesh, the one on May 26th, 1865, the other in September, 1868, both, strangely enough, from the same locality, Whitley, near Melksham. In addition to the names mentioned above, it is known in Germany as *Rothfussiger Wasserläufer*, 'Red-Footed Water-Runner;' in Sweden as *Rödbent Snäppa*; and in Portugal as *Chalvrêta*.

153. GREEN SANDPIPER (*Totanus ochropus*).

This and the following species seem interlopers in the midst of the Snipe family, and scarcely deserve to be classed with them, for their beaks are neither so long nor so sensitive, and they seek their food on the surface as much as below the mud. In other respects they are closely allied to the other members of the family. This is a far more common bird in Wiltshire than many suppose. It has been shot by the late Rev. G. Marsh in the water-meadows at Salisbury in 1833: and the Rev. A. P. Morres, who lives in a locality far more suited to its requirements than that which I inhabit, says they are almost always to be found in the water-meadows near Salisbury; indeed, he has seen them there in every month of the year, with the exception of June. Mr. W. Wyndham writes that it is common at Dinton; and Lord Heytesbury that a specimen was killed by one of his grandsons in 1884. In North Wilts I learn that one was seen at Littlecote in May, 1876, and Mr. Grant furnishes me with a goodly list of sixteen which have passed through his hands for preservation, having been taken within a radius of ten or twelve miles of Devizes. It does not remain on the sea-coast

when it reaches our island in its migrations, but proceeds at once to the rivers and streams of the interior. I have met with it in great abundance in Egypt in winter, and I have seen it in summer in its breeding haunts in Norway, and have occasionally met with it in the creeks of the Wash on the coast of Norfolk. When disturbed, it will hurry away with a shrill whistle, flying low, and skimming over the surface of the water, and generally following accurately all the bends and angles of the stream. We have the excellent authority of Dr. Kruper in Pomerania, and that of Herr Bädeker and Mr. Wainwright in Norway, that this bird, contrary to expectation, will occasionally, if not generally, lay its eggs in the old nests of fieldfares or other tree-building birds.* This, as well as the Common Sandpiper, and some other members of the same family, is frequently dubbed the 'Summer Snipe.' Its scientific name, *ochropus*, signifies 'with pale yellow feet,' from *ὀχρός*, 'pale yellow,' and *πούς*, 'a foot'; but this is singularly in opposition to the fact, for the feet are very dark gray or nearly black, with a green tinge. Some modern ornithologists remove it from the genus *Totanus* and call it *Helodromas*, which signifies 'Marsh Runner,' and is appropriate enough. It is also called the 'Whistling Sandpiper,' from its shrill note, said by the Rev. R. Lubbock, in his 'Fauna of Norfolk,' to be probably the loudest note for its size of any of our fen birds. In France it is *Chevalier cul-blanc*, 'White-tailed Horseman;' in Germany, *Punktierte Strandläufer*; in Italy, *Culbianco*; in Sweden, *Grä-bent Snäppa*.

154. WOOD SANDPIPER (*Totanus glareola*).

This is but an occasional straggler to the British Isles, so that its occurrence in Wiltshire was hardly to be expected; and, indeed, I have but one instance of its being taken within the borders of our county, and that was at the hands of Mr. W. Macey, of Lavington, on January 13th, 1879, as I am informed by Mr. Grant. It is somewhat smaller than the Green Sandpiper,

* See Canon Tristram in *Ibis* for 1860, p. 169, and Mr. Simpson in same vol., p. 390.

with which it is often confounded, and with which it was always supposed to be identical, until our countryman Montagu pointed out wherein it differed; but though similar to that bird in plumage, in general habits, and especially when breeding, it more closely resembles the Redshank. Its true home is in Central Asia and Central Europe, where it frequents thickets of alder and willow in marshy ground, and is common in winter throughout the Mediterranean, including the northern shores of Africa. The specific name *glareola*, which is a diminutive from *glarea*, 'gravel,' would imply that it haunts gravelly places, but such appears to be by no means characteristic of this species. It is the *Tringa grallatoris* and 'Long-legged Sandpiper' of Montagu, and, indeed, its length of leg seems disproportionate to the size of its body. The English specific name, 'Wood Sandpiper,' as well as the French *Chevalier Sylvain* and the German *Wald Strandläufer*, all point to the peculiar haunts it loves, wherein it differs from all its congeners. In Sweden it is known as *Grön-bent Snäppa*.

155. COMMON SANDPIPER (*Totanus hypoleucos*).

This is a far more common species than *T. ochropus*, as its trivial name implies, and may be frequently met with in summer, not only on the banks of our streams, but even occasionally on our downs. The Rev. G. Marsh told me that it is especially abundant in the neighbourhood of Salisbury; and that is thoroughly confirmed by the Rev. A. P. Morres, who sees them every summer there. Sometimes, but only very seldom, I have met with them in the water-meadows in the parish of Yatesbury. It is an elegant little bird, and all its movements are graceful and pleasing: whether on the wing, as it skims over the surface of the water with a shrill piping whistle, or on foot, as, perched on a stone, it continually moves its tail up and down, or runs with great rapidity by the margin of the stream. It is also said to be able to dive as well as swim on emergency, and, in short, is a bird of most active habits and most lively motions. Its note, too, is remarkably loud for its size. To most people it is known

under the name of 'Summer Snipe.' The specific name, *hypoleucos*, 'white underneath,' though not distinctive, tells accurately of the pure unspotted white of the plumage on the under surface of the body. I found this species most abundant in Egypt during the winter, and met with it at every turn of the river; and not less common in Norway during the summer, where it established itself in its breeding quarters on every river and stream, and where I have taken the young just out of the shell, and marvelled at its size in comparison with its parents. But the *Drill Snäppa*, as it is there called, is very abundant all over Scandinavia. By the Lapps it is called *Skillili*, and they have a saying as to the disproportionate size of the egg to the bird which may be thus rendered:

' Skillili, Skillili ! I carry, I carry
An egg large as that of a Ripa,
So that my tail cocks in the air.'

In like manner as the Dunlin is commonly said in Iceland to guard and tend the Golden Plover, so on the islands of the Baltic Sea the Common Sandpiper is reported to act the part of a servant or guardian towards the Redshank. Now, the Redshank (*T. calidris*) is known to the fishermen as *Tolk*, or 'Interpreter,' because of its shrill cry, whereby it warns other birds of the coming of the fowler, for which reason the Common Sandpiper is there often designated *Tolka-piga*, or 'Handmaid to the Interpreter.' In France it is *Chevalier guignette*; in Germany, *Trillender Strandläufer*; and in Italy, *Piovanello*.

156. GREENSHANK (*Totanus glottis*).

This is a rare bird in Wiltshire. The Rev. A. P. Morres had the good fortune in 1865 to see three together on two consecutive days in some water-meadows near Salisbury, where they had been noticed to have taken up their quarters, and to have occupied the same spot for some four or five days previously. They were very wild, and would not admit of too near approach. It is not usual to see three in company, for when found in this country it is almost always a single bird that is

found alone. Another instance of its occurrence in Wiltshire was communicated to me by the Rev. A. W. Phelps, who informed me that a specimen had been killed from the 'Diamond,' opposite the Abbey at Amesbury, by Sir E. Antrobus' keeper, on the August Bank Holiday of last year (1886). A third passed through the hands of Mr. Grant, which was shot at Foxhanger in August, 1870. A fourth, as I am told by Lord Methuen, was shot near the waters at Corsham Court, and is preserved there. Mr. Rawlence possesses a specimen killed at Gombledon, near Salisbury; and Lord Heytesbury called my attention to an instance of which the Rev. G. Powell had previously informed me, which had been observed on the 27th of August, 1868, by Mr. William Swayne, in the Knook meadows in the parish of Heytesbury, and after flushing it several times, that gentleman contrived to get a shot at it as it rose from some rushes and killed it. It appeared to have been wearied by previous long flight; and my informant, who examined the bird carefully, believes it to have been a young bird and a hen. The Green-shank, though a scarce bird in England, does make its appearance almost every year as a straggler, and is generally observed during the spring or autumn migrations, either on its way to or its return from its breeding-places in the far north. Hence the specimen last mentioned was undoubtedly on its journey southwards when it halted to rest in the parish of Heytesbury. Like many others of its congeners, it will on occasions perch on the top of a tall tree, to the no small astonishment of the observer, who is ignorant of this unlooked-for habit in a true wader. Its beak is, though very slightly, yet perceptibly curved upwards. In connection with this upturned beak, Mr. Harting remarked a peculiarity in its manner of feeding, for he noticed that it placed the bill upon the surface, the under mandible almost parallel with the mud, and as it advanced scooped from side to side after the fashion of the Avocet, leaving a curious zigzag line impressed upon the ooze.* Its food consists of small molluscs, worms, beetles, and insects of various kinds. Our English word

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 181.

'Greenshank' indicates at once the grayish-green colour of the legs, which distinguishes it from the Redshank. Its scientific name *glottis*, and in Swedish *Glutt Snäppa*, signify the bird 'with a tongue;' so the French call it *Aboyeur*, 'the Barker,' for it is most vociferous, and its loud shrill note, with which it rises when disturbed, alarms all other birds in the fen. In Germany it is *Grünfussiger Wasserläufer*, and in Italy *Pantana verderello*.

157. BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa rufa*).

Common though it is on the coast, I have only one instance of the occurrence of this bird in Wilts, and that was a specimen shot in the neighbourhood of Marlborough; and as it puzzled its captors, it was sent to me to name on November 6th, 1881, when it was of course in winter plumage. In Sweden it rejoices in a name almost as long as its beak, being known as *Rost-röd Lång Näbba*, or 'Rust-red Long-Bill,' but provincially *Augusti Snappa*, because it appears in August. Its scientific name, *Limosa*, meaning 'muddy,' marks the localities it prefers, and here it will, with its long semi-flexible bill, probe the muddy deposit on the banks and mouths of rivers, wading deep in the water, immersing the head at intervals, and searching the ooze beneath.* When disturbed and raised on the wing, the Red Godwit will send forth a cry not unlike the bleat of a goat, whence, I suppose, the name *ægocephala* bestowed on it by old writers, for in no other respect assuredly does it bear any resemblance to the head of a goat. In consequence of their great length of beak, they are often called 'Sea Woodcocks,' and as they arrive on the east coast pretty regularly on or about May 12th, that day is known to the fen men as 'Godwit-day,' a plain proof, if any were wanting, how numerous they once were in the fen districts of England. Harting says Godwits come with an east wind, and are more plentiful in mild than in severe winters; he also adds, in their winter dress they greatly resemble Whimbrel, from which, however, they may be distinguished at a distance by their note, which sounds like

* Selby's 'Illustrations of British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 94.

*lou-ey, lou-ey.** Professor Skeat derives our English word 'Godwit' from the Anglo-Saxon *god*, 'good,' and *wiht* 'creature,' the goodness of the creature having reference, I conclude, to its edible qualities. In France it is *Barge rousse*; in Germany, *Rostbrauner Wasserläufer*; in Portugal, *Maçarico gallego*.

158. RUFF (*Machetes pugnax*).

This is truly a fen bird, and belongs of right to the eastern counties, from which, however, the draining of the fens and the rage for reclaiming waste land have nearly succeeded in banishing it. But I am glad to hail it as a straggler to our county, for it is extremely handsome, and withal a very interesting species. Two instances have come to my knowledge of its occurrence in Wiltshire, one killed by a farmer in the neighbourhood of Wootton Bassett, about 1850; the other taken in the immediate neighbourhood of Salisbury in 1828. The striking feature of the bird is the strange frill or ruff of feathers which, together with conspicuous auricular plumes, surrounds the neck of the male bird in his breeding plumage, and which when raised form a shield round the head, reminding one of the costume of the worthies, with whose portraits we are familiar, of the time of Elizabeth. At that season, so much do they vary in colour of plumage that it is scarcely possible to find two alike; the ruffs which these birds assume being of all shades, from white, yellow, chestnut, brown, or a mixture of any or all of these colours, to pure black. At all other seasons of the year, they are of comparatively sober hue, and more nearly resemble the females, which are called *Reeves*.

These birds are polygamous, unlike all the rest of the Snipe family; and, like the Capercaillie and Blackcock, select a dry hillock in the breeding season on which to 'hill,' as it is termed, or take their stand in defiance of all rivals. And here these magnificently bedizened Lotharios strut about in their pride of dress, and proclaim aloud their readiness to combat all opponents, and challenge such to fight for possession of the somewhat dowdy-looking females assembled around. Indeed, they are most ex-

° 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 184.

ceedingly pugnacious; no gamecock could be more combative, and hence they derive both their generic and specific names, *Machetes*, signifying 'warrior,' from *μαχητής*, and *pugnax*, 'fond of fighting,' from *pugna*. So in France it is *Bécasseau combattant*; in Germany *Streitstrandläufer*; in Italy, *Gambetta scherzosa*, or 'Playing Horseman,' in reference to the *lek*, or 'hill'; and *Combattente*, in reference to its pugnacity; in Spain it is *Combatiante*, and in Sweden *Brus-hane*. The Rev. R. Lubbock says that when the 'hill' is over the males seem to be much inconvenienced by the collar of long feathers which obstructs their flight, rendering it slow and laboured; but, relieved of this by the autumn moult, their flight becomes powerful and glancing, like that of the female. No birds were in old time more highly esteemed by epicures than the Ruffs; consequently the price they fetched was very remunerative, and they were caught in nets in great numbers and fattened on bread and milk, hempseed, boiled wheat, and sugar. But the method of killing them when fat enough for the table, though as quick and certain as by the guillotine, seems to us barbarous enough, for it was the custom to cut off their heads with a pair of scissors, in order that the blood might more readily be discharged, and then they were dressed like woodcock.*

159. WOODCOCK (*Scolopax rusticola*).

I need scarcely assert that this is a winter migrant to our county, though I fear it is becoming less abundant every year. A few pairs undoubtedly remain in England to breed in summer, and a nest was found at Winterslow in 1830, but the larger part retire to more northern and more secluded localities. It loves open glades, and moist ground in woods, and is not therefore often seen in the down districts. Occasionally, as I learnt from Mr. Stratton, of Gore Cross, as well as from the late Mr. William Tanner, of Rockley, it is to be met with in our more exposed covers on the hills. But the moister climate of Ireland seems to have attractions for the Woodcocks which this country does not hold out, for we learn from Mr. Knox's admirable book that

* Cordeaux's 'Birds of the Humber,' p. 121.

'forty couple is frequently the result of one day's sport in the Emerald Isle,'* and Sir R. Payne-Gallwey speaks of even a larger bag; while in 1881—an exceptional year for abundance of Woodcock—a thousand head a week for three weeks were forwarded to London by one dealer only; and over five thousand were brought into a small town in County Clare during the three weeks' frost of January of that year. And yet this is as nothing compared to the immense quantities which are obtained in the evergreen woods and swamps of the Greek coast and Ionian Islands, as we may gather from Lord Lilford's graphic account in the *Ibis*.† The Woodcock is a nocturnal feeder, as might be inferred from its immense, full, dark, bright, and very prominent eyes, which are also placed very far back in, and nearly on a level with the crown of, the head, and give the bird a singular staring appearance. That the eyes are so placed is doubtless to avoid their contact with mud and wet, as well as to see while they plunge their bills, nearly forehead deep, while in the act of feeding. Unlike its congeners, it seeks the retirement of woods during the day, only emerging at twilight or dusk to its feeding-places in swampy ground. Its flight is perfectly noiseless, and very rapid, and it is marvellous how quickly and accurately it will thread its way through the thick branches of the trees, and very soon it will close its wings, and suddenly drop into any tempting cover, and then run to shelter into any rank grass or thick underwood it can find. St. John observes that its flight in the evening is rapid and steady, instead of being uncertain and owl-like, as it is often in bright sunshine;‡ and Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, 'that if flushed when a hurricane is blowing, its immense powers of wing (unrivalled almost) will carry it along in any direction as if it was merely a summer zephyr.§ It is a solitary bird, and seldom associates with its fellows. Its plumage is peculiarly rich, of a deep brown

* 'Game Birds and Wild Fowl,' p. 50.

† *Ibis* for 1860, vol. ii., pp. 340-342. See also Thompson's 'Natural History of Ireland,' vol. ii., p. 242.

‡ 'Highland Sports,' p. 220.

§ 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 16, 218-225.

colour, barred and spotted, and crossed with black or very dark brown. Woodcocks frequently arrive on the east coast in the autumn migration, very much exhausted, and will drop immediately on reaching land in the nearest available cover, or even at the base of the rocks on the shore. It is curious how they always seem to arrive two or three days after the Golden Crested Wren, hence dubbed the 'Woodcock Pilot.*' Gilbert White has been censured for refusing to credit what he called the improbable story of the naturalist Scopoli as to the Woodcock, when alarmed for the safety of its young, carrying them off in its beak, '*pullos rostro portat fugiens ab hoste;*' for he considered the long and unwieldy beak of that bird very ill adapted for such a purpose. But in truth our good old English naturalist was quite right in his opinion, for though the Woodcock does, beyond question, remove its young when in danger, it is not with the beak, but either with the feet, grasping the young bird in its claws, as an owl will carry off a mouse, or else supporting it with both feet and bill, which that bird could well do, as it always flies with bill pointed downwards to the earth, or else pressed between the thighs. This has been witnessed over and over again of late years, and for instances and further particulars on this very interesting subject I refer to the pages of Bewick, Yarrell, Lloyd, St. John, Stevenson, Harting, Howard Saunders, and, above all, Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey. In Sweden it is called *Mor-kulla*, or 'Moor-maid,' and it is commonly supposed there that there are two species, the Common and the 'Stone Woodcock,' the latter known in Germany as the *Stein-Schneppe*, and described as of darker colour, and as nearly one-third less in size than the other. But it would appear that this divergence is only attributable to the difference of sex, the male bird, as Mr. Cecil Smith has pointed out, being *much* smaller than the female. Indeed, Yarrell says a young male shot in October will sometimes weigh only 7 oz., while an old female will probably weigh as much as 14 or 15 oz. It is only of late years that it has been known to breed in England, but now that attention has

* Cordeaux's 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 136.

been called to it, there are few counties in England which cannot boast of a Woodcock's nest. In Wiltshire I learn from Mr. C. Penruddocke that its nest is occasionally found in the woods at Compton; from the Rev. S. L. Sainsbury, Rector of Beckington, that it breeds in some of the covers at Longleat; and I hear that it is strongly suspected to breed within the precincts of Savernake Forest, though I have no positive information on this point. The specific name *rusticola* is a diminutive, meaning 'belonging to the country' (B.O.U.). In France it is *La Bécasse*; in Germany, *Wald Schneppe*, 'Wood Snipe'; in Italy, *Beccaccia*; in Spain, *Gallineta*, and in some districts *Chocha*; in Portugal, *Gallinhola*.

160. GREAT SNIPE (*Scolopax major*).

I have little doubt that this species is often confused with its commoner relative, and mistaken for a large specimen of *S. gallinago*; while fine individuals of that bird have undoubtedly in their turn equally been hailed as *S. major*. Since, however, the attention of naturalists has been directed to the points in which these species differ, the Great Snipe is found to be sparingly scattered over the country every autumn; and Wiltshire is one of the counties named by Montagu in which it had then been observed. The late Rev. G. Marsh reported that one was killed in Winterslow Wood in 1831, and he had himself seen a specimen in Christian Malford, though he was not able to obtain it. The Rev. George Powell tells me of one killed in South Wilts in 1854, and of another killed by his brother at Hurdcott, on the 25th September, 1868; and the Rev. A. P. Morres mentions one killed at Pewsey on September 23rd of the same year, which Mr. Grant, who preserved it, tells me weighed $7\frac{3}{4}$ oz. Another killed near Hungerford in October, 1874, is recorded by Mr. Grant.

In 1868, from some unexplained cause, these birds were extraordinarily numerous in many parts of England: and I have notices of one killed on Salisbury Plain, another at Milton, near Pewsey, and of several others on the borders of the county.

It is often called the 'Solitary' Snipe, as it was supposed, though it seems erroneously, to shun the society of its fellows. It is also called the 'Double' Snipe, from its size; the 'Silent' Snipe, from its uttering no cry as it rises on the wing; and the 'Meadow' Snipe, from its habit of frequenting fields of long coarse grass, whence it is also designated by the Germans *Wiesen Schnepfe*. It is rarely seen in England but in the autumn: in summer I have met with it in Norway, where it retires to breed on the vast wild fields of that thinly populated country. The principal points wherein it differs from the Common Snipe are its greater size and heavier form; its smaller and shorter beak; its stouter and shorter legs; and the under-plumage invariably barred with brown and white, which in the commoner species is pure white. The eye, too, is placed very high in the head, and it flies more like a Woodcock than a Snipe, more heavily and sluggishly, and without those turns and twists for which the latter is notorious. It also prefers drier situations than its congeners, the heather-covered hillside or the rough grass of a sheltered bank being favourite haunts. When on the wing, it spreads its tail like a fan. In France it is *Grande ou Double Bécassine*; in Germany, *Mittelschneppe*; in Italy, *Beccacino maggiore*; in Portugal, *Narseja grande*; and in Sweden, *Dubbel Beckasin*.

Like the Ruffs and some other species described above, Great Snipes have their *leks*, or playing grounds, wherein the males strut and posture, droop their wings, spread their tails, swell out their feathers, and do battle for the admiration and approbation of the other sex. The English word 'Snipe' is undoubtedly derived from *neb*, the Anglo-Saxon for a 'bird's beak,' and certainly that is the most noticeable feature in all the members of this family.

161. COMMON SNIPE (*Scolopax gallinago*).

It is unquestionable that these birds, once so numerous here in winter, are gradually becoming perceptibly scarcer every year. This may be attributed to the general increase of draining, and the reclaiming of fens and marshes; so that, like the Red Indian

in America, the Snipe will soon be improved off the face of this country by the rapid advance of high farming. In Wiltshire and the more southern parts of England it is a true migrant, arriving in the autumn and departing in the spring; but in more northern counties many pairs remain annually to breed in the moors or fens. The shrill alarm cry of this bird, and its peculiar zigzag flight, are too well known to require comment. I may mention, however, that in addition to the sharp scream with which we are all familiar in the winter, it makes a drumming or bleating noise in the breeding season, and hence is called by the French *Chèvre volant*, and in several other languages words equivalent to the 'Air-goat,' or the 'Kid of the Air.' More poetically it is called in Germany *Himmel ziege*, or 'Goat of the Heavens'; and by many modern authors *Capella cœlestis*; and in some parts of England 'Heather Bleater' and 'Moor Lamb,' the bleating sound being described in Norfolk as 'lambing,' because of its similarity to the bleating of lambs.* But in Norway, where this peculiar note is supposed to resemble the neighing of a horse, it has obtained the appellation of *Skodde-Föll*, or 'Horse of the Mist'; and in some parts of *Hors-Gök*, or 'Horse Cuckoo,' for, in that land of legends, this bird is indeed believed to have at one period been a veritable steed.† It has been much disputed whether this bleating or humming proceeds from the mouth or from the motion of the wings. It seems, however, unquestionable that it only occurs when the bird is descending rapidly with wings shivering or violently agitated. It is also to be noted that rooks, peewits, ring-doves, and black-headed gulls all occasionally produce a loud humming sound with the wings.‡ Mr. Mitchell, in his admirable little book on the 'Birds of Lancashire,' says Snipes are amongst the earliest risers in the morning, and may often be heard drumming before daylight.§

* Christopher Davies' 'Norfolk Broads and Rivers,' p. 13.

† For the legend referred to, see Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 406.

‡ See Harting on this subject in 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 190; his edition of 'White's Selborne,' p. 119; and in *Zoologist* for 1881, pp. 198-200.

§ 'Birds of Lancashire,' p. 186.

In France it is *Bécassine ordinaire*; in Germany, *Heerschneppe*; in Italy, *Beccacino reale*; in Sweden, *Enkel Beckasin*, 'Single Snipe'; in Spain, *Agachadiza*; in Portugal, *Narseja ordinaria*. To distinguish it from the succeeding species, it is in England sometimes called the 'Whole' Snipe.

162. JACK SNIFE (*Scolopax gallinula*).

This diminutive species might, with much more reason, be denominated 'Solitary' than its largest relative, inasmuch as it is almost always found alone. 'He is rarely seen' (says Sir R. Payne-Gallwey) 'careering in a storm; not he: he sticks like a limpet to the lee of a "tuft," his little body crouched warm and low in the herbage. If disturbed, he will make for another shelter at a short distance, and even return to the same.* But it utters no cry when it rises from the ground; hence known in Sweden as *Stum Beckasin*, or 'Mute Snipe'; and it lies so close that you may almost tread upon it before it will move, and, as Harting says, really appears to be so deaf that the French name for it, *Bécassine sourde*, is not an inappropriate one. When at rest, the head reclines upon the back, between the shoulders, giving the bird the appearance of having no neck: the bill rests on the ground in front, the breast touches the ground, and the *tarsus* and *tibia* touch, and are parallel. When, however, it is roused, the bird rises so suddenly as to cause an involuntary start on the part of the observer,† but it does not fly with such twists as does the preceding; and it invariably departs to northern countries for breeding purposes. In general habits, feeding and nesting, the Snipes are all alike. It is often called the 'Half' Snipe, in allusion to its size; and is said to have derived the name of *Jack Snipe* from an old erroneous supposition that it was the male of the 'Common Snipe. The provincial names of these three species accurately describe their relative size; the Jack or *Half Snipe* weighing about two ounces; the Common, *Whole*, or *Full Snipe* four ounces; and the Great or *Double Snipe* eight ounces.

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 17.

† 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 194.

In Germany it is *Moorschnepper*, 'Fen Snipe'; in Sweden, *Half-enkel Beckasin*, 'Half-single Snipe'; in Italy, *Beccacino minore*; in Spain, *Agachadera*; and in Portugal, *Narseja gallega*; and here I may observe that *gallega*, as a diminutive, is given to several other species, as the smallest woodpecker, the short-toed lark, the little bittern, etc.; probably because the servants and porters of Portugal, coming from Galicia (one of the northern provinces of Spain), as hewers of wood and drawers of water, have come to be looked on as inferiors, and hence *gallego* is a term of inferiority; just as *real*, 'royal,' is on the contrary applied to species of a large size.

It is called *gallinula*, or 'the chicken,' I suppose, as if it must, from its diminutive size, be the young of a larger species! But if the bird is small, its eggs are large: perhaps of greater bulk, relatively to the size of the bird, than any others in the British list; for whereas the Jack Snipe weighs two ounces, its four eggs weigh more than an ounce and a half.

163. CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Tringa subarquata*).

This is sometimes known as the 'Pigmy Curlew,' the specific name, *subarquata*, having also the meaning of 'a little like a Curlew;'^{*} and the beak of this pretty little bird, gently curved downwards, reminds one immediately of *Numenius arquata*, of which it looks like a miniature edition. It has often been confused with the Dunlin, which in general appearance it much resembles; moreover, it is not nearly so rare a visitor to our shores as was once supposed, a considerable number being noticed every year. This is especially the case in the south-western extremity of England, and the late Mr. Rodd, of Penzance, pointed out to Professor Newton and myself, when we were on an excursion through Cornwall, several specimens in his most interesting collection. The only instance I have of its occurrence in Wiltshire I give on the authority of my friend, Colonel Ward, who informed me that it was picked up alive by a labourer on Chip-

^{*} B.O.U. 'List of British Birds,' p. 170.

penham Bridge, and was taken to Mr. Dangerfield, bird-preserved of that town, who at once wrote to Colonel Ward to come and see it, which that gentleman did, and secured it for his own collection. This was in July, 1869, when it should have been breeding in more northern latitudes; but, strange to say, several of the occurrences recorded in England bear the date of July. Hitherto this species has contrived to elude the sharp eyes of ornithologists when searching for its nest, and its eggs have never been discovered, and are quite unknown to science. Mr. Seebohm, indeed, confidently hoped to add this to the other laurels he gained in his famous journey to Siberia, but the Curlew Sandpiper baffled him, and he came home without accomplishing that portion of the task he set himself to fulfill.* In Sweden it is known as *Bägnäbbad Strand-Vipa*.

164. KNOT (*Tringa canuta*).

This is in my judgment one of the most excellent birds for the table: nor am I singular in that opinion; for however little known to modern epicures, it derives its name, Latin as well as English, from the famous Danish King Knut or Canute, who had an especial liking for the flesh of this, the most delicate perhaps of all the well-flavoured family to which it belongs. It has, however, been suggested that the name may be derived from its littoral habits, in allusion to the story of Canute's celebrated reproof to his courtiers; but I prefer the other derivation. It is strange how the eggs of this bird are still absolutely unknown to science, and how curiously they have eluded discovery. Swedish and Norwegian naturalists considered that they bred on the higher fjelds in the more northern parts of Scandinavia, within the Arctic Circle, but even Wolley failed to discover their nests there. When the famous Arctic Expedition of 1875-76, under Captain Nares, attained the high latitudes to which the *Alert* and *Discovery* penetrated, Captain Markham wrote† that in August,

* See his 'Siberia in Europe,' p. 233; also his 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 181.

† 'The Great Frozen Sea,' p. 127.

1875, some Knots were obtained, but no amount of search was successful in discovering the egg of that bird; and even Captain Feilden, enthusiastic ornithologist as he was, and determined as he was to unravel the mystery, was baffled in his efforts, though every man on both ships was on the look-out for the nest, and the parent birds in full nuptial plumage, and evidently breeding, were almost daily seen. Again, when Mr. H. Seebohm made his famous expedition to the valley of the Petchora in European Siberia, the Knot was one of the half-dozen birds whose breeding grounds were wrapped in mystery, and whose eggs he especially desired to find; but it was the only bird of the six which he never met with at all in the valley of the Petchora,* and we may be sure it would never have escaped the notice of that keen ornithologist if it had been in that district. Neither was he more successful in regard to this bird in his subsequent adventurous journey to the banks of the Yenesei.† In Norway it is called *Isländsk Strand-Vipa*, as if Iceland was its home; but its nest is quite unknown there. In this country it is a winter migrant, and the mud-flats and sand-banks of the eastern coast literally swarm with the vast flocks of this species; at one moment they will rise simultaneously in a compact body, and, after a short flight, settle again in close array on the shore; then they will run at the extreme edge of the receding tide, and seek their food in the ooze laid bare by the retreating waves. The numbers which compose these great flocks must be immense; they cannot contain less than many thousands, so widespread and at the same time so dense is the cloud, which, with one impulse, takes wing, wheels about with simultaneous movement, and as rapidly settles again at the edge of the waves. This general account of their immense numbers may in some degree prepare the way for a marvellous shot, which I am about to relate; and which will doubtless seem incredible to those whose experience is confined to inland shooting only, and who are unaccustomed to see the vast flights of birds which occasionally collect on our coasts; but of the truth of which I have satisfied myself, and therefore do not hesitate to publish the

* 'Siberia in Europe,' p. 2.

† 'Siberia in Asia.'

story. It is the custom of the wild-fowl shooters or 'gunners,' as they are called on the Norfolk coast, to paddle noiselessly down the creeks of the Wash in a low narrow gun-boat or canoe, with a large duck gun moving on a swivel lashed like a cannon in the bow; and a single lucky shot into a flock of geese, or ducks, or knots, or other birds, frequently produces a great harvest of spoil. With one of these gunners I was very well acquainted, and have been accustomed to overhaul the produce of his day's or rather night's excursion, in search of rare specimens; and from him I have gathered a great deal of information on the shore-feeding birds of the eastern coast. He has often astonished me by the quantities of ducks of various species with which his boat was loaded on his return, and I have seen half a sackful of Knots, amounting to above 200 in number, turned out on the floor of his cottage as the result of one fortunate shot with the long gun; but when he assured me that on one occasion he had picked up and brought home after a single discharge no less than 36 dozen and 11 Knots, or 443 birds, I acknowledged that I was incredulous, till conversation with sportsmen of the neighbourhood convinced me that the story was true; and then I felt ashamed that ignorance of shore-shooting in the fens led me to doubt the word of an honest man. Since then I have often watched the Knots by the hour together on the Norfolk coast, on the shores of the Wash; and with a double field-glass (the ornithologist's best companion) have followed the every movement of these busy birds; and seeing the dense array of the countless hosts which compose a flock, I can well understand the havoc which a well-aimed discharge of the big gun must cause.

In my former papers on the 'Ornithology of Wilts' I quoted Thompson as having more practical knowledge of shore-shooting with the swivel gun than any other author of birds with whose work I was then acquainted, and as one who will be found in great measure to corroborate this assertion;* but since then we have had the advantage of the books written by Sir R. Payne-

* See Thompson's 'Natural History of Ireland,' vol. ii., p. 292, under the head of 'Dunlin,' and p. 303, under the head of 'Knot.'

Gallwey, who is the highest living authority on shore-shooting, and he speaks of the vast numbers of Knots which frequent the coast and the tidal harbours and estuaries, and relates how he once killed 160 at a shot with his big gun, having mistaken them on a dark evening for Plover.* Still more emphatic is the testimony of Mr. Cordeaux as to the extraordinary gathering of Knots on the Humber flats, and the noise made by their occasional short flights along the coast; the roar, or rather rush, made by their wings in flight reminding him, more than anything else, of the noise made by a mighty host of Starlings when settling down for the night. Thousands and thousands of Knots were massed together on the foreshore as the tide was coming in: here crowded as closely as they could sit, there again straggling out into a more open line, and there again massed together by thousands. Some hundreds of yards in length and about thirty in breadth, along the edge of the water, were fairly crowded with them.† Colonel Hawker in his time, and provided only with the clumsy punt-gun of old, says, 'Knots sit on the edge of the mud so thick that you may sometimes kill the whole company at a shot;‡' and Selby speaks of the vast numbers which frequent the ooze on the coast.

I have three instances of the occurrence of this bird in Wiltshire. The first, a male, killed at the side of the railway cutting at Langley, in 1850, by Mr. Bethell, of Kellaways Mill, and, I believe, still in his possession; the second, killed at Seend in February, 1870, as recorded by Mr. Grant; and the third, reported to me by Mr. W. Wyndham, as shot by his keeper at Langford on December 10th, 1879. As it is generally seen in England in winter garb, the Knot is of very sober plumage, composed of ash-gray above and white beneath; but in summer dress it is far more attractive. Reddish-brown above and rich reddish-chestnut below render it very gay, and enable it to vie with the Gray and Golden Plover in their respective nuptial

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 24.

† 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 134, and *Zoologist* for 1866, p. 75.

‡ 'Instructions to Young Sportsmen,' p. 230.

dresses. In England it is often called the 'Plover Knot,' on account of its general resemblance to Plovers; in France it is *Bécasseau Canut* or *Maubèche*; in Germany, *Aschgrau Strandläufer*; and in Italy *Chiurlo*. Considering the high favour in which all birds of the Snipe family are deservedly held for the table, and the method of dressing these birds as practised in England, though repudiated abroad; considering also the positive assertion which I have made that they do not live by suction, but devour worms and various grubs and insects, it is but fair that I should add that the digestion of all these birds is extraordinarily rapid.

165. DUNLIN (*Tringa variabilis*).

This is one of the most abundant birds on suitable coasts, and immense flocks may generally be seen where sand-banks and mud-banks are left bare by the receding tide; but it is seldom found far from the seashore, and it is quite by accident when an occasional straggler is driven so far inland as Wiltshire. It seldom comes so far south except in winter, for the breeding places of the great bulk of the species are in the distant north; hence its modern specific name, *alpina*. And out of the seven specimens of which I have records in this county, six were killed in the month of February—viz., in 1870 two were killed on February 10th at Chitterne, on February 16th, one at Market Lavington, on February 18th, one at Compton Bassett, now in the possession of Major Heneage. In 1873, one was shot on February 13th at Avebury, one on February 22nd at Wedhampton; and in 1875, on December 9th, one was shot by Mr. T. Jenner, of Netheravon. So much does its breeding plumage differ from its winter garb that it was long known under two names, the 'Dunlin' and the 'Purre'; and the identity of these, till then recognised as distinct, was discovered by our countryman, Colonel Montagu, who unravelled so many similar cases of confusion, and pointed out the truth. When a flock of Dunlins is on wing above the mud-banks, it is marvellous to see by what simultaneous impulse every bird twists and turns, now exposing

the upper, now the under, surface of the body—a feat which we who live far from the seashore may see faintly imitated by the somewhat similar, though more clumsy, evolutions of a flock of Starlings. All its movements, too, on the sand are graceful and elegant, and it runs with great swiftness, for it is as active on foot as on the wing. It derives its name *variabilis* from the difference of plumage exhibited by a flock in transition from winter to perfect summer dress. So abundant a bird is certain to be honoured with many provincial names on the coast, and accordingly we find it recognised by the fishermen of various districts as the ‘Ox-eye’ and the ‘Oxbird,’ the ‘Sea Snipe’ and the ‘Least Snipe,’ and the ‘Sea Wagtail,’ from a habit it has of jerking the tail up and down. In Iceland it is known as *Lóu Præll*—‘the Servant of the Golden Plover;’ for it is there said that a solitary Dunlin will attach itself to a solitary Golden Plover: and this strange notion has extended to the Hebrides, where, from its habit of associating with those birds, it is called the ‘Plover’s Page.’ I found it very abundant in summer on the high fjelds of Norway, and no less numerous in spring on the coast of Portugal; indeed, it was the only member of the genus which I met with in that country. But it is one of the most cosmopolitan of birds, swarming in the island of Formosa and in Japan; very common in winter on the northern coast of Africa and in the Red Sea, and breeding in Greenland, British North America, and Hudson’s Bay.* The Continental names are generally mere translations of *variabilis*; as in France, *Bécasseau variable ou brunette*; in Germany, *Veränderliche oder Alpin Strandläufer*; in Sweden, *Föränderlig Strand-Vipa*.

166. PURPLE SAND-PIPER (*Tringa maritima*).

This is another winter visitant to our shores, and generally comes in large flocks where it finds a rocky coast suitable to its taste: for it abhors the sand-banks and mud-flats so dear to the greater number of its congeners. Hence it was once known as the ‘Rock Tringa.’ I conclude it was called *Maritima* because

* *Ibis*, 1859, p. 347; 1860, p. 80; 1861, p. 11; 1863, pp. 97, 132, 412.

it was supposed never to come inland. Wherefore the arrival of a specimen in the heart of Wiltshire, at Everleigh Rectory, on February 3rd, 1881 (as I learn from Mr. Grant, who received it in the flesh and preserved it), must be looked upon as the single exception which proves the rule. By the B.O.U. Committee the name *maritima* is now abandoned in favour of *striata*—the 'striped'—which was undoubtedly the name under which it was described by Latham and Gmelin. It is readily to be distinguished from all its congeners by its dark purple or bluish lead colour. Hence provincially it is the 'Black Sandpiper'; in France, *Bécasseau violet*, and in Sweden, *Svart-grä Strand-Vipa*. When the spring arrives it departs for the highest latitudes, having been found to breed in the most northern districts of Europe and America—in Greenland, Spitzbergen (where it was said to be the only species of the Gallatores seen), and in Nova Zembla, as well as in Davis Straits, Baffin's Bay, Melville Island, and the shores of Hudson's Bay. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, who reports that they are numerous in some districts in Ireland, says 'they are so tame you may pelt them with stones, and they will not rise, but merely trot farther off. It is common to see them running about or sitting huddled upon the rocks at the verge of a lashing sea. Each wave looks as if it must overwhelm them; but no! they judge their distance to a nicety, or stick like limpets to the rock, amid the spray and foam.'*

RALLIDÆ (THE RAILS).

We are now approaching the more essentially aquatic birds, and there are several characteristics in the family of Rails which lead on to the true Water-fowl. Thus their bodies are more compressed and boat-shape, and most of them can swim with ease. Their legs are shorter and their feet larger, and with the hind toe more developed than in the preceding family. Their beaks, too, are much harder and stronger, and some of them are furnished with a narrow membrane on the sides of the toes, which is the first approach towards a web-foot. They are, for

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 243.

the most part, a shy race, and as they generally prefer inland ponds and lakes to the sea-coast, they secrete themselves in the flags and reeds and rushes which border their haunts, and are often found in wet ditches. They creep through the thick cover with amazing quickness, winding their way amidst the dense grass, and are very unwilling to rise on the wing; but when compelled to do so, their flight is heavy and awkward, as might be expected from the shortness of their wings.

167. LAND-RAIL (*Crex pratensis*).

This species, known also as the Corn-Crake, is familiar to the partridge shooter, and well known also to him is its disinclination to rise, and the rapidity with which it skulks with depressed head through the stubble; and if forced to take wing where it can drop into cover again, it will fly with legs hanging down and prepared to run the instant it alights. Harting says that, besides running with great swiftmess, it has a curious method of avoiding the dogs by leaping with closed wings and compressed feathers over the long grass some three or four yards; and, then running a short distance and leaping again; and that the scent being thus broken, it eludes the most quick-scented dogs.*

It is common enough in our cornfields in summer, and yet it is a genuine Rail, and resorts to damp meadows and marshy soil to seek its food, for St. John declares it to be wholly insectivorous, and never to eat corn or seeds; † but other authors assign to it a vegetable as well as an insect diet. The name *crex* is a Latinized form of κρέξι, 'a Rail,' and this has the same derivation as κρέκω, 'I strike so as to sound' (B.O.U.). Hence our English 'Crake.' 'Rail,' too, comes from its cry, from *raller*, 'to rattle in the throat' (Skeat). In France it is *Poule d'eau* or *Rale de Genet*; in Germany, *Wiesenknarrer*, 'Meadow-Crake'; in Sweden, *Korn-Knarr* and *Äng-Knarr*; in Portugal, *Codornizão*. It is a true migrant, and never winters with us; but in May its harsh croaking cry of *crek, crek*, may be frequently heard; and the

* 'Our Summer Migrants,' p. 297.

† 'Highland Sports,' p. 145.

bird which produces it has the remarkable power of the ventriloquist in causing the note to sound now on this side, now on that, now under your feet, now at the farther end of the field; and many a hopeless chase, and many a bewildered and baffled pursuer, has been the result of this peculiarity. When uttering its cry the neck of the bird is stretched perpendicularly upwards. Gilbert White speaks of it as having been abundant in the low wet bean-fields of Christian Malford in North Wilts. But, indeed, we may say it is very common at this day in all parts of the county. In the South of France the peasants call it *Roi des cailles*, and in Spain it is known by the name of *Guion de las codornices*, owing to an idea that it places itself at the head of the Quails, and precedes them on their migrations.* Harting believes that Corn-Crakes hibernate; while Gilbert White says it is poorly qualified for migration.

Undoubtedly it is a difficult problem to solve how a bird which flies so heavily and awkwardly across even one field can prolong its flight from the other side of the Channel; but it is certain that other species of feeble powers of flight do annually perform the passage. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, however, brings forward proof which cannot be gainsaid, that Corn-Crakes do occasionally winter in Ireland. He has himself twice found them, to all appearance asleep, in the month of February, ensconced in the centre of loose stone walls close to the ground, and has met with several other instances of the kind. He has also evidence of others, taken in a semi-comatose state out of a rabbit-hole.†

The Rev. H. E. Delmé Radcliffe writes me word that he observed one in his garden at Tedworth on the remarkably early date of April 1st, and that he saw it again and again in the very short grass in his field; and as it always ran back to the hedge and ditch full of dead leaves, in which it crouched, he was able to examine it minutely. On the other hand, Mr. W. Wyndham gives me instances of its late appearance at Dinton: in 1881

* Howard Saunders, fourth edition of 'Yarrell's British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 139.

† 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 251.

he himself shot one on November 12th; and in 1883, on November 23rd, his retriever caught an old bird, and in very good condition, one of whose wings had been previously slightly injured.

168. SPOTTED CRAKE (*Crex porzana*).

Though not in reality uncommon, this sombre-clad little species is so retiring and timid in its nature, and seeks such little-frequented, quiet ponds for its haunts, that it escapes observation, and is supposed by many to be a rarer bird than it really is. I have heard of several in Wiltshire: the late Rev. G. Marsh killed one in some marshy ground at Christian Malford in October, 1849; Mr. MacNiven, junior, shot another at Patney about 1871; and the Rev. A. P. Morres records the capture of several in South Wilts. 'In the autumn of 1869 a pair were killed at Hinks Mill pond, in the parish of Mere, by Mr. Forward; and in the very same field another specimen was killed on October 12th, 1878. In 1873 one was picked up dead at Gillingham, having been killed by flying against the telegraph-wires; and another met its fate in the same year and in the same way near Westbury. In 1879 a friend brought me a wing of this bird, for identification, which had also been picked up under the wires near Salisbury, and which had been apparently quite severed from the body by the force of the concussion; and these three occurrences happening so near together would certainly prove the bird to be more numerous than is generally supposed, for none of these three specimens would, in all probability, have been heard of had it not been for their singular misfortune. In addition to all these instances, Mr. Baker reports that a nest containing twelve eggs was cut out in a clover-field adjoining a marsh beside the stream at Mere, and that he sent up one of the eggs to the *Field* office, where it was pronounced a genuine egg of *C. porzana*.* Lord Heytesbury wrote me word that one was killed by one of his grandsons on his estate last year (1886); Mr. W. Wyndham that he shot one at Dinton on October 25th, 1875.

* See *Field* of June 18th, 1881, 'Natural History Notes.'

One was picked up at Marlborough, and secured for the College Museum, September 12th, 1872, by Mr. Coleman; and Mr. Grant reports one from Wedhampton, near Devizes, November, 1863, and from Melksham, December, 1879. It is, like its congener, a migrant; but, unlike that species, it is one of the earliest to arrive, and one of the latest to depart. Its general plumage is dark green and brown, speckled with white.

In Sweden it is distinguished by the lengthy name of *Små-fläckig Sump-Höna*, or 'Small-spotted Fen-Hen'; and with us is provincially called, according to locality, 'Spotted Rail,' 'Spotted Water-Rail,' and 'Spotted Water-Hen.' From the difficulty experienced by sportsmen in forcing it to move, and the hard work, in consequence, which it gives to the dogs employed for this purpose, it has obtained in the South of Europe the sobriquet of 'Kill-dog,' *Tue-chien*, *Mata-perros*, *Cansa-perros*, etc.* Its great length of foot enables it to run lightly over floating leaves, and its narrow and compressed body to penetrate through the dense herbage which forms its retreat. *Porzana* seems to be a corruption of the Italian *sforzana*. In France it is *Poule d'eau marouette*; in Germany, *Punktirtes Rohrhuhn*; and in Italy, *Gallinella aquatica sutro*.

169. WATER-RAIL (*Rallus aquaticus*).

This is a very common bird in wet and marshy districts, and, I am told, is especially numerous in the low lands near Salisbury. I have shot it in the water-meadows at Old Park, and I have instances of its occurrence in all parts of the county. Like all other members of the family, it seeks safety in running amidst coarse herbage, and in hiding itself in the thickest cover it can find; and I have seen it, when driven by a dog from its place of refuge, fly up and settle in the branches of a thick bush, in preference to seeking safety by flight. It will on occasion run on the water, making use of the flags and floating water-plants as stepping-stones in its course; and hence, I suppose, from the

* H. Saunders in fourth edition of 'Yarrell's British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 146.

softness of its tread on the floating herbage, which it traverses so nimbly, it is provincially known as the 'Velvet-runner,' the 'Brook-runner,' and the 'Runner.' Montagu calls it the 'Oar-Cock;' and Mr. Cecil Smith says it is known in Somersetshire as the 'Skitty,' and calls attention to the extreme narrowness of its breast-bone, whereby it is enabled to creep through very small holes and very tangled grasses.* This bird (in common with the Moorhen and Coot) has a small rudimentary claw or spur on the wing; but this in a kindred species—a specimen of which was kindly brought me from New Zealand by Miss Awdry—is developed into quite a formidable weapon.† In France it is *Rale d'eau*; in Germany, *Wasser Ralle*; in Italy, *Gallinella palustre*; in Sweden, *Vatten-Rall*; in Spain, *Rascon*, 'Scratcher'; and in Portugal, *Frango d'agua*. It can both swim and dive with great ease. It remains with us throughout the year.

170. MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*).

This is the most common species of the whole family, for it may be seen on almost every retired pond or lake, either swimming amidst the rushes with its peculiar jerking motion, or alarmed at the presence of an intruder, seeking the shelter of the most distant bank and the thickest sedge; and there it will sink in the water, submerging the whole body with the exception of the beak, which alone protrudes above the surface to enable it to breathe, and holding on to that position by means of some rush, or reed, or water-plant, which it grasps with its feet. As evening draws on, it will wander over the newly-mown grass of a hay-field, searching diligently for food. Though a shy bird, it is more familiar and shows more confidence in man than the preceding species, and has been known when undisturbed to become quite tame. In the classic grounds at Walton Hall, the seat of the late well-known naturalist, Mr. Waterton, where all

* 'Birds of Somerset,' p. 443.

† See article by Mr. P. L. Sclater 'On the Claws and Spurs of Birds' Wings,' in *Ibis* for 1886, pp. 147-151.

birds were encouraged and protected, I have seen the Moorhens feeding just beneath the drawing-room windows, and not caring to move nearer the water, even when a stranger approached. At Bowood they show great boldness, and at Draycot pond, where they are not molested, they evince none of that timidity for which the race of Rails is renowned. Where, however, they are not so protected, and are surprised in an open space, they will skim along the surface of the water, dipping with their toes as they hurry along; partly flying, partly running, legs as well as wings being actively employed, till they have retreated into thick cover. But though their flight for a short distance, with legs hanging down, seems heavy and awkward, they can, and do on occasion, indulge in a prolonged flight with apparent ease: they can also perch in a bush or on a low tree. They are conspicuous for the bright scarlet frontal plate or horny shield which extends above the beak, and as they swim over the pond, with a nodding motion of the head, examining every weed on either side, or as they hurry through the meadows, in both cases perpetually jerking up their tails, they always seem in a bustle, and as if they had no time to waste.

The specific name, *chloropus*, 'green-footed,' is most applicable: so in Sweden it is *Grön-fotad Sump-Höna*, or 'Green-footed Fen-Hen'; but with us the 'Common Gallinule,' 'Water-Hen,' and 'Marsh-Hen,' and used in old time to be 'Mot-hen,' meaning 'Moat-hen,' for (says Pennant) in the days of moated houses they were very frequent about the moats. In France it is *Poule d'eau ordinaire*; in Spain, *Polla de agua*; in Portugal, *Gallinha de agua*; in Germany, *Grunfussiges Rohrhuhn*; and in Italy, *Pullo sultano cimandorlo*.

171. CAYENNE RAIL (*Aramides Cayannensis*).

Though denied a place in the British list by those in authority, and ignominiously denounced as an escaped convict from some zoological garden or other place of detention, to which it had been transported from its native land, I cannot pass over in silence this interesting stranger, which was killed in October, 1876, on

the river between Trowbridge and Bradford-on-Avon, and which the Rev. A. P. Morres, who saw it in the flesh the day after its capture, described as 'evidently a Gallinule, but somewhat larger than, and quite different in colour to, our Moorhen; the legs and iris of eye of a rich crimson lake; beak light green, inclining to yellow at the base; head, neck, and thighs, pure gray; back, bright olive-green; tail, tail coverts, and vent, black; breast, rich rufous brown, and wings bright brown, with a touch of crimson on the quills. On the underside of the wing the axillaries were beautifully barred with rufous and black.' Mr. Morres most obligingly took out one of these feathers, and sent it to me, together with a description of the bird and details of its capture. But I, being wholly ignorant of the species, and so unable to supply the information required, forwarded the feather to Professor Newton, at Cambridge, and there Mr. O. Salvin, guided by that single feather alone, recognised the bird and declared its species, a declaration which a comparison with some skins in the museum at Cambridge amply confirmed. This was certainly a great triumph of ornithological acumen, and Professor Newton, in proof of the correctness of the determination thus happily arrived at, enclosed to me another feather which almost exactly matched the feather I had forwarded to him. Professor Newton added: 'I purposely chose one that is not exactly the same, that there may be no confusion, the larger feather being the one I had from you, the smaller one from a specimen in the Swainson Collection. As its name implies, it is an inhabitant of Cayenne and adjoining parts, occurring in Trinidad, but I should think nowhere nearer to this country: it has been brought over several times to the Zoological Gardens, and probably you might see it there now. I cannot imagine that it should find its way to us unassisted, but if it should make good its escape, I dare say it might continue to exist for some weeks or months in this country, except in winter. *Aramides* is a rather aberrant genus of Rails, found only in the New World.' On making inquiries at the Zoological Gardens at Clifton, Mr. Morres could not learn that any such bird had ever been confined there, nor could he discover

elsewhere any tidings of the escape of any such captive. It seems, therefore, but for the decisive verdict given above by authority, as if it were permissible to imagine this specimen a possible straggler from America. Most remarkable, however, is the sequel to this tale: for now, after such close examination of this stranger, Mr. Morres bethought him of a stuffed bird, of just the same size and appearance, though not of such bright colouring, with which he had been familiar for years, and which stood in the hall of a friend, Mr. Edward Everett, now deceased. For this bird Mr. Morres at once made diligent inquiry, and was so fortunate as to recover it; and on inspection it proved to be a second specimen of *Aramides Cayannensis*, with the same remarkable rufous and black feathers under the wing. As to the history of this specimen, it was impossible to gain any positive information, beyond that it had been shot many years ago by some friend, and that Mr. Everett had had it set up. But whether this was an escaped convict, or whether both birds were mere roving Americans, voluntarily visiting the old country, as so many Americans—birds as well as men—do every year, it is impossible to say, though in a question so uncertain I would claim, by common English law, that the prisoner should have the benefit of the doubt.

LOBIPEDIDÆ (LOBE-FEET).

There is no more perfect example of the gradual transition from one class of birds to another than is to be seen in the little family of Lobe-feet. Occupying a position as they do at the end of the Order of Waders, and immediately before that of the Swimmers, we find them partaking of the anatomical structure as well as the habits of both. They have neither the stilted legs and lengthened beaks of the one, nor have they the webbed feet of the other, but yet they approach both these characteristics. With slender naked legs of moderate length they possess feet of a very remarkable structure, inasmuch as these are furnished with a lateral development of membrane, which, though it does

not connect them as in the true Swimmers, projects in rounded lobes on either side of the toes. With these they can swim and dive with perfect ease—indeed, they pass the greater portion of their lives in the water, though frequently seen on land too. There are but three species of this family known in England, and I have instances of the occurrence of all of them in Wiltshire.

172. COMMON COOT (*Fulica atra*).

This is a common bird, generally to be found in the haunts of the Moorhen, and, like that species, has a horny frontal plate, which runs from the base of the beak to the forehead, and which, being of a pure white colour, is very conspicuous on the nearly black plumage of the bird; hence it is often called the 'Bald Coot.' It is the only species of the family which frequents inland lakes; and in its general habits, innate shyness, retirement amongst sedge and reeds on the least alarm, and method when flushed of scuttling over the surface of the pond, striking the water with its feet to aid its progress, it bears a very close resemblance to the Moorhen last described. Like that bird, too, though so heavy and even clumsy in flight as it hurries over the water to some place of concealment when disturbed, it does occasionally indulge in a long flight at a very high elevation, proving its powers of wing when the time of migration arrives. For though to a certain extent, and in suitable localities, a permanent resident in the South of England, its numbers are very much increased in winter by the arrival of vast flocks from the North. When on one of these aerial excursions the Coot may be easily recognised from its legs stretched out behind and acting like a tail, after the manner of Herons. William of Malmesbury, A.D. 1200, tells us that in his day the fens of England were so covered with Coots and Ducks that in moulting time, when they cannot fly, the natives took from two to three thousand at a draft with their nets.* But even now Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says that on inland fresh-water lakes he has seen from two to

* 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 146.

three thousand together, and many thousands may be met with on some of the Norfolk broads. As regards the flesh of this bird, my own taste obliges me to say that it is most unpalatable and fishy in the extreme—indeed, the fact that it is allowed by the Romish Church to be eaten on *jours maigres*, as are some other birds which partake of the same fish-like flavour, condemns it at once in my judgment as affording the reverse of delicate meat. Its generic name, *fulica*, is from the Greek *φαλακρος*, meaning ‘bald-headed,’ whence also the French *Foulque*; but in Germany it is the *Schwarzes Wasserhuhn*; and in Sweden the *Sot Höna*, or ‘Soot Hen.’ Harting observes that it may always be known from a Moorhen on the water by its attitude. The Coot swims with head and tail very low and the head poked forward, but the Moorhen with head erect and tail jerked up almost at right angles to the back. The Moorhen’s white tail, or rather under-tail coverts, also serve to distinguish it, the same parts in the Coot being black.* In Spain it is *Mancon* and *Focha*; in Portugal, *Galeirão*. The English word ‘Coot’ is probably of Celtic origin, from *cwta*, ‘short,’ ‘docked,’ ‘bob-tailed.’

173. GRAY PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*).

This pretty little bird belongs rather to the ocean than the land, and its home is in Northern Asia, Siberia, and Northern America, where it breeds in the most desolate regions within the Arctic Circle, amidst the ice and snow and piercing cold of the extreme North. On Parry’s Arctic voyages it was found in very high northern latitudes, in summer swimming unconcernedly amongst the icebergs; and Major Feilden observed it in July breeding in latitude 82° 30’ N., so that when it visits us in Wiltshire it is as an accidental straggler indeed, and yet I have many records of its occurrence here. The specimen from which Colonel Montagu took his description, and which was in his own museum, was taken at a pond at Alderton.† Yarrell reports

* ‘Birds of Middlesex,’ p. 212.

† ‘Ornithological Dictionary’ *in loco*.

that 'Mr. Lambert presented to the Zoological Society a beautifully marked adult bird, which was killed in Wiltshire in the month of August, and retained at that time a great portion of the true red colours of the breeding season or summer plumage.*' The late Rev. G. Marsh recorded that one was brought to him which was killed by some boys with a stone on Dunspool pond, on the downs at Winterslow. Another was shot at Dauntsey by the Rev. A. Biedermann; and another at Kellaways Mill by the Rev. R. Ashe. Lord Nelson showed me a fine specimen in his possession, which was taken on the borders of the county on the Hampshire side. The late Rev. John Ward announced the capture of another at Great Bedwyn; and Mr. Elgar Sloper, of Devizes, speaks of several as having been killed in that neighbourhood, one which came into his collection having been taken on the banks of the Kennet and Avon Canal in November, 1840. The Rev. T. A. Preston wrote me word that one had been killed near Marlborough in 1869, and the Rev. G. Powell that another was killed at Deverill by Mr. George in September, 1870. The Rev. A. P. Morres mentions two killed at Woodlands, in the parish of Mere, as well as several others, in the winter of 1870; one at Pertwood, November 17th; and another at Codford, November 19th, 1875; and one knocked down with his oar by Mr. Edwards while rowing on the river near Salisbury in or about 1875. The Rev. E. Duke possesses a specimen shot on the river at Lake fifteen or twenty years ago. Mr. Rawlence has one in his collection killed at Wishford. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports mention one now in their museum shot by Mr. Coleman at East Kennett in 1866, and two others killed on the edge of a pond at Pewsey in 1876. The Rev. E. Goddard saw one on the Bowood water on October 2, 1877; and Mr. Grant's list contains twelve specimens, eleven of which were taken in the month of October, and the other in November: viz., one in 1869, from Wedhampton; but in 1870 (when there seems to have been an immigration of these birds to North Wilts) from Upavon, Conock, Lacock, Beckhampton, Devizes, Allington,

* 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 132.

Lavington, and Potterne; in 1876 from Easton, and in 1877 from Marston.

If we exchange the scene from the retired inland pond to the open ocean, we shall find the habits of the Phalarope very like those of the more familiar Coot; they are, however, perhaps still more aquatic, and they differ in having great power and swiftness of wing. In summer their plumage is of a reddish-chestnut or rich brown hue, but in winter of a light gray colour; which great variation has given rise to much confusion in identifying these birds as belonging to but one species only. It is most buoyant on the water, and swims with the lightness of a cork, after the fashion of a Gull, as Mr. Cecil Smith well describes it, and keeps on incessantly nodding its head. It is of a bold, fearless, unsuspecting nature, probably resulting from its inexperience of man and his persecutions in the uninhabited regions it frequents.

Seebohm says that from their habit of following the whales and approaching them when they blow, in order to catch the small marine animals that are then disturbed, they are called by the sailors 'Whale-birds' and 'Bow-head birds.' The word 'Phalarope' has exercised the ingenuity of many to discover its origin; as when dissected into *φάλακρος*, 'bald-headed,' or 'with a patch of white on the head,' and *πούς*, 'a foot,' the meaning is not very transparent. There can, however, be very little doubt that its true intention is 'Coot-footed,' or 'possessing feet like those of a Coot.' *Platyrynchos*, 'broad-billed,' was the specific name assigned to it by Temminck, Sabine, and others, and its beak will on examination be found in some degree to answer the description. So in Norway, where it is seen on migration to and from its breeding-places in the Arctic regions, it is known as *Bred-näbbad Simm-Snäppa*, or 'Broad-billed Swimming Snäppa'; and in France, *Phalarope platyrhinque*; but in Germany, *Rothbauchiger Wassertreter*.

174. RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus hyperboreus*).

This elegant but diminutive species is far more rare in England than its larger congener. The specific name, *hyperboreus*, fully declares its habitat, for it ranges over all the Arctic regions of the Old and New Worlds, and descends as low as the Orkneys and the northern coast of Scotland, where it is not uncommon. The plumage may be generally described as lead-coloured above; chest and neck reddish bay, otherwise white below. I have a notice from Mr. Elgar Sloper that a male bird in the breeding plumage was shot by him in the brickfield at Old Park in May, 1841, and that, as the pinion of one wing was the only part injured, it lived for several weeks, feeding in the water on animal food with which Mr. Sloper supplied it, and swimming with great facility: and the Rev. T. A. Preston, in the autumn of 1869, recorded a specimen killed in a garden at Marlborough, with plumage in a transition state between the summer and winter dress. These are the only notices I have of the occurrence in our county of this stranger from the extreme North. The distinguishing mark by which it may be recognised, without fear of confusion with its congener, is its more slender beak: hence in Sweden it is known as *Smal-näbbad Simm-Snäppa*, 'Small-billed Swimming Snäppa'; and in Lapland it is called by the Finnish squatters *Wesitiainen*, or 'Water-Sparrow,' which shows a paucity of idea in regard to the several species of birds on the part of those gentlemen. Reinhardt reports that it breeds in Greenland, and in Spitzbergen it is common enough to have earned two names, being known there as the 'North-East Bird,' doubtless from its indifference to the coldest blasts of air, and also as 'Mahogany Bird,' from the colour of its neck. In Orkney it is known as 'Half-Web,' and Selby attributes to it the provincial name of 'Water Snipe.' In frequenting the icy regions of the extreme North, in its fearlessness of man, and in its general appearance and habits, it closely resembles its congener last described. Our countryman Montagu, in the Supplement to his

Dictionary, quotes a correspondent who says: 'It swims with the greatest ease, and when on the water looks like a beautiful miniature of a Duck, carrying its head close to the back in the manner of a Teal.'

In France it is *Phalarope hyperboré*, and in Germany *Rothhal-siger Wassertreter*.

We have now reached the end of the fourth great Order of Birds—viz., the Waders—and but one more Order remains to be considered, the true Water-Fowl, or Swimmers.

CHAPTER XI.

NATATORES (*Swimmers*).

As the fifth and last great Order of Birds contains those only which are thoroughly aquatic, and as by far the larger portion of these belong to the ocean as their peculiar habitat, it is manifest that Wiltshire as an inland county can scarcely lay claim to an extensive acquaintance with this Order. And yet with such ease and celerity do they pass over the intervening land which separates us from the coast, that the Ducks, Geese, and Gulls, which enjoy a great power of wing, very frequently visit us, often in considerable numbers; while even the heavy-flying, short-winged Divers, Grebes, Auks, and Cormorants appear at rare intervals as occasional visitants, and thus all the families which compose the Order of Swimmers are more or less represented in our county, and have been met with from time to time in various localities.

The characteristics of this Order are to be seen in the long boat-shaped body, so admirably adapted for swimming, or rather sailing, on the water; in the structure and position of the legs and feet, placed so far behind as to cause an awkward gait on land, but so well fitted to act as oars and paddles and rudders in propelling the body over the surface of the water, and in the close oily plumage, which is altogether impervious to wet. They are therefore, for the most part, neither active nor graceful on land, and their attempts at walking result in a waddle or a shuffle, and some of them are little less agile on the wing; but in their own proper element the most clumsy on shore will be nimble enough, diving, swimming, sailing, even in rough water,

with the utmost buoyancy and ease, and thoroughly at home, and even sleeping on the waves.

ANATIDÆ (THE DUCKS).

This very large family comprises not only the almost innumerable species of Ducks proper, but also the Geese, the Swans, and the Mergansers. They are all of one general uniform character, and their structure, as well as habits, are too well known to require comment. The distinguishing mark of this family, wherein its several members partake in a greater or less degree, and wherein they differ from the remaining families of the Order, centres in the beak, which is of a broad, flattened form, of a softer consistence than is seen in others, and covered with an epidermis or skin, excepting at the tip, which is furnished with a horny nail. There are other peculiarities regarding the beaks of these birds, suited to the special requirements of the individual species; but in all the family the edges of the mandibles are provided with plates, rugosities, or even hooks, more or less developed, which are serviceable either in seizing and holding the slippery prey on which they feed, or in separating and removing the mud which unavoidably accompanies its capture. For the same purpose their tongues are usually very large, thick, fleshy, and extremely rough.

175. GRAY LAG GOOSE (*Anser ferus*).

This is the true original Wild Goose, as its specific name *ferus* implies, *the* Wild Goose *par excellence*, and above all its congeners, though in point of numbers some of them may now exceed it. Moreover, it is generally allowed to be the origin of our domestic species, and was at one time common enough in this county, but has now become extremely rare, since the draining of our fens and marshes: for in the good old times before so much waste land was reclaimed, it used to be a permanent resident in England, breeding regularly in Lincolnshire and other fen districts, and from thence wandering in winter over the southern and western counties. Colonel Montagu

described it in his day (at the beginning of the present century) as 'frequently killed upon the Downs in the south of England, feeding on green wheat,' and he adds, 'We remember one, being shot in the wing by a farmer, in the neighbourhood of the Wiltshire Downs, was kept alive many years, but would never associate with the tame ones.' In more recent days the late Rev. George Marsh informed me that two or three fine specimens of this bird were killed on the river Avon by Mr. Ferris, of Sutton Benger, in the very severe winter of 1838, and doubtless it is still occasionally met with in hard weather. It is to be distinguished from its congeners by the pink flesh-colour of its beak, legs, and feet, the nail of the beak being white. Mr. Harting says it has also invariably some black feathers on the belly, which the other species lack, and the gray colour in the wings of the Gray Lag runs through the wing like a double bar, which is very conspicuous when the pinions are stretched.* The meaning and derivation of the word *lag* was for a long time a puzzle to many. Yarrell conjectured it to come from the English *lake* or Italian *lago*, both derived from the Latin *lacus*; but in 1870 Professor Newton, the then editor of the *Ibis*, with the able assistance of Professor Skeat, unravelled the mystery, and set the question at rest for ever. 'The adjective "lag,"' he says, 'means originally "late," "last," or "slow," whence we have "laggard" and "laglast," a "loiterer," etc. Accordingly the Gray Lag Goose is the Gray Goose which in former days *lagged* behind the others to breed in our fens, as it now does on the Sutherland lochs, when its congeners had betaken themselves to their more northern summer quarters.† Most certainly it did not imply any inferiority to either of its congeners in rapidity of flight, for, like them, it is very strong and powerful on the wing, and fifty or sixty miles an hour is the rate at which they are said to fly. We who live in this inland western county have little conception of the large flocks of domesticated geese derived from this species which are still brought up in the fen districts

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 216.

† *Ibis* for 1870, p. 301.

of the eastern counties, and which, until very lately, if not still, underwent the cruel process of plucking, and were driven out to pasture in the morning and brought home at night by the goose-herd or 'gozzard;' very much as Sir Francis Head described in his famous 'Bubbles from the Brunnens of Nassau,' only there the flock consisted of contributions from many owners, one or two from each house in some German village; but here the whole flock, often some hundreds in number, was the property of one owner. In France it is *Oie cendrée*; in Germany, *Wilde gemeine Gans*; in Italy, *Oca paglietane*; in Spain and Portugal, *Ganso bravo*; and in Sweden *Grå-Gås*.

176. BEAN GOOSE (*Anser segetum*).

This is so much more common amongst us in these days, that it has now generally usurped the title of its larger relative last described, and is known as 'the Wild Goose.' Specimens occur in various parts of the county almost every winter, and during the hard weather in January of this year (1887) the Rev. H. Algar, occupying my house at Yatesbury, wrote me word that he saw six presumably of this species, pitched in Yatesbury Field, though at his approach they of course took wing. The general colour of the beak is black, the middle of it flesh-red, and the nail at the extremity black; the form of the beak is also shorter and stouter than is the case with *A. ferus*. These birds fly in flocks varying in form according to their size, a little band always flying in a long line in Indian file, and in close order, looking as if linked together by a string; hence they are spoken of as a 'skein' of geese: but a large flock, called a 'gaggle,' probably from the cackling noise it perpetually keeps up, assumes a > like form, the sharp angle being always forward, and one bird acting as leader and taking the head of the party, while the rest form themselves into two lines converging towards their guide; the same bird, however, does not always keep its place at the van, but after a time falls into the line, and another takes its post. This interesting manœuvre was first pointed out to me in Norfolk many years ago by the famous Arctic voyager, Captain

Edward Parry, who in his prolonged voyages in the Polar seas had unlimited opportunities of marking the habits of the race of Anseres. The Bean Goose is essentially an inland feeder, frequenting marshes and meadows as well as cornfields by day, and returning at dusk to mud-banks or sands where it can pass the night in security. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says, 'It is provided with a most suitable bill for grazing, and can cut off wet soft grass or young shoots as with a sharp pair of scissors.*' It was very generally supposed that the English specific name of this goose was derived from the black nail at the extremity of the beak, of about the size and appearance of a bean; but Selby pointed out that it was because of its partiality to bean or pea fields, rather than from the shape of the nail of the upper mandible that the bird was so named, and this is now generally admitted. Cordeaux adds that beans being cut late in autumn, more especially in wet and backward seasons, there is always a considerable loss by the opening of the pods and shedding of their contents: it is then that the geese arrive in large flocks to feed on the scattered beans.† In corroboration of this view the Swedish name for our Bean Goose is *Säd Gäs*, or 'Grain Goose;' in Germany, *Saat Gans*; and provincially in some parts of France *Oie des Moissons*, or 'Harvest Goose;' and the recognised scientific name is *A. segetum*. In Continental Europe generally it is by far the commonest of all the geese, and is called in France *Oie vulgaire*, and in Italy *Oca salvatica*. I conclude my notice of our commonest wild goose by a very valuable extract from the writings of Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, who from his personal experience is more entitled than any other to be listened to on this subject. 'Geese (he says), like swans, are slow in taking wing, either from land or water, and give more or less notice of their intentions previous to flying. They stretch out the neck, cackle loudly, run along the ground ere they can rise, and beat the surface with their wings if on the water. They always appear to have a sentry on duty, an outside bird, who,

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 145, 148.

† 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 149.

whilst his companions are greedily feeding, stands erect, looking suspiciously round on all sides. I have remarked, when near enough to hear, that the watching goose continually utters a low, guttural chuckle, which seems to imply "All's well, all's well!" On suspecting danger he is instantly silent. This cessation of sound on his part is at once followed by the startled attention of all the rest. This sentinel is from time to time relieved of his duties by a companion.*

177. WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*).

This is really as common in England, if not more common, than the species last described; but it so happens that, with the exception of the very reliable testimony of the Rev. G. Powell, who tells me he has seen it in South Wilts, I do not chance to have any other notice of its occurrence in the county, and yet it is most probable that so regular a winter visitor to our island frequently favours Wiltshire with its presence. Selby, indeed, says that it is more abundant in the South and Midland parts of England than the Bean Goose; but it is the first to disappear at the approach of spring, and by the middle of March all have departed for their northern breeding-places; and yet it has, time out of mind, resorted to Egypt for winter quarters, like a wise bird that it is, and was the most abundant of all the geese which I saw in vast flocks on the Nile. Moreover, that it was domesticated in Egypt of old is certain, for its portrait, as represented on the walls of the temples and tombs, may be readily identified. It is an inland feeding bird, and seeks low, marshy districts, and not cornfields, for, as St. John observes, it is entirely and absolutely graminivorous. The specific name, both in Latin and English, describes its mark of distinction in the white patch above the beak, extending to the forehead. It is also sometimes called the 'Laughing Goose,' and is *L'Oie rieuse* of Buffon and Temminck, from the peculiar note, supposed to resemble a man's laugh; and provincially known as the 'Bar Goose,' from the dark bars upon the breast. This, and not the Bernicle, is the true

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 145, 148.

Fyall Gäs, or 'Mountain Goose' of the Swedes, as Professor Newton has shown in an article on *Anas erythropus*,* the latter being the specific name given by Fleming and others of the older ornithologists, and which calls attention to its orange-coloured legs. It is *Blassen Gans*, 'the Pale Goose,' in German; and in Italy, *Oca Lombardella*. Mr. Harting, to whom we have already been much indebted for accurately pointing out the distinguishing marks by which closely allied species may be identified, has drawn up the following useful table in regard to the commoner species of gray geeset :

Gray Lag Goose :	<i>bill</i> , flesh-colour ;	<i>nail</i> , white ;	<i>legs</i> , flesh colour.
Bean Goose :	„ orange ;	„ black ;	„ orange.
White-fronted Goose :	„ pink ;	„ white ;	„ orange.
Pink-footed Goose :	„ pink ;	„ black ;	„ pink tinged with vermilion.

[Of the species just mentioned, the 'Pink-footed Goose' (*Anser brachyrhynchus*), I regret that I have no example to record, and so no proof of its occurrence in Wiltshire; but that it must very often visit us is almost certain, for not only does it so much resemble the Bean Goose (the most abundant now of all our wild geese) as to be frequently mistaken for it, though somewhat smaller in size, but in some districts of England it is declared to be even more common than that species. It is to be hoped, therefore, that Wiltshire sportsmen will keep a sharp look-out on the specimens which fall to their gun, and announce the discovery of a Wiltshire killed *A. brachyrhynchus*, or the 'Short-beaked Goose,' whose bill, scarcely more than an inch and a half in length, offers a good mark of distinction.]

178. BRENT GOOSE (*Anser torquatus*).

This little black species is the most numerous of all the Geese on our coasts, but is so essentially marine in its habits—the most oceanic (says Mr. Cordeaux) of all the Geese—that it is by no means common in the interior of the country. Occasionally,

* *Ibis* for 1860, pp. 404-406.

† 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 216.

however, a straggler wanders out of its course, and I have several instances of its occurrence near Salisbury, near Corsham, and near Calne; and of later date Mr. W. F. Parsons, of Hunt's Mill, Wootton Bassett, wrote me word that a specimen was killed about the middle of February, 1870, during the very severe frost, by Mr. Isaac Tuck, of Greenhill. He found it in the brook on his farm known as the Upper Avon, when the weather was unusually cold. The Rev. A. P. Morres also records one now in his collection, which was killed in his own parish of Britford, in April, 1884; and I am informed by the Rev. J. Hodgson that two handsome specimens have been shot in the meadows of Collingbourne: one in the winter of 1881-82, by Mr. Pike, of Hougoumont Farm; the other in the spring of this year (1887), by Mr. Russ' bailiff. Mr. Grant also records a specimen killed at West Lavington in October, 1881.

Its beak is very short, and, like the general colour of its plumage, quite black. Indeed, with the exception of a small patch of white on either side of the neck, and the tail coverts, which are also white, its plumage is either slate-gray or smoke-black. It is said to have derived its English name 'Brent' from its 'burnt' or generally charred appearance; and its scientific name *torquatus* from the 'collar' of white feathers on the neck. Montagu calls it the 'Clatter Goose,' from the constant chattering it keeps up while feeding; wherein it differs from the Gray Geese, which feed in silence. Selby calls it the 'Ware Goose,' from the marine vegetables which constitute its food; and for the same reason it is known as *Rotgans*, 'Rot,' and 'Road Goose,' with the meaning of 'Root Goose.' It is strange that whereas the Brent Geese, sometimes called '*Sea Bernicles*,' frequent the muddy shores of the south and especially the east coasts of England, where they occur at times in enormous numbers, the true Bernicle Geese, known as '*Land Bernicles*,' are seldom seen there, but inhabit the west coast, where Brent Geese are almost unknown; so rigidly do these closely allied Black Geese keep to their several localities. They are both winter migrants, arriving here in the autumn from the North; and are both of shy,

suspicious nature, ready to take wing at the slightest alarm of danger. Both, too, retire to breed in the Polar regions, Greenland, Spitzbergen, and still farther towards the North Pole. Captain Markham, in his narrative of the voyage of the *Alert* during the Arctic Expedition of 1875-76, says the Brent Goose was one of the very few birds met with in the high North, and that in considerable numbers. As regards its edible qualities, I was astonished to see the late Mr. Knox write, 'This is the best bird I ever tasted,' and to find that verdict corroborated by Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, who places it first among the Geese, though he somewhat qualifies that proud distinction by adding, 'But no goose except a Brent, unless a very young bird, is fit to serve up whole.' My own experience, and judging from the single specimen of which I made trial in Norfolk thirty years ago, is that it has a most villainous, rank, and fishy flavour.

In France it is *Oie Cravant*; in Germany, *Ringel Gans*; in Italy, *Anatra Columbaccio*; in Sweden, *Prut-Gäs*, from its continued murmuring cry when on the wing.

I cannot forbear to call attention here to the monstrous popular error which very generally prevailed regarding the origin of this goose, sometimes called the 'Brent Bernicle,' as well as that of the other Bernicle (*A. leucopsis*); and to this end I will quote the story as related by an old writer of the time of Queen Elizabeth.* 'There are found in the north parts of Scotland, and the islands adiacent, called Orchades, certaine trees, whereon do growe certaine shells of a white colour tending to russet, wherein are contained little liuing creatures, which shells, in time of maturity doe open, and out of them grow those little liuing things, which falling into the water, do become fowles, which we call *barnacles*; in the north of England, *brant* geese; and in Lancashire *tree* geese: but the other that do fall vpon the land, perish, and come to nothing. Thus much, by the writings of others, and also from the mouthes of people of those parts, which may very well accord with truth.

'But what our eies haue seen, and hands haue touched, we

* Gerard's 'Herbal; or, History of Plants,' p. 1588, edition 1636.'

shall declare. There is a small island in Lancashire, called the Pile of Foulders, wherein are found the broken pieces of old and bruised ships, some whereof haue beene cast thither by shipwracke, and also the trunks and bodies, with the branches of old and rotten trees, cast vp there likewise; whereon is found a certain spume or froth that in time breedeth vnto certaine shells, in shape like those of the muskle, but sharper-pointed, and of a whitish colour; the other end is made fast, wherein is contained a thing in forme like a lace of silke, finely wouen, as it were, together, of a whitish colour, one end wherof is fastned vnto the inside of the shell, even as the fish of oisters and muskles are; the other end is made fast unto the belly of a rude masse or lumpe, which, in time, commeth to the shape and forme of a bird. When it is perfectly formed, the shell gapeth open, and the first thing that appeareth is the foresaid lace or string: next come the legs of the bird hanging out, and as it groweth greater, it openeth the shell by degrees, til at length it is all come forth, and hangeth onely by the bill. In short space after, it commeth to full maturitie, and falleth into the sea, where it gathereth feathers, and groweth to a fowle bigger than a mallard, and lesser than a goose, hauing blacke legs and bill or beake, and feathers blacke and white, spotted in such manner as is our magpie, called in some places a Pie-Annet, which the people of Lancashire call by no other name than a *tree Goose*, which place aforesaid, and all those parts adjoyning, do so much abound therewith, that one of the best is bought for threepence. For the truth hereof, if any doubt, may it please them to repair vnto me, and I shall satisfy them by the testimonie of good witnesses. Moreover it should seem that there is another sort hereof, the history of which is true, and of mine own knowledge: for traouelling upon the shore of our English coast, between Douer and Rumney, I found the trunk of an old rotten tree, which (with some help that I procured by fishermen's wiues, that were there attending their husbands' returne from the sea) we drew out of the water upon dry land. Vpon this rotten tree, I found growing many thousands of long crimson bladders, in shape like

vnto puddings newly filled, before they be sodden, which weere very cleere and shining, at the nether end whereof did grow a shell-fish, fashioned somewhat like a small muskle, but much whiter, resembling a shell-fish that groweth vpon the rockes about Garnsey and Garsey, called a Lympit. Many of these shells I brought with me to London, which, after I had opened, I found in them liuing things without form or shape: in others, which were neerer come to ripenesse, I found liuing things that were very naked, in shape like a bird: in others, the birds covered with soft downe, the shell halfe open, and the bird ready to fall out, which no doubt were the fowles called barnacles. I dare not absolutely auouch euery circumstance of the first part of this history, concerning the tree that beareth those buds afore-said, but will leave it to a further consideration; howbeit, that which I have seen with mine eies, and handled with mine hands, I dare confidently auouch, and boldly put down for verity. Now if any will object that this tree which I saw, might be one of those before mentioned, which either by the waues of the sea, or some violent wind, had been ouerturned, as many other trees are; or that any trees falling into those seas about the Orchades, will of themselves beare the like fowles, by reason of those seas and waters, these being so probable conjectures, and likely to be true, I may not without prejudice gainsay, or indeauour to confute.'

The little shell-fish which these wise people supposed to have brought forth the geese still go by the name of 'barnacles,' and the Latin name, *Lapas anatifera*, 'the goose-bearing bernicle,' recalls the belief respecting them; yet surely the extravagant and ridiculous theory detailed above must have severely taxed the credulity even of the ignorant and unscientific age in which it was propounded.

179. BERNICLE GOOSE (*Anser leucopsis*).

As the Brent Goose abounds on the eastern, so the Bernicle Goose frequents the western coasts of Great Britain, but not in such numbers as its darker relative. It is called *leucopsis*, or 'white-faced,' or 'white-fronted,' to distinguish it from its darker-

headed and darker-breasted congener the Brent, with which it is often confused. Saunders says that, unlike the Gray Geese, which feed in silence, these 'Black Geese,' as they are called, both when feeding and when on the wing keep up a constant cackling. I have already said that this is sometimes known as the 'Land Bernicle,' and the Brent as the 'Sea Bernicle,' but indeed both species are essentially dwellers on the sea, and rarely come to dry land; and it must have been an unusually severe gale which could have driven so far inland the only three specimens whose visit to Wiltshire I am able to chronicle, two of which, I learn from Mr. Grant, were killed at Enford on February 25, 1865, and the third, as Mr. Rawlence informs me, was killed at Britford. In Sweden it is sometimes called the *Hafre Gös*, or 'Oat Goose,' from its partiality for oat stubbles. It is more generally known in that country as the *Fjäll Gös*, and some few breed in the fjalls of Northern Scandinavia, but the great bulk in the breeding season penetrate to the most northern latitudes; and Nordenskiöld relates that, from the most northerly point of Spitzbergen hitherto reached, vast flocks of this species have been seen steering their course in rapid flight yet farther towards the north—a conclusive proof (so the walrus-hunters affirm) of the existence of some land more northerly than Spitzbergen.* In France it is *Oie Bernache*; and in Germany, *Weisswangige Gans*, 'White-cheeked Goose.'

180. EGYPTIAN GOOSE (*Anser Egyptianus*).

I am indebted to my friend Colonel Ward, of Bannerdown House, Bath, for an account of the occurrence of this very handsome species in our county, two of which were killed at Corsham Court some few years back, and were preserved by Mr. Dangerfield, of Chippenham. They were in perfect plumage, and had every appearance of being genuine wild birds, and not (as has sometimes been the case with such stragglers) mere semi-domesticated specimens which had escaped from some ornamental water. The Rev. A. P. Morres says it is occasionally

* 'Arctic Voyages,' 1858-1879, p. 53.

met with near Salisbury, and specifies one that for two or three days was seen feeding with the ducks near the river in his own neighbourhood.

The Egyptian Goose is a splendid bird, and the rich colours of its plumage make it an exceedingly attractive species; and when seen in a large flock, as I have met with it on the sandbanks and shallows of the Nile, presents as gorgeous an appearance as the most enthusiastic ornithologist could desire. It is a very wary bird, and will not readily admit of near approach, and it was only when sailing with a brisk breeze, and suddenly and noiselessly rounding some corner of the river, that we were enabled to come upon it at close quarters; but at such times, or occasionally when quiet at anchor in the dusk, we have been in the midst of a flock, and could thoroughly admire the well-contrasted and brilliant colours of their plumage before they took alarm and decamped at their best speed.

Chenalopex is the modern generic name with which this bird is now often favoured. It is the same as *Vulpanser* of Herodotus* in a Greek dress, or, as we should say, the 'Fox-Goose,' so called from its living, or rather breeding, in holes. It appears frequently on the monuments of Egypt, and is often delineated with great artistic skill. The richness of the plumage and remarkable appearance of this species, compared with the other Nile Geese, would have naturally attracted the early artists. Wherever the colouring has been preserved, we find usually the head and neck painted red, the breast and belly blue, the back yellow, with the tips of the wings red, the tail with narrow lengthened feathers, like the Pintail Duck, which many of the Karnak intaglios more closely resemble. The Goose was the emblem of Sib, the father of Osiris, but was not sacred; it signified 'a son,' and consequently occurs very often in the Pharaonic ovals, signifying 'Son of the sun.' Horapollo says it was adopted in consequence of its affection for its young.† It has been found frequenting the lakes south of the equator in

* Book ii., c. 72.

† Dr. A. L. Adams in *Ibis* for 1864, p. 34.

East Africa and in Somali-land, where it is known to the inhabitants as *Etal Jaz*, or 'who lives at the wells.'* It is generally allowed to be the most unpalatable of all the tribe, and by most people considered quite uneatable.

181. SPUR-WINGED GOOSE (*Anser gambensis*).

I have an account of the capture near Netheravon, on the edge of Salisbury Plain, on September 4, 1869, of this very rare African Goose, of which but three other specimens are known to have occurred in the British Isles.† It had been seen for some days previously associating with some tame geese in the fields, and was killed by Mr. Rowden, of Upavon, as I was informed by my friend the late Rev. C. Raikes. I had also notice of another which was shot near Ramsbury in November, 1881, but on inquiry this turned out to be an escaped prisoner from a pond in the neighbourhood, where two, which were sent over from Africa, had been for some time in captivity. It is not improbable that the Netheravon bird may also have escaped from confinement, but of this there is no evidence to show. This species is not only extremely handsome, with well-marked glossy and bronzed plumage, but it is remarkable for the strong white horny spur, above half an inch in length, and turning upwards, situated on the carpal joint of each wing, as in the Spur-winged Plover (*Charadrius spinosus*), at whose formidable weapons in every variety of bluntness I had often marvelled in the many specimens which I shot on the Nile. It is a native of tropical Africa, and though called a goose, and with the general appearance of a goose, it is thought to be more nearly allied to the ducks, which it resembles in manner of feeding and some other respects. It derives its specific name, *gambensis*, from Senegambia, in West Africa; and *plectropterus*, 'Spur-winged,' the generic name bestowed upon it by some, from the peculiarity mentioned above.

* Capt. J. H. Speke in *Ibis* for 1860, p. 248.

† Recorded in the Fourth Edition of 'Yarrell,' vol. iv., p. 305; and in *Science Gossip* for 1870, p. 51.

182. CANADA GOOSE (*Anser Canadensis*).

The last-mentioned species was a straggler from Africa. This is no less rare as an occasional and very unfrequent visitor to the British Isles from America, in the north of which continent, and in Hudson's Bay, Greenland, and the regions still farther north, it is found in very great numbers, where it has proved a welcome source of provision to Arctic explorers, as well as to the fur-traders and *voyageurs* of the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company, to whom it is universally known as the 'Common Gray Goose.'

For its occurrence in Wiltshire I am indebted to the pen of Mr. Henry Blackmore, of Salisbury, who thus records its appearance in that very useful periodical, the *Zoologist*: 'On Monday, the 21st of January, 1867, a fine specimen of the Canada or Cravat Goose (*Anser Canadensis*) was shot in a meadow at Coombe Bissett, Wiltshire, by Mr. Crosse, of the same place. It came into my possession the following day, and on dissection proved to be a male bird, weight twelve pounds. Another was shot in the same locality on Saturday, the 26th of January, and was purchased by Mr. Marsh, of Ramridge House, for his collection. This specimen appeared to me to be the same in every respect as the one I have (a male bird in equally good plumage and condition). Mr. Whatman, of this city, told me that he had seen a flock of these birds on the 19th instant in a meadow at Homington, which is the adjoining village to Coombe Bissett, where the two birds were killed. From inquiries I have since made, I cannot learn that these birds were kept on any ornamental water or lake in the neighbourhood; it may therefore be deduced that they are *bonâ fide* specimens of the bird in its natural state.* The Rev. A. P. Morres wrote me word that he had himself seen the flock of seven from which the above specimens were shot, and that they remained for some time in the Britford water-meadows. But this again is a species of attractive appearance, which is frequently kept on ornamental

* *Zoologist*—Second Series, April, 1867, p. 709.

waters, so that it is difficult to say whether the Wiltshire killed specimens were mere tourists on their travels come to visit this inhospitable country of their own free will, or whether they were escaped convicts, involuntarily transported to these shores. In either case their reception was a warm one. Mr. Grant records another specimen killed at Enford Manor Farm in September, 1870. This bird has obtained the trivial name of 'Cravat' Goose, from the conspicuous patch of white feathers on the chin and throat, almost encircling the black neck, which bears a certain resemblance to a neckcloth. These birds are the 'bustards,' *les outardes*, of the Canadians.

183. WHOOPER (*Cygnus musicus*).

More commonly known as the Wild Swan, and is an annual visitor to our coasts in winter. Indeed, I have seen nine brought in to the Lynn poulterers by a single gunner in a morning in severe weather. It is a bird of very powerful flight, which travels at a great height above the earth and in a straight line, and its speed is said sometimes to exceed a hundred miles in an hour; so no wonder it is wont to appear at times on most of our larger inland lakes and rivers. The late Rev. George Marsh reported that a dozen of them settled on the Draycot Pond in 1838, which was one of the hardest winters within the memory of living man. He also recorded that one was brought to Lord Radnor at Salisbury, who offered a guinea if the man would get him another. The worthy fowler soon returned with one of his lordship's tame Swans, and received the guinea, and neither he nor the noble earl was aware of any difference between the two birds. The Rev. A. P. Morres records the sudden appearance of a small party of four Whoopers as Mr. Attwater, a farmer of Britford, and the keeper Butler were resting under a tree after a successful day's duck-shooting. These fine birds, after circling round for a while, pitched in the Britford meadows on the brink of the river at no great distance, when two of their number were then and there shot. On February 9th, 1877, Mr. Nelson Goddard, of the Manor House, Clyffe Pypard, my much-valued

friend and neighbour and a keen observer, wrote me word that as he was riding in a field below his house he saw a Wild Swan pass over his head, making for the westward—that is, towards Bowood; and that he had never seen one on the wing before, and much marvelled at the speed at which it travelled. It was soon, he said, out of sight. This occurrence of the Wild Swan so far inland was the more remarkable, because the winter of 1877, so far from being severe, was one of the mildest and wettest ever known in this country. Lord Nelson tells me of a Whistling Swan which was killed at Trafalgar, and Mr. Herbert Smith of one shot at Bowood in the year 1885 by one of Lord Lansdowne's keepers. It derives its specific name, *musicus*, not from its fabled song just before its death, but from the peculiar grand clanging trumpeting or whooping note which it repeats several times at intervals—'hoop, hoop,' 'hoop, hoop'—whence its name 'Whooper' and 'Whistling Swan.' Lloyd, who was well accustomed to see it in Sweden during the spring and autumn migrations on the way to and from the breeding-stations in the far North, says: 'Its voice, though it consists but of two notes, is beautifully melodious, more especially—as frequently happens—when birds of different ages, whose notes differ, take part in the concert. Some think that in the distance their song resembles the finer notes of the bugle. Kjærbølling likens it to the sound of distant church bells; and adds that in calm weather it may be heard at more than a Danish ($4\frac{3}{4}$ English) mile's distance.* Cordeaux says: 'The cry of the Wild Swan is extremely wild and musical. I once, during the prevalence of a severe "blast," saw forty-two of these noble birds pass over our marshes, flying in the same familiar arrow-head formation as Wild Geese use—a sight not to be forgotten, not alone for their large size and snowy whiteness, but for their grand trumpet notes; now single, clear, distinct, clarion-like, as a solitary bugle sounds the "advance"; then, as if in emulation of their leader's note, the entire flock would burst into a chorus of cries, which resemble a pack of hounds in full cry.†' Cordeaux also calls attention to the

* 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 429.

† 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 157.

singular formation of the upper mandible of this bird, which possesses a hinge-like joint, allowing a greater extension and distension of the mouth. St. John remarks that 'when Wild Swans are feeding one always keeps his head above water as sentinel;' and Montagu that it 'carries its head straight and erect, either upon the water or when stationary on land; but in walking the head is lowered, and the neck reclines over the back.' In Ireland there is a deeply-rooted superstition that something dreadful will happen to him who has the misfortune to kill a Swan, for the Irish entertain the strange belief that a departed spirit, perhaps of one of their own kin, is imprisoned in the outward form of each bird of this genus.* There is yet another fable connected with this bird, very commonly believed in England—viz., that it is able to break a man's arm or leg by the stroke of its wing. But for this there is no sort of foundation; indeed, as uncompromising Montagu remarked, the tale is quite ridiculous. If I may judge from the only specimen which I ever obtained in the flesh, through a gunner on the coast of the Wash, and which, after I had taken off its skin, we roasted and ate, I should pronounce the flesh tough, and the flavour coarse and unpalatable. There were some, however, of the large party which partook of it who declared it to be good, especially when cold. In France it is *Cygne à bec jaune ou sauvage*; in Germany, *Der Singschwan*; in Italy, *Cygno salvatico*; and in Sweden, *Vild Svan*.†

184. MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*).

I am somewhat at a loss to know why this species should be reckoned as a British bird, seeing that it certainly cannot be called *fera naturæ* in these islands. However, as it is included in all the British lists, and as we have our share of this handsome bird in all parts of the county, I, of course, follow suit, and add it to my Wiltshire catalogue. Though, for the most part,

* Sir R. Payne-Gallwey's 'Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 164-171.

† For an account of the Whooper in its natural haunts, see Scebohm and Harvie Brown on the 'Birds of the Lower Petchora,' in *Ibis* for 1876, p. 437.

of gentle, peaceful manners, it becomes very pugnacious during the breeding season; and I well recollect when a boy at Eton, while sculling in a light skiff near the rushy banks of an eyot on the Thames, I unconsciously found myself in close proximity to a Swan's nest, and the old bird came at me with such furious aspect of beak and wings that I made my escape as fast as possible, fairly driven off by the victorious bird, which even followed me for some distance, triumphing over my defeat. There is one simple mark of difference whereby the Whooper may be distinguished from the Mute Swan, viz., the colours of their respective beaks. In *C. musicus* the beak is black at the point and reddish yellow at the base; in *C. olor* these colours are reversed, the point of the beak being of a reddish orange colour, the base black. In other respects the two birds seem externally alike, though on dissection they show several anatomical differences of structure. The Mute Swan has been from early times reckoned a royal bird in England, said to have been brought from Cyprus and introduced into this country by Richard I.;* and I learn from Yarrell that 'anciently the Crown had an extensive swannery annexed to the Royal Palace or Manor of Clarendon, in Wiltshire.' The privilege of having a swan-mark or 'game' of swans was considered a high honour in old time, and was seldom granted except to those of high rank in Church or State, or to corporate bodies of some pretensions to dignity. All such owners of Swans were registered in the book of the royal Swan-herd; and swan-marks, cut on the upper surface of the upper mandible of the beak, were most jealously guarded. So long ago as in the eleventh year of Henry VII. (A.D. 1496) a law was passed that 'no manner of person, of what condition or degree he be, take or cause to be taken, be it upon his own ground or any other man's, the egg of any Swan out of the nest, upon pain of imprisonment for a year and a day and a fine at the King's will.†' The conceit that this species was accustomed

* 'Birds of Somerset,' by Mr. Cecil Smith, p. 472.

† 'Journal of Archæological Institute,' vol. xli., p. 295. See whole passage on 'Swan Marks,' treated archæologically.

to sing before its death is as old as Pliny, who refuted it; but it is strange that the bird into which Orpheus the musician was changed, and which was called the bird of Apollo, the god of music, with a reputation for sweet singing which has descended with it from such ancient times, should now come to be distinguished in England by the specific name of 'Mute' Swan. That, however, seems in reality to be its characteristic. Yarrell, indeed, assures us that it has a soft low voice, rather plaintive, and with little variety, but not disagreeable; and that he has heard it often in the spring, and sometimes later in the season, when moving slowly about with its young. On the other hand, Waterton altogether denies that it has any such melodious warblings. Coleridge, speaking of the superstition alluded to above, says:

'Swans sing before they die, 'twere no bad thing
Should certain persons die before they sing.'

Before taking leave of this graceful species, let me recommend all who have the opportunity to pay a visit to the Dorsetshire Swannery at Abbotsbury, near Weymouth, where they will see the splendid sight of from 700 to 1,500 of this magnificent bird in their own breeding haunts: the particulars of which I communicated in the *Zoologist* of 1877, pp. 505-511, to which I would refer my readers, and will not repeat myself here. Lord Arundell remarks that, 'though not rare birds, Swans may be mentioned as a feature of the country near Wardour; as from the circumstance of there being several large pieces of water within a few miles, at the Fonthills, Pythouse, etc., the Swans, four or five at a time, are frequently seen on the wing, flying from one pond to another; and I know of few things more impressive than the metallic sound of the Swan's wing when in flight.' The specific name, *olor*, is classical Latin for a 'Swan.' In France it is *Cygne tuberculé ou domestique*; in Germany, *Höcker Schwan*, 'Swan with a bump,' in allusion to its beak; in Italy, *Cigno reale*; in Sweden, *Tam Svan*, 'Tame Swan;,' and in Spain, *Cisne*.

185. COMMON SHELLDRAKE (*Tadorna vulpanser*).

As this fine species may be said to stand at the head of the Ducks, it will be well to observe that there are two distinct groups of these birds which entirely differ from each other in habits. These are the *surface feeding*, or 'true Ducks,' and the *diving*, or 'Oceanic' Ducks. Of the surface feeders, with the exception of sundry very rare and accidental visitors, all the British species, eight in number, have been found in Wiltshire. They generally frequent fresh-water lakes, rivers, marshes, and quiet pools; have great powers of flight; never dive for their food, and, in short, are almost as much at home out of the water as in it; in all which respects they differ entirely from the Oceanic ducks. First of them comes the Common Shelldrake, so conspicuous for its bright coloured plumage, and so attractive for its general appearance. It is by no means uncommon on the coast, and occasionally a straggler has appeared in our county. The Rev. F. Goddard, at that time Vicar of Alderton, informed me that a specimen was killed in that neighbourhood about the year 1856 or 1857; and the Rev. A. P. Morres records the capture of another, on the river near Britford, by the keeper, some years since. Lord Lansdowne has seen it on the lake at Bowood, and Mr. Grant had a specimen brought him for preservation in September, 1868, which had been taken at Overton. Some say it is called the 'Shelldrake' from the partiality it evinces for the smaller shellfish which constitute the principal part of its food; others say, from its tortoiseshell colour; or because it has a lump at the base of the bill like a shell; but others, with more probability, from *sheld*, signifying 'pied,' 'flecked,' or 'parti-coloured,' and certainly a plumage which exhibits such marked contrasts of colour as green, chestnut, white, and black, deserves to attract special notice. The generic name, *tadorna*, is pronounced to be of Italian origin, but derivation and meaning unknown; the specific, *vulpanser*, 'fox duck,' either from its dark-red, fox colour or from its habit of breeding in a hole. The specific name now often bestowed on it of *cornuta*, 'horned,' from *cornu*, has

reference, I suppose, to the bright red knob at the base of the upper mandible, which is developed in the breeding season. Provincially it is known as the 'Burrow Duck,' and in Sweden as the *Graf-And*, 'Grave' or 'Hole' Duck, from its habit of selecting for its nest a cavity in the rock, or a deserted burrow of a rabbit. For a similar reason it is called in Scotland the 'Stock Annet,' because it sometimes breeds in the hollows of decayed trees, and in Orkney the 'Sly Goose,' from the manœuvres it employs to entice the intruder from its nest. Its flight is slow and heavy, like that of a goose; but Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says, 'I have noticed them fly into their burrow with a dash, the wings folded at that instant, rather than alight at the entrance and leave a trace behind for plunderers.' The same experienced observer also says, 'I have seen from ten to twelve of the young ducklings climb up on the mother's back, each little one holding a feather in its tiny bill, and thus carried by the parent to the safety of the sea.'* Like the Egyptian Goose, with which it has many affinities, though so gay in plumage, it is coarse and bitter to the taste, and indeed quite uneatable. In France it is *Tadorne*; in Germany, *Brandente*, 'Burnt or Flame-coloured Goose'; in Italy, *Volpoca tadorna*, 'volpoca' being the exact equivalent of 'vulpanser'; in Spain, *Patotarro*, 'the Pan Duck,' but why this title I know not. Like the Geese, but unlike the Ducks, between which it stands, the female wears very much the same coloured plumage as the male.

186. SHOVELLER. (*Anas clypeata*).

The beak of this species at once distinguishes it from all other Ducks, as here we see in its most perfect form the laminated structure (as it is called) to which I have already alluded: the laminae taking the shape of fine long bristles; those of the upper mandible projecting beyond the margin, and concealing the front part of the lower mandible, and these fit beautifully into each other, forming a kind of sieve, by which the bill is capable of separating what is fit for food, and rejecting through their inter-

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 63-66.

stices the mud and other superfluous matter. Moreover, the beak is peculiarly broad, flat, and depressed, the tip more particularly spoon-shaped, and terminated by a hooked nail. But it is to be observed that the bill of the young bird possesses none of this peculiar shape, and is no longer than that of an ordinary duckling. From the remarkable appearance of the adult bird, in consequence of this wide bill, which gives it rather a top-heavy look, come the numerous names by which naturalists of various countries have designated it: *Spathulea*, 'with a bill broad like a spoon'; *Platyrhyncos*, in some parts of England, 'Broadbill'; in Germany, *Löffel Ente*; and in Sweden, *Leffel-And*, or 'Spoon Duck' but it derives its specific name, *clypeata*, 'armed with a shield,' from its white shield-like gorget. It is the most cosmopolitan of birds, having been found not only in abundance in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, but even rarely in Australia; and I believe that can be said of scarcely any other bird. It is of shy, timorous disposition, and the localities it loves best are the marshes and muddy shallows at the mouths of rivers. Cordeaux says, 'Shovelers have a curious habit of swimming round and round each other in circles for hours together, with the neck and head depressed to the surface of the water.*' The Rev. A. P. Morres records a pair killed in the meadows at Britford, by the keeper, some time back, but says they are the only instances he has heard of their occurrence near Salisbury, and he believes them to be quite uncommon in that district. It has, however, been met with from time to time in various parts of Wiltshire, and Mr. Herbert Smith has observed it on the lake at Bowood. In France it is *Canard Souchet*; in Italy, *Anatra Mestolone*, 'Ladle Duck'; in Spain, *Pato Cuchareta*, 'Small-spoon Duck'; in Portugal, *Pato trombeteiro*, 'Trumpeter Duck.' Though by no means a common species in England, I may say it is sparingly distributed every year over the country.

* 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 161.

187. GADWALL (*Anas strepera*).

Since my former papers on the Ornithology of Wilts were published, I have a notice of the occurrence of this species in our county, for a specimen was shot at Amesbury at the latter part of 1871 by Mr. S. Hayes, as I learn from Mr. Grant, of Devizes. It is not a common bird in England, though met with sparingly every year. The specimen in my collection I considered myself very fortunate in obtaining in 1855 from a 'gunner' on the shores of the Wash, with whom I had frequent dealings; for it was the only specimen of the species he had ever shot, though he had then pursued the calling of fowler on those mud-banks for twenty-five years. It is common in Holland, but its home is in the far north of America, as well as of Europe and Asia. It is a very shy bird, and seeks the most lonely spots it can find in which to shelter itself. It excels in the art of diving, is more rapid in flight than most of the ducks, and has been pronounced by Lord Lilford 'by far the best for the table of the European Anatidæ.' Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says it may easily be mistaken at first sight for a female Wild Duck, but the patch of white near the centre of the closed wing affords a good mark of distinction. It is a fine, plump-looking bird, with a very broad chest; and the markings on the breast, which are peculiar to it, are very beautiful, and have a dappled appearance, which is formed by small white half-moon shaped pencillings on each feather, almost an eighth of an inch from the top.* It is remarkable for the length and delicacy of the laminæ of the upper mandible, which project upwards the tenth of an inch beyond the margin; and from that peculiarity the Gadwall has obtained from modern ornithologists the generic name of *chaulelasmus*, which literally means 'with outstanding teeth,' but here applies to the projecting laminæ. Its specific name, *strepera*, 'noisy,' in German *Schwatter Ente*, in French *Le Chipeau*, and in Swedish *Snatter And*, all meaning 'Chattering Duck,' take their origin from the loud, harsh, shrill notes which it repeats over and over again. It is

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 56.

sometimes known as the 'Gray Duck,' which Yarrell says the term Gadwall is intended to imply; but he omits to explain how.

188. PINTAIL DUCK (*Anas acuta*).

There is no more elegant and graceful duck than this. Of slender form, with thin neck, elongated tail-feathers, and handsome plumage, it rivals our brightest and gayest birds, whether of land or water. It is common on the southern coast of England, and in Dorsetshire is known by the provincial name of 'Sea-Pheasant,' a sobriquet derived from its prolonged tail. It is almost needless to say that the specific name, *acuta*, also refers to the sharp-pointed tail, which is its chief characteristic. In Germany it is *Spiess-ente* 'Spear-duck'; in Swedish, *Stjert-And*, 'Tail-duck'; and provincially in this country the 'Spear Widgeon,' all having reference to the elongated tail-feathers of the drake. It may be identified at a long distance, and discerned among other fowl, by the snow-white neck and breast.* As regards its excellence for the table, it is placed by Sir R. Payne-Gallwey at the head of the wild fowl, and is said by him to excel all the other ducks and geese in delicacy of flavour. Mr. Cecil Smith,† who keeps it in confinement on his pond, says it obtains its food by tipping its head downwards into the water, after the manner of tame ducks, and that it feeds on the pond-weed and the insects and small mollusca which it picks up with it; but that he never sees it feed on grass, like the Widgeon, as Meyer asserts.

I may mention here that in the good old times of yore our ancestors saw the wisdom of protecting this and other valuable birds from wanton destruction at improper seasons; and by the Code of Fen Laws, or orders for regulating the fens, passed in the reign of Edward VI. (A.D. 1548), it was decreed that 'no person should use any sort of net, or other engine, to take or kill

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 20-22, 50.

† 'Birds of Somersetshire,' p. 483.

any fowl commonly called moulted ducks in any of the fens before Midsummer-day yearly.*

The Rev. A. P. Morres mentions one killed on the water at Clarendon Park, and now preserved at the house. Mr. Ponting tells me that Sir H. Meux's keeper shot a good specimen on the Kennett near Lockeridge, in February, 1886. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports show that one was killed at Mildenhall in February, 1870, and another at Axford in January, 1871; but wherever sportsmen are accustomed to shoot wild fowl they meet with it from time to time, associated with the Common Wild Duck, Teal, and Widgeon.

In France it is *Canard a longue queue*; and in Italy, *Anatra di coda lunga*.

189. WILD DUCK (*Anas boschas*).

Though rapidly becoming more scarce under the present system of draining, this is still too common a bird to require comment on its appearance and habits. It breeds on a pollard-tree or ruined wall, as well as on the ground, and (as Selby pointed out) is careful to cover the eggs with down when it quits the nest for food. This may be partly to keep them warm during her absence, but still more to hide them from the sharp eyes of the marauding Carrion Crow or other evil-minded thief who may be prowling about. It is the *Gemeine-ente*, 'Common Duck,' of Germany; '*Le Canard sauvage*' of France; the *Gräs-And*, or 'Grass-Duck,' of Norway; the 'Stock-Duck' of British North America; and whether in India and China, in the Ionian Islands and Malta, in Northern Africa and Egypt, or in Greenland and America, it is always the *Common Duck* of the country; so that the numbers of this universal and familiar friend must be, could a census be taken of it, something prodigious. But when we reflect that in the active days of the Lincolnshire decoys over thirty thousand birds were sent to London in one season from one district only, and of these productive returns the Wild Duck formed the main staple, we can only marvel that the species is

* Cordeaux's 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 163.

so abundant now. Harting observes that Ducks, when bent on a long flight, do not all move through the air at the same altitude, but some much higher than others; and large flights generally seem to have a break in the centre, and present a figure very much resembling the outline of North and South America as it appears on the map. When flying near the surface of land or water, they are often in a confused mass.* Wilson, in his 'North American Ornithology,' has described an amusing and ingenious method of taking Wild Ducks adopted by the inhabitants of India and China, where the sportsman, covering his head with a calabash or wooden vessel, wades into the water, and keeping only his head thus masked above it, advances towards and mixes with the flock, who feel no alarm at what they look upon as a mere floating calabash. He is thus enabled to select his victims, whom he seizes by the legs, and, pulling them under water, fastens them to a girdle with which he is equipped, thus carrying off as many as he can stow away, without exciting distrust and alarm amongst the survivors.† The Rev. A. P. Morres says the Wild Duck is very common near Salisbury, and breeds there in considerable numbers. In the winter he has seen more than a hundred rise from a part of the river called the 'Broad,' close to Longford Castle. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports speak of a flock of seventy seen at Ramsbury, November 10th, 1876. Mr. Herbert Smith, writing to me this spring (1887), says: 'We have had a very fair amount of Wild Ducks on the Bowood Lake this year. One morning I saw, I should say, about five hundred at one time; and among them I noticed the Common Mallard, Teal Pochard, and Tufted Duck.' Mr. Hussey-Freke, writing from Hanningford Hall, in the extreme north of the county, says: 'We get a few wild fowl at the Thames.' And of single specimens I hear in all quarters.

In Italy it is *Anatra salvatica reale*; in Spain and in Portugal, *Pato real*.

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 228.

† Selby's 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' vol. ii., p. 307.

190. GARGANEY (*Anas querquedula*).

This is often called the 'Summer Teal,' and though larger than *A. crecca*, it bears considerable resemblance to that pretty little species, with which we are so familiar. It is really half-way in size between a Widgeon and a Teal, and is distinguished from its congeners by a white streak down the sides of the neck. Professor Skeat derives the name *querquedula* from *querq* or *kark*, significative of any loud noise, in allusion to its note, which is said to be a harsh *knack*, and very loud in proportion to the size of the bird. In Germany this species is known as *Knack-ente*. Besides this, its ordinary note, in spring the drake makes a peculiar jarring noise like that of a child's rattle, whence the name of 'Crick' or 'Cricket Teal' in the eastern counties, where it is best known.* It arrives in the spring, and the late Rev. G. Marsh used to describe it as by no means uncommon in his neighbourhood, twenty years ago. Mr. Grant received one in May, 1874, from West Lavington. The Rev. A. P. Morres mentions a little party of four birds marked down in a bend of the river at Britford, all of which the keeper shot; and I hear from Mr. Hussey Freke that his keeper killed one at Hannington last year. It may be said to occur in this county, but sparingly. The only country in which I ever met with it was Portugal, from which I brought back specimens. In France it is *Sarcelle d'été*; in Portugal, *Marreco* and *Marrequinho*; in Sweden, *Ärta*.

191. TEAL (*Anas crecca*).

This beautiful little duck, the smallest of the Anatidæ, is well known throughout the county. It is a night-feeding species: for all day it reposes on the water, or sits motionless on the very brink, with the head crouched between the shoulders; but immediately after sunset it will fly to its feeding-grounds. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says† the habit of this, the prettiest and smallest of all wild-fowl, is to swim near the surface, with only

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iv., p. 395.

† 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 59-61.

head and bill showing above water. They prefer inland lakes so long as they are unfrozen. For beauty of feather, no bird can excel the adult male Teal: the dappled breast, the exquisite contrast of velvet black, metallic green, and rich cream yellow, with the graceful sprightly aspect, are unrivalled. A number of Teal, collecting at night, or in a happy humour by day, chatter and whistle loudly; they sometimes then sound like a stand of Golden Plover. The whistle of the male is low and shrill, the call of the female is a subdued imitation of the Wild Duck. Its flight is very rapid, and Harting says * that, on being disturbed at a brook which has plenty of cover along the banks, it will, after flying a short distance, drop down suddenly again, like Snipe and Woodcock. The specific name, *crecca*, is undoubtedly derived from its note, as is *Crick-ente* of Germany, and *Krick-And* of Norway, where it breeds in the upper fjäll morasses, as well as in the lower marshes. In France it is *Sarcelle d'hiver*; in Portugal it shares the same name as the Garganey; but in Spain it is *Patito* and *Cerceta*.

192. WIDGEON (*Anas penelope*).

As common as the last. The enormous numbers of this species obtained by the fenmen and gunners on the east coast of England by means of a duck boat and swivel gun surpass conception, and the heap of slain must be seen to be believed. I have many times turned over half a sackful which my friend the Norfolk fowler obtained by a successful shot from the big gun; and a large proportion of the ducks taken in decoys were of this species. Colonel Hawker said that for coast night shooting the Widgeon is like the fox for hunting: it shows the finest sport of anything in Great Britain. As it only fetches half the price of a Mallard or Brent Goose, it is known to the fenners as 'a half-bird.' It is pre-eminently a river duck, resting and sleeping on the water, but, when the tide permits, resorting in large bodies to the *Zostera* beds on the mud flats.† Harting says: 'I have observed

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 230.

† 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 167.

Widgeon call a good deal at night; their soft whistling note like *whee-ou, whee-ou*, may be heard on still nights at a great distance.* From this peculiar whistling call-note they are known as 'Whew Ducks'; in France, *Canards siffleurs*; and in Germany, *Pfeif-ente*; but in Sweden it is *Bläs And*, or 'White-fronted Duck.' When they are feeding they are remarkably silent, and the larger the flock, the quieter they are, for numbers give confidence and a feeling of security. In Spain it is *Pato-silbador*; and in Portugal, *Assobiadeira*, both with the meaning of 'Whistling Ducks.' Mr. Waterton has proved that, unlike its congeners, the Widgeon is not a night-feeding bird, but devours by day the short grass which the Goose is known to pluck; hence it is called in Lapland the 'Grass Duck.'

To see a large flock of Widgeon reposing on the lake at Walton Hall, perfectly wild birds, and yet quickly gaining confidence by finding themselves unmolested in that happy spot; to observe them dressing their feathers, sporting with one another, chasing each other, splashing up the water, in a state of security, where they could lay aside the anxious alarm which they must so frequently feel; and to watch their playful antics through the big telescope which Mr. Waterton always kept adjusted at the drawing-room window, and directed towards the lake, was one of the many treats of a visit to Walton Hall, and a sight which alone would repay a journey to Yorkshire.

193. EIDER DUCK (*Somateria mollissima*).

We now begin the second division, the *Diving*, or 'Oceanic' Ducks, as they are called. Above we noticed that the *surface-feeders* comprehended those species only which frequent fresh-water lakes, marshes, and dry land; have great powers of flight, and seldom dive. But the Oceanic species, on the contrary, have no partiality for fresh-water or for dry land, but frequent the harbours, the estuaries, and the open sea, and obtain their food, which lies at the bottom of the water, by diving. They may be recognised by the well-developed and broadly-webbed hind-toe,

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 234.

which materially assists their progress under water. At their head in the British list stands the Eider Duck, which well deserves to occupy that post of honour. This large and handsome species abounds in Northern Europe and America, where its well-known down forms a most valuable article of traffic to the inhabitants: so compressible and elastic, so soft and light is this famous down, that a large quantity which I brought from Norway, and which when unpacked was enough to fill four quilts, was easily squeezed into a hat-box for the convenience of transport. On the northern shores of England, and in Scotland, it is commonly met with, but is rarely seen on our more southern coasts; so that I the more marvel what fortunate accident has enabled me to add it to our Wiltshire list. But an undoubted specimen of this bird was killed a few years back on the water at Lynham, the property of Major Heneage, and is still to be seen in the Hall at Compton Bassett House; and Mr. Grant reports another killed at Bottlesford, near Woodborough, in March, 1866. It is, however, notorious for very powerful flight, and the speed at which it flies is marvellous—Montagu says at the rate of ninety miles an hour—but on land it is very inactive and sluggish. The beak has a thick swollen appearance, is elevated at the base, and is terminated with a strong rounded hooked nail. The generic name, *somateria*, literally means ‘body-wool,’ from *σώματος*, ‘of the body,’ and *ἔριον*, ‘wool,’ in allusion to the down which the bird plucks from its breast for the lining of the nest; and that it is *mollissima*, ‘most soft,’ will be readily admitted. It is still known on the coast of Durham and Northumberland as ‘St. Cuthbert’s duck.’ The true home of the *Ejder Gås*, or ‘Eider Goose,’ as it is there called, is on the islands off the north-western coast of Norway, called *Fugle vœr*, or ‘Bird preserves,’ where they are strictly protected. Like the Swan, the Eider does not seem to be in any manner affected by the cold; and, unless the sea is frozen over, it remains on the coast during the whole winter. Indeed, it has been observed in the highest latitudes. Professor Newton says it ‘breeds abundantly in Spitzbergen,’ and Reinhardt that ‘it breeds in Greenland.’ Captain

Markham, in his narrative of the voyage of the *Alert*, during the expedition of 1875-76, says it is one of the few birds which they met with in some numbers in those high latitudes; and more recently Lieutenant Greely, in his disastrous expedition of 1881-84, found it breeding in hundreds on Littleton Island, in the month of August, in latitude 78°. There is an opinion entertained by Ekström and some other Norwegian naturalists that there are two kinds of Eider in Scandinavia, the Common and the *Smal-näbbad*, or 'Narrow-billed,' but this opinion has not been generally endorsed. Professor Skeat says that 'Eider' is entirely a Scandinavian name, and this has been adopted in most European languages; in France it is *Canard Eider*; in Germany, *Eiterente*; but in Italy, *Oca settentrionale*.

194. KING DUCK (*Somateria spectabilis*).

This is another species of Eider Duck, more rare in England than the last, but frequenting the same or even still more northern latitudes than its better-known congener. It is also a very handsome bird, and the well-contrasted colours of its plumage attract notice. The only information I have of its occurrence in this county is a short note by my friend the late Rev. G. Marsh, who wrote, 'The King Duck in my collection was killed in Wilts,' but I have no farther particulars of date or place of capture. The down of the King Eider and its mode of nesting, as well as general habits, are identical with those of *S. mollissima*. The specific name, *spectabilis*, means 'worth seeing,' as applied to the splendour of its plumage. In Sweden it is called *Prakt Ejder*, or 'Beautiful Eider': and, indeed, it does wear right royal robes, and comports itself as every inch a king. But not on that account do we assign it the rank of royalty, but because of the remarkable orange-coloured comb or knob resembling a crown which it wears on its head: and so the Icelanders dubbed it *Aeder Köngr*, or 'Eider King'; and we, taking the hint from those who are more familiar with it, call it the 'King Duck.' During the breeding season it resorts to very high northern latitudes; and as it is found there in immense

numbers and is pronounced palatable, it has proved a welcome addition to the food of Arctic voyagers from the days of Parry, Sabine, and Ross to those of Markham, Nordenskiöld, and Greely. In France it is *Canard à Tête grise*; and in Germany, *Brandente*.

195. COMMON SCOTER (*Oidemia nigra*).

The specific name, *nigra*, sufficiently describes the appearance of this bird, whose plumage may be shortly defined as deep-black in the male and brownish-black in the female: hence it is generally known to the fishermen as the 'Black Duck,' and in Sweden as the 'Sea Blackcock'—*Sjö Orre*. It may easily be distinguished, even at a distance, by its rich, velvety black plumage and orange knob at the base of the bill, and from its congeners by its small size and the absence of white on the wing and neck. Its regular breeding-places are in the far North, though some remain even on our southern coasts throughout the year; but in winter it is a very common bird all round our shores, and especially off the eastern counties of England, where the waters are said to be quite black with them. It derives its name *oidemia* from *οἰδημα*, a 'swelling,' from its tumid bill. Its flesh is so rank and fishy that in Roman Catholic countries it is considered in the light of a fish, and allowed to be eaten on fast days. In France it is *Canard macreuse*; and in Germany, *Die Trauer-ente*, as if 'the duck in mourning dress.' It is a very common bird on the coast, and doubtless visits us in this county occasionally, but the only positive instances I have of its recent occurrence in Wilts are, first, from my kind correspondent, the Rev. George Powell, Rector of Sutton Veney, who met with a specimen on Salisbury Plain in 1849; secondly, from Mr. Grant, of Devizes, who reported that one had been shot on the canal near that town by Mr. Greenhill, of Rowde, at the end of 1871; thirdly, from the Marlborough College Natural History Reports, which state that one was caught in the town of Marlborough, and a second seen at the same time in February, 1873. Moreover, Yarrell mentions that though seldom found on fresh water

inland during winter, yet the late Sir Richard Colt Hoare, Bart., sent him word that his keeper had shot a Scoter on the ornamental water in the park at Stourhead, Wiltshire, which is more than twenty miles from the sea in a straight line, and no such bird had been seen there before. In truth, it is a thoroughly oceanic bird—a true Jack tar which seldom comes ashore, and there cuts but a sorry figure, but which is quite at home in the heaviest surf, and swims and dives with equal facility.

196. **POCHARD** (*Fuligula ferina*).

This species, known also as the Dun Bird, visits our shores in winter in immense numbers, and penetrates inland wherever retired lakes and quiet rivers offer it a suitable asylum: for it is a very shy bird, and generally avoids the proximity of man. In contrast to its usual habits of timidity, and in proof of the confidence which even the wilder birds soon learn to entertain when unmolested, I have seen the Pochards arrive on the lake at Walton Hall (where I was on a visit to my revered friend, Mr. Waterton) and fearlessly swim in flocks before the windows, where we could watch their motions at leisure, while they seemed wholly unconcerned at our presence. The Pochard bears a close resemblance in colour and general appearance to the famous Canvas-backed Duck of America, and is said to be little inferior to that bird in delicacy; consequently it is much sought after by the fowler and taken in vast numbers. The specific name, *ferina*, 'belonging to *feræ*, wild animals,' is said to have reference to its 'game' flavour; for the same reason it is known in Germany as *Tafelente*, the 'Table Duck.' In France it is *Canard Milouin*; in Sweden, *Röd-halsad Dyk-And*, 'Red-necked Diving Duck'; in Spain, *Cabezón*, 'Large-head'; in Portugal, *Tarrantana*. The generic name, *fuligula*, seems to be a diminutive of *fulica*, though what the Red-headed Pochard has to do with the Bald Coot I am at a loss to conjecture. A bird so common as it is on all our coasts—and on the eastern coast it is especially abundant—is sure to have many provincial names, and amongst them the 'Red-headed Widgeon' and the 'Red-headed Poker' are, in addition to those given

above, perhaps the most common. It is also sometimes called the 'Red-eyed Poker,' from the peculiar colour of the eye, a peculiarity not shared in by any other British bird. Pochards, from the backward position of their legs, are awkward and clumsy on land. They swim, however, very rapidly, but deeply immersed in the water, and are especially gifted with diving powers. They are also, though somewhat heavy, very quick and powerful on the wing, but fly in a closely packed body, and not in line or in the triangular shape that we see in wild ducks. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says that Pochards, in common with most of the diving ducks, when alighting on the water, curve the tail downward, and the feet forward, like a Swan, against the water, to check the impetus of flight as they tear along the surface.* It is a well-known species in Wiltshire. Mr. Herbert Smith pronounces it common on the Bowood water. The Rev. A. P. Morres regards it as quite common in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, where it is found in flocks every winter: and as an annual visitor to the lake at Stourton. The Rev. C. Soames reported it as shot at Stoney Bridge, near Marlborough, on January 20, 1881; but I need not enumerate further instances, when it occurs so frequently in all parts of the county.

197. FERRUGINOUS DUCK (*Fuligula nyroca*).

This is not a very common visitor to England, for North-eastern Europe and Northern Asia appear to be its home; it wanders however, in winter, westward and southward, being abundant throughout the Mediterranean and in Northern Africa, and is reported to be the commonest species in Malta, as it undoubtedly is in Egypt, whence the name given it by Buffon, *la Sarcelle d'Egypte*. But the most persevering flights penetrate in some numbers as far west as the British Isles, and as it prefers the fresh-water lakes and ponds of the interior to salt water, it is as likely to occur in Wiltshire as in any other county. I have, however, but three instances of its appearance within our

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 100.

borders : two of which were shot by Mr. W. H. Stagg, of Nether-avon, on December 9, 1875, and for information as to the third, I am indebted to the Rev. E. Duke, of Lake House, who kindly wrote me word that a specimen had been captured on the river there. The specific name, *nyroca*, is Latinized from the Russian, which I can neither spell nor pronounce ; but the English specific name, 'ferruginous,' is obviously derived from its dark-brown back. It is also called the 'White-eyed Duck,' and the 'White Eye,' by our older writers ; as in France, *Canard à iris blanc* ; and in Germany, *Die weissaugige Ente* ; and by our Fleming, *Nyroca leucophthalmos*, from the conspicuous white eye which is its distinguishing characteristic. It may however, as Sir R. Payne-Gallwey points out, be easily mistaken for the female Golden-Eye, not only from the colour of the irides, but from the white wing-patch, and the general colour of the plumage. In Spain it is *Pardote* ; and in Portugal *Negrinha*, 'Negress.'

198. SCAUP DUCK (*Fuligula marila*).

This, too, is a very common bird on the British coasts, and as it frequents the southern shores in vast numbers, it is not surprising that a straggler occurs in Wiltshire occasionally. Mr. Grant records the capture of one at Erlestoke Park, on February 13, 1862, and another at Bulkington in January, 1864. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports state that one was shot at Mildenhall in 1870, by the Rev. C. Soames, and Mr. S. B. Dixon mentions that one was shot in the Pewsey water-meadows in February, 1873, by Mr. C. Goode. But it is a thorough sea-bird, preferring the muddy estuaries and tide-washed sand-banks to any inland lakes or rivers, in which it differs materially from the Pochard, to which it is otherwise closely allied. It is a winter visitor here, arriving early in November, and retiring in spring to high northern latitudes, where it breeds. It is of stout compact shape, and the black head and neck glossed with green reflections, and the gray and white spotted plumage of the back, contrast to great advantage. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, however, pronounces it 'an ungainly-looking fowl, especially about the

head.' Willoughby explained that 'Scaup' means 'broken shells,' in allusion to the smaller univalve and bivalve shell-fish on which it feeds; *marila* (μάριλη) means literally 'the embers of charcoal,' in reference to the pitch-black colour of the plumage on the front parts. So on the Somersetshire coast it is known as the 'Black Duck,'* which is not a very distinctive title, seeing how many other species, clothed with similar dark-coloured plumage, partake of the same name. More appropriately it is known in some localities as the 'Blue-bill.' In British North America it is 'the Big Black-head,' but in Sweden *Hvit Buk*, or 'White Belly.' In France it is *Canard Milouinan*; in Germany *Berg-ente*.

199. TUFTED DUCK (*Fuligula cristata*).

This is a regular winter visitant to our shores, and is not unfrequently found inland, for it follows up the rivers from their mouths, and is in no hurry, where it can find an undisturbed retreat, to return to salt water. It is of plump shape, short and compact figure, and partakes of the general appearance of the Scaup, to which it is closely allied. The specimen in my collection was kindly given me by Mr. Swayne, who killed it in 1856; when shooting with the late Lord Herbert at Grovely, and I have notices of its occurrence in several parts of the county. Major Heneage possesses one which was shot at Lyneham in 1881. Mr. Herbert Smith reports it as common on the Bowood water, and Mr. G. Watson Taylor that it comes to Erlestoke in hard weather. The Rev. A. P. Morres says it is the commonest of the rarer ducks in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, where he sees it in the meadows every hard winter. It is locally known there as the 'Pie-curr.' Mr. Grant reports a pair shot at Netheravon by Mr. F. W. Hussey at the end of January, 1871; and I learn from the *Field* newspaper, under date January 23, 1875, that a fine specimen had been killed by Mr. J. J. Estridge, of Bradford-on-Avon, near that town. It derives its name from a long pendant crest of narrow silky feathers, three inches in

* Mr. Cecil Smith's 'Birds of Somersetshire,' p. 500.

length, and curving from the top of the head down the neck. From Mr. Cordeaux we learn that it is known in Yorkshire as the 'Brass-eyed Poker Duck,' in reference to the brilliant golden-yellow of the eye, which is its most attractive feature; and from Mr. Cecil Smith that in Somersetshire it is the 'Curr Widgeon' and is the commonest there of all the Diving ducks, except perhaps the Pochard, which is also dubbed 'Curr Widgeon,' but elsewhere the 'Black Widgeon,' and is almost as much esteemed for the table as that bird. In other places it is called the 'Small Black Diver.' In Sweden it is the *Vigg*, or 'Wedge,' so called because, when on the surface of the water, it almost always lies with its neck stretched forwards, as if ready to dive; whereby the body assumes a somewhat wedge-like shape. In France it is *Canard Morillon*; in Germany *Reiher-ente*, 'Heron-duck.' In Portugal this species is also called *Negrinha*, from its dark plumage.

200. LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Fuligula glacialis*).

I include this species in the Wiltshire list without hesitation, as I do so on the authority of that excellent ornithologist, the late Rev. George Marsh: otherwise I have no farther notice of its appearance amongst us: indeed, as its specific name, *glacialis*, 'icy,' implies, it is a thoroughly Arctic bird, inhabiting and breeding in, not only Lapland, Spitzbergen and Greenland, but even the very highest latitudes to which our Polar expeditions have penetrated. Moreover, as it is a true denizen of the ocean, seldom coming inland, it is necessarily much more scarce in England than either of its congeners previously described: and yet hardly to be accounted a rare bird in Britain: as it is (though in small numbers) a regular winter visitor to our northern coasts. It is remarkable for the elongated tail-feathers, whence it derives its name, and which are quite pheasant-like in appearance. It is also called 'Hareld' in some places, and by some consigned to a separate genus, *Harelda*, which appears to be an Icelandic name. Montagu says it is provincially known as 'Coal and Candle Light,' from a fancied resemblance of its long and plaintive winter

call to these words. In the Orkney and Shetland Islands it is known as 'Calloo,' which is there supposed to represent its song. Cordeaux so much admires this strange note that he says, 'Amongst all the varied cries and calls of our numerous sea-fowl, that of the Hareld is the sweetest, most melancholy and harp-like. Heard from a distance at sea, in the spring, on a still day, it is inexpressibly wild and musical.' But in America it is derisively termed 'South Southerly,' and 'Old Squaw,' from its 'gabbling notes,' so diverse are opinions and tastes as to excellence of voice, whether in the feathered or the human race. In Norway it is called *Angle mager*, 'Hook-maker,' doubtless from its cry, connected with the time of its appearance when the sea-fishing begins:* and in that country its arrival is hailed with delight, for its down is held next in estimation to that of the Eider. For an admirable account of this species see Messrs. Seebohm and Harvie Brown on the Birds of the Lower Petchora in the *Ibis* for 1876, p. 445. In France it is *Canard de Miclon*; in Germany, *Eisente Winter Ente*; in Sweden, *Al-Fogel*.

201. GOLDEN-EYE (*Fuligula clangula*).

This very active, sprightly, and withal beautiful bird, with a remarkable brilliancy of eye (which is of a golden yellow colour, whence its name), is tolerably common on the coast, though rarely seen in the interior of the country. I have often met with it on the shores of the Wash, but have never seen it far from the sea. I have, however, an instance of its occurrence in Wiltshire from the pen of the Rev. G. Marsh, who wrote that a specimen of this bird had been killed on the river at Salisbury in 1830; and had been preserved at the house of Mrs. Bath. The Rev. A. P. Morres reports its appearance, though rarely, in the water-meadows at Britford, and instances a fine male shot by the keeper some years back, and now preserved at the 'Moat' in that parish. Another was killed at Stourton in 1874: and an immature bird was shot at Mere by Mr. J. Coward, in the winter of 1880. Another was killed at Mildenhall in 1867: and Major

* J. Wolley in *Ibis* for 1859, p. 70.

Heneage possesses two specimens which were shot at Lyneham in 1870 and 1883, and it is most probable that other instances which have not come to my notice have occurred. This species breeds in Lapland in holes in the trees, or in *tyllas*, or nest boxes, generally portions of hollow wood which the natives affix to the trees, often at a considerable height above ground, and I have eggs in my collection taken from such a situation by my lamented friend Mr. John Wolley, who was so keen and accurate an observer, and did so much for Ornithology, and had already earned for himself a European reputation, as a master in natural science, and would undoubtedly (had his life been spared) have proved one of the first naturalists of the day. This duck is also known as the 'Morillon,' which at the beginning of this century was the name bestowed on the female and immature bird, from the supposition that they belonged to another species: and St. John to the last maintained that the Golden-Eye and Morillon *are* distinct:* but the contrary has been authoritatively determined, and the question is no longer to be entertained. So active are they in the water, and so rapid in their movements, and so easily do they dive at the flash of the gun, and so avoid the shot, that in America they are called 'Conjuring,' or 'Spirit Ducks:' but they are awkward enough on land, and their gait shuffling and ungainly, owing to the large size of their feet. Their old name was *Garrot*, as it is still in France; in Germany, *Schelle Ente*; and in some parts of England 'Curre,' in regard to which Colonel Hawker says, 'If you see a single Curre by day, when he dives, you must run; and the moment he comes up, squat down; so you may go on till within ten yards of him.'† The specific name, *clangula*, 'noisy,' may possibly refer to the rapid beating of the wings and the distinct whistling sound so caused; and hence perhaps they may be called 'Rattlewings,' 'Whistle-wing,' and 'Whistler'; some, however, think the latter term has reference to the voice, which is very loud. It is also known as the 'Magpie Diver,' a very descriptive name, by reason of the black and white

* 'Highland Sports,' p. 132.

† 'Instructions to Young Sportsmen.'

plumage of the adult male; and they seem to have the power (says Sir R. Payne-Gallwey) when rising from the bottom of the water, to spring on wing into the air with the same upward shoot; nor do they appear to hesitate a couple of seconds on the surface to recover breath ere flying, as is the case with Scaup and Pochard.* In Sweden it is known as *Knipa*.

202. SMEW (*Mergus albellus*).

I am again indebted to the Rev. G. Marsh for the first information that the Smew Merganser has been killed in Wiltshire. Two other instances have since been recorded by Mr. Grant, which came into his hands for preservation, one from Fyfield, Enford, in January, 1876, and the other in December, 1879, but where it was killed I am not able to say. Though admitted at the end of the great family of Ducks, and partaking of their general habits and appearance, the Mergansers (of which this is one), differs from them, in being provided with a beak, both mandibles of which are toothed or serrated, the saw-like teeth inclining backwards, the better to prevent the escape of the slippery prey. The form of the beak is also long and extremely narrow, and it is terminated with a very strong hooked nail. Armed with this admirable implement, the Mergansers have no difficulty in supplying themselves with fish, which constitutes the bulk of their food: moreover, they can swim and dive and fly with great quickness, but, from the backward position of their legs, are awkward on shore. In swimming they appear deeply immersed in the water, the weight and flattened form of the body giving them that appearance, the head, neck and back only being visible. In diving, they seem to fly beneath the surface with great rapidity, and they remain for a long time below, and on rising for breath they merely raise the bill above water, and then dive again, without causing any perceptible disturbance of the surface. Montagu says it is called in Devonshire the 'White Widgeon,' and sometimes the 'Vare' (or Weasel) 'Widgeon,' from the supposed similitude about the head to a Weasel or *Vare*, as

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 110.

it is called in Devonshire; and indeed the head of the female, which is very small, does in colour resemble in some degree that of the Weasel. Mr. Cecil Smith says it is also known in Somersetshire as the 'Weasel Coot,' as well as the 'Red-breasted Smew'; and elsewhere it is known as the 'White Nun,' and the 'White Widgeon.' The generic name, *mergus*, meaning 'Diver,' is appropriate enough, and the specific term, *albellus*, 'the Little White Bird,' is equally applicable. In Germany it is the *Weisser Sager*, or 'the White Sawyer.' The terms 'Red-breasted Smew,' and 'Lough Diver,' refer only to the young bird in immature plumage. Like most of its congeners, it is a very shy bird, and cannot tolerate the presence of man. Its true home seems to be the northern countries of Europe and Asia, more especially Northern Russia and Northern Siberia. It would be but blemishing the tale if I were to attempt to condense the admirable account by the late J. Wolley of the nesting of the Smew, which, until its discovery by that ardent, painstaking ornithologist, was wholly unknown. I must therefore refer my readers to the story as told by him in the *Ibis* for 1859, pp. 69-76; and also for an excellent account of the same bird in its native haunts to Messrs. Seebohm and Harvie Brown's paper on the Birds of the Lower Petchora, in the *Ibis* for 1876, p. 448. In France it is *Le petit Harle huppé, ou la Piette*; in Italy, *Mergo oca minore*; and in Sweden, *Sal-Skrake*.

203. RED BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*).

The form of beak at once proclaims that the habits of all the species of Mergansers are identical. This is a more common bird than that last described, but is seldom found inland. I have, however, positive evidence of the occurrence of one fine specimen which Lord Nelson pointed out to me in his collection, which was killed in his water on the Avon, by the Rev. J. N. Neate, in December, 1864; of another killed by Mr. Heath at Quemerford, near Calne, about 1860; of another taken at Trowbridge, in March, 1873; and of another fine specimen shot at Great Bedwyn, and presented to the Wiltshire Archæological

and Natural History Society by the Rev. W. C. Lukis, in the year of its inauguration, 1853. Lastly, the late Major Spicer wrote to me on February 5, 1881, that his keeper had that morning brought him in a good specimen of a female Merganser, killed on the pond at Spye Park, where he had disturbed it the previous evening, but to which it returned during the night. The Merganser, or 'Diving Goose,' as that name signifies, may well be called *serrator*, or 'one who wears a saw,' so effective an instrument for holding its slippery prey must be its long serrated crimson beak. In Ireland it is known to the fishermen and fowlers as the 'Skeld Duck,' and sometimes as 'Spear Widgeon,' on account of its sharp-toothed bill. In England it is provincially known as the 'Harle,' and the 'Jack-Saw,' and in Sweden it is the *Små-Skrake*, 'Small Saw-bill.' One cannot but admire the remarkable position of the legs of this and all the other *Mergi*, and *Colymbi* as well, which, though it renders them clumsy on land, to which they seldom resort, so marvellously supplies them with oars and rudders in the water, where they spend their lives. Both these families were called by Linnæus *Compedes*, because they move on the ground as if 'shackled' or 'fettered.' 'Of all fowl' (says Sir R. Payne-Gallwey,) 'except perhaps the Golden-Eyes, they are the most restless and wary: never quiet, always swimming, diving, or flying, and to no apparent end.' I never yet saw one at rest with head down and bill tucked under wing. They build in cracks and crevices in the rocks and shore, but do not choose rabbit holes. Ekström, the Norwegian naturalist, says, 'The Saw-bill is the best of barometers; if, during a partial thaw in the winter, it reappears, one may be very sure there will be no more severe frost that year.' In France it is *Harle huppé*; in Germany, *Langschnabliker Sager*; in Italy, *Mergo oca di lunggo becco*; in Portugal, *Merganso*.

204. GOOSANDER (*Mergus merganser*).

This is the largest species of the genus, and perhaps the most common, though none of this little group of birds are very plentiful on our coasts: and very seldom does a straggler from

such truly oceanic ducks penetrate so far as our inland county. The Rev. George Marsh, however, had a pair in his collection which were killed in Wiltshire on the river Avon, in February, 1838. Mr. Grant, of Devizes, reports one killed at Wedhampton, in the parish of Erchfont, in January, 1861; another on the canal at Devizes in 1862; one at Stowell in 1875; and one at Spye Park in 1881. Major Heneage has a pair shot at Lyneham, one in 1856, the other in 1857. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports state that one was shot at Stitchcombe by Mr. R. Butler in December, 1879. Lord Arundell mentions one killed at Wardour about twenty years ago. Lord Nelson has a specimen killed at Trafalgar; and the Rev. E. Duke, one killed at Great Durnford, on the estate adjoining Lake. The Rev. W. H. Awdry tells me of one killed near Ludgershall this spring (1887), and Mr. G. Sotheron Estcourt records how one has visited the lake at Estcourt this winter, swimming about for several weeks with the domesticated wild ducks, but especially with the Coots. Again, I have a notice, which I extract from the *Zoologist*,* of its occurrence at Clarendon Park, Salisbury, where the bailiff picked up a fine male specimen quite dead on the banks of the lake in February, 1867, its mouth full of fresh-water weeds. The Rev. A. P. Morres has twice fallen in with them in the meadows at Britford, where on the first occasion two adult birds in fine plumage, and on the second occasion, in 1870, a small band of three attracted his attention; and as a proof that he was not mistaken in the species, which he only saw on the wing, one was killed by the keeper in the evening of the same day. Lastly, Mr. Hussey Freke, of Hannington Hall, reported that a female specimen was shot on the river Thames, in the parish of Highworth, on January 6, 1871. It is called 'Goosander' by us, and *Merganser*, or 'Diving Goose,' as its scientific name, on account of its size, as it is the largest of the genus. So in Sweden it is *Stor Skrake*, or 'Great Saw-Bill.' From its manner of fishing in flocks, and driving the fish before it, it has acquired in Sweden the name of *Kör-fogel*, or 'Driving Bird.' Then, when

* Second Series, volume for 1867, p. 709.

gorged, it retires to open water to rest and digest its food, and allows itself to be rocked by the waves. Whence its designation in some districts of *Vrak-fogel*, or 'Wreck Bird,' implying that at such times it lies like a wreck on the billows.* Most of the provincial names given to its congeners, as related above, are also indiscriminately applied to this species, for in the eyes of fishermen and labourers small distinctions are overlooked; so this, too, is the 'Harle,' the 'Saw-bill,' and the 'Jack Saw;' but I believe alone it enjoys the names of 'Dundiver' and 'Sparling Fowl,' as given it by Bewick, Montagu, and others. Before I take leave of this genus, I would quote the following instructive passage from the masterly hand of Sir R. Payne-Gallwey: 'Mergansers have longer wings and lighter bodies for their size than the diving ducks, and are therefore more powerful on the wing than the latter. Their actions, like those of other divers, when alighting, are governed by their power of rising. Feet and legs being near the tail, they cannot fly from, or pitch on, the water with the facility exhibited by the true ducks. In structure they are admirably formed for fishing; and their prey once caught has as much chance of escaping from the serrated beak as has a roach from the mouth of a pike. As in the case of the pike, the saw-like teeth on the edges of the mandibles curve inwards.† In France it is *Grand Harle*; in Germany, *Gansen-Sager oder Taucher Gans*, 'Diving Goose'; and in Italy, *Mergo oca marina* è *Mergo dominicano*. When alive, this species shows a most delicate rose colour on its neck and breast, which (as in the case of *Pastor roseus* and several other species) fades very quickly after death. A magnificent specimen which I once procured from a Norfolk fenman as he was returning with his spoil, and which quite glowed with a rich rosy hue, soon after faded (to my intense disgust) to a dingy smoke colour, and has now no trace of its former beauty.

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., p. 480.

† 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 117.

COLYMBIDÆ (THE DIVERS).

This very remarkable family of Diving birds shows a most complete structure, and a general formation thoroughly adapted to their submerged habits, for all the species which comprise it pass a considerable portion of their lives, not only on the surface of the water, but beneath it. The form of body is remarkably long and oval; the neck long and tapering, the head small, and the beak straight, hard, and sharp-pointed; the legs are placed at the extreme end of the body, and the feet are large, thus acting as paddles propelling from the stern; the tarsus is remarkably thin or laterally compressed, and the feet, though furnished with membranes, have the toes so articulated as to fold into a very small compass when drawn towards the body, after making the necessary stroke, thus offering the least possible resistance in the water. By this arrangement they are enabled to pass rapidly through the water beneath the surface, and can remain a long time submerged; but on land they are awkward and ungainly enough, standing quite upright, and resting upon the whole length of the leg from the foot to the first joint, reminding one of the kangaroo, and when surprised or alarmed they shuffle into the water on their breasts, somewhat after the manner of the seals. But they rarely come on shore except at the breeding season, and then they place their nests at the water's edge. Though their wings are short and their bodies heavy, they can fly with astonishing strength and swiftness, yet the flight is necessarily laboured; but, once in the water, none are more active and rapid, and even graceful, in their movements than the Divers. Many of them are quite tail-less, and others have but rudimentary apologies for tails; but perhaps the most admirable provision for their subaqueous habits centres in their plumage, which is not only thick, downy, and soft, but has a glossy, silky lustre, which renders it so completely waterproof that prolonged immersion has no effect in penetrating beneath it. There are but two genera belonging to this family, the Grebes and the Divers, and we have instances of both as having occurred in this county.

205. GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*).

This fine species well deserves to take rank at the head of the family, and an adult bird furnished with its ruff or fringe round the neck, and long occipital tufts or horns, presents a dignified appearance. It spends a part of its life amidst inland lakes and part in the shallow waters of the coast, whence it procures its food. So rapidly does it dive, and such progress can it make by exerting wings and feet beneath the surface, that it requires a well-manned boat and sturdy rowers to keep pace with it. The generic name, *podiceps*, from *podicis* + *pes*, signifying 'with feet at the stern,' calls attention to one of the most marked features which the whole genus shares. It was known in old time in Lincolnshire, where it was abundant, as a 'Gaunt,' which, Mr. Harting says, signifies 'one who yawns,' from the Anglo-Saxon *geanian*, and is applicable to these birds, as he has frequently observed in the Grebes and Divers a spasmodic action analogous to gaping or yawning.* But I would with deference venture to submit whether, taking into consideration the shape of the bird—'an elongated cone,' as Yarrell describes it—the word 'gaunt' may not bear the more obvious meaning of 'slim,' 'slender,' for I find the word in Skeat's Etymological Dictionary signifies a 'thin pointed stick,' or a 'tall thin man,' and is there said to be an East Anglian word, presumably Scandinavian, and corresponds to the Norwegian *gand*. Mr. Harting further adds that in the reign of Edward I. land was held in the county of Bucks by the tenure of providing, among other things, 'two Grebes when the King came to Ailesbury'; nor does he doubt that *duas gantes* signified 'two gaunts,' whose soft, satiny plumage was esteemed of great value for the trimming of robes and mantles. On the broads of Norfolk it is known as a 'Loon,' with the meaning of 'clown,' 'slow,' 'ungainly,' with reference to its awkward gait on land, and in Ireland as 'Molrooken.' Sometimes it is called the 'Satin Grebe,' from the delicate silvery whiteness and shining silky appearance of the under surface of

* *Zoologist* for 1884, p. 350.

the body. The English word 'Grebe' is from an old Breton word signifying 'crested' or 'tufted with feathers' (Skeat). In France it is *Grèbe huppé*; in Germany, *Gehaubter Steissfuss*; in Italy, *Colimbo crestato*; in Sweden, *Hvit strupig Dopping*, 'White-throated Dipper'; in Portugal, this and all the other species known there are called in common *Mergullão*, 'Diver.' Its nest consists of a mass of wet sedge or half-rotten decayed water-plants floating on the surface of the water, and how the eggs are hatched in such moisture seems extraordinary. This nest is so fastened to the reeds amongst which it is placed that it cannot be driven away by the wind; and (strange to say) near each nest is a second platform, or pad of sedge, upon which the male bird rests while his mate is sitting. When the Grebes are alarmed they immediately sink, without splash, in the water, and dive away for security; and when the young are hatched the parent birds will on emergency take them down under their wings for safety when they dive, the young birds being placed with their heads towards the tail, and their bills resting on the back of the parent. Though necessarily only an occasional straggler in Wiltshire, where we have no large lakes suited to its habits, I have several instances of its occurrence. Mr. Elgar Sloper informs me that a young male in his collection was shot on the Kennet and Avon Canal near Devizes in February, 1839. Mr. Withers had an immature specimen sent to him for preservation which was killed at Enford; Mr. Marsh possessed a female shot on the Avon in February, 1838; and Lord Methuen has one killed on the water at Corsham Court.

206. RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps rubricollis*).

This is a smaller species than the last, and if not a more rare visitor to our coasts, is more rarely noticed, as it prefers salt water to fresh, and being an inhabitant of more northern latitudes, only comes to us in winter. It is said, when diving, 'to dart through thick entangled masses of weeds and grass with the ease and rapidity of the fish,' but not to use its wings under water, as from the very weedy nature of the lakes or streams

it invariably frequents, that would only impede its progress. Like others of their congeners, they swallow a mass of their own feathers to aid the digestive process, somewhat after the habit of hawks and owls. I am fortunate in having several instances of the occurrence in our county of so rare an inland straggler; and I am again indebted to Mr. Elgar Sloper for the information that one was killed near Devizes in 1840; to Mr. Baker that another, an adult bird, was killed at Westbury in 1874; and to the Rev. T. A. Preston that two specimens, which he saw, had been sent to the Marlborough bird-preserved to be converted into plumes for hats! this was in April, 1870. I have also notices from the Marlborough College Natural History Reports of one killed at Preshute many years since; and from Mr. Grant of specimens shot at Eastcott in 1868, at Stanton in 1870, and at Lyneham in 1870; the latter is now in the possession of Major Heneage at Compton Bassett. Amongst the most advanced ornithologists in England, *P. rubricollis* is now known as *P. grisegena*, or 'Gray-cheeked,' as already it had been generally known on the Continent; in France, *Grèbe jou-gris*; in Germany, *Graukehliger Steissfuss*; and in Sweden, *Grä-strupig Dopping*, or 'Gray-throated Dipper.'

207. SCLAVONIAN GREBE (*Podiceps cornutus*).

In my former papers on the Ornithology of Wilts, I was obliged to omit this species from the Wiltshire list, as I had no instance before me of its occurrence within the county, though I remarked it did in all probability occasionally appear amongst us, as it is, in comparison with some of its congeners whose visits I am able to record, common in England. In 1864, Mr. Henry Blackmore reported one shot in the immediate neighbourhood of Salisbury, which was brought to him in the flesh on January 19.* The Rev. A. P. Morres has himself shot it in his own parish of Britford. Major Heneage possesses a specimen which was killed at Lyneham in 1870. Mr. Baker, of Mere, possesses one which was shot on a sheep pond at Knoyle in 1874;

* *Zoologist* for 1864, p. 9048.

and in the winter of 1877 a policeman, walking down the street in Warminster on a cold, dark night, when it was snowing heavily, heard a flight of birds passing overhead, and shortly after was startled by hearing a heavy thud behind him, which turned out to be a Slavonian Grebe, its plumage and wings being so encrusted with frozen snow that it could no longer use them. Like the last-named species, it is a winter visitor here, retiring in spring to breed in the far north. In breeding-plumage it may well be called *cornutus*, for it not only has a fine chestnut tuft about the head, but below the chin, and round the sides of the neck, a rich dark-brown ruff, giving it a very distinguished appearance. It is also known as the 'Dusky' and the 'Horned' Grebe; the former referring to its immature or winter dress, the latter to its summer plumage. Our countryman, Colonel Montagu, was the first to make it known as British. Like others of the family, it has been known to dive with its young under its wings on occasion of alarm, and has also been seen to fly with the young birds on its back, when it was necessary to transport them to a place of safety otherwise than beneath the water; for Sir R. Payne-Gallwey* points out that the idea common in Ireland, that the bird flies with its young under its wings, is manifestly an error, since no bird could sustain its flight, and at the same time grip an object under the wings. In France it is *Grèbe cornu* and *le Grèbe d'Esclavonie*; in Germany, *Gehörnter SteiSSFuss*.

208. EARED GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*).

This is the rarest British Grebe, and I am glad to be able to include it in our Wiltshire list: indeed, I have several records of its capture; the first on the authority of the late Rev. G. Marsh, who informed me that a specimen was killed at Christian Malford; the second and third from the no less reliable testimony of the Rev. G. Powell, who on March 24, 1875, wrote me word that he had that afternoon seen a specimen of this rare visitor to Wilts. It was killed near Knoyle, and (strange to say) another specimen was killed, or picked up dead, in the same locality, not many

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 142.

years previously. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports mention one caught near the 'Burnt House,' Savernake Forest, on January 27, 1878; and Mr. Grant records three specimens which have come to him in the flesh: viz., in 1864 from Stanton, in 1865 from Chitterne, and in 1877 from Keevil. The most modern school of ornithologists call it *nigricollis*, and certainly the 'black neck' does offer a point of distinction; but *auritus*, 'eared,' was the name used by all our older authorities: Pennant, Montagu, Bewick, Fleming, Selby, Yarrell, Temminck, etc. It may also be at once distinguished from the species last described, and which it much resembles, by the beak, which is bent slightly upwards and depressed at the base. Canon Tristram gives an admirable account of a colony of Eared Grebes, the most gregarious of the genus, which he found breeding in societies more densely crowded than any rookery, on Lake Halloula, in Algeria: the nests, formed like those of other Grebes, were raised on artificial islets, frequently almost touching each other, and sometimes piled on stout foundations rising from more than a yard under water.* Mr. Cecil Smith, who has kept this bird in confinement, says, 'Grebes do not sit erect, but with face to the ground; but when walking or running, the posture is nearly erect, and they proceed along with a waddling gait. When resting, they do not place their feet upon the ground, but turn them up so as to place them under their wings, which they cover with their side feathers, and thus entirely hide them from view. They will also rest in the same manner upon the water.† In France it is *Grèbe oreillard*; in Germany, *Gehörter oder Ohren Steissfuss*; in Italy, *Colimbo Suasso turco*.

209. LITTLE GREBE (*Podiceps minor*).

We come now to the commonest and best known of all the genus, the familiar 'Dabchick,' which may be generally seen on every retired river or large pond; a shy retiring species, disappearing beneath the surface at the first alarm, and only re-

* *Ibis* for 1860, p. 159.

† 'Birds of Somerset,' p. 532.

appearing at a considerable distance; and then perhaps, after the manner of its race, only thrusting its head above water, while the body is still submerged. Like most, if not all of its congeners, it covers its eggs during temporary absence from the nest, but this does not appear to be for any purpose of retaining the warmth of incubation, but for concealment and consequent protection from marauders. It is strange that with this species, too, the nest is wet below, and the eggs are covered with wet weeds. As it flutters along the surface of the pond when disturbed, its feet (which are longer in proportion to its size than those of any other Diver) appear to weigh it down, and it drags them dip, dip, dipping along the water behind it.* Indeed, it is most reluctant to take flight, and trusts to its wonderful diving powers to elude an enemy; but, when once on the wing, its flight is both rapid and well sustained. When it stands upright, it has a very awkward, knock-kneed appearance. Provincially in many parts of England it is known as the 'Didapper,' or 'Little Diver.' In Sussex it is called the 'Mole Diver.' By many authors it is now no longer known under the old familiar name of *Podiceps minor*, but transferred to a separate genus of its own, and called *Tachybaptus fluviatilis*, or the 'River Quick Diver.' In France it is *Grèbe castagneux*, or 'Chestnut-coloured Grebe,' in allusion to the colour of its neck in the breeding season; and in Sweden *Små Dopping*, or 'Little Dipper'; in Germany, *Kleiner Steissfuss*; in Spain, *Zambullidor*, 'Dipper,' or 'Plunger.' Before taking leave of this genus, I would again call attention to the feet of the Grebes, which are very peculiar, and are furnished with a broad membrane down the sides of the toes, not unlike those of the Lobipedidæ.

210. GREAT NORTHERN DIVER (*Colymbus glacialis*).

This magnificent species is an inhabitant of northern seas, as its name implies, and one of the most glorious sights to me as an ornithologist when in Norway was the almost daily view of a pair of these fine Divers, or its congeners, the 'Black-throated'

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 142.

(*C. arcticus*), or the 'Red-throated' (*C. septentrionalis*), swimming in the midst of some salt-water fjord or fresh-water inland lake, monarchs of all they surveyed, for I never recollect meeting with two pairs on the same water. They are all wild, shy birds, and extremely difficult to shoot, from the facility with which they would dive, the distance they would traverse before they rose again to the surface, and their instantaneous disappearance again beneath the water when alarmed; and I have spent hours in chasing them in a boat before I could secure the specimens I wanted.

In diving, indeed, it is most expert, and its progress at the bottom is said to be at the rate of more than seven miles an hour, while it continues its submarine hunting with apparently little exertion. In swimming, its flattened body is often immersed deep in the water, the head and neck only appearing above the surface; at other times it will swim as high as a duck, and float as buoyant as a cork. But on land it presents a very sorry figure, with little more means of walking than a seal has: for the construction and position of its legs combine to render it incapable of moving on its feet like other birds. Accordingly, *ventre à terre*, it shoves itself forward on its breast by jerks and by striking the ground with its feet. So averse is it to leave the water, and so reluctant to fly, that it will swim and dive for hours when hotly pursued; but when once it does take wing its flight is swift and, for so heavy a bird, wonderfully powerful. Its cries, as you listen to it on a still night in Norway, uttered with loud voice from the midst of some fjord, are most plaintive and melancholy; and many in consequence are the idle superstitions and fearful tales connected with this bird, thoroughly believed in by the credulous Norsemen, and gravely detailed by the marvel-loving, quaint old Bishop, Pontoppidan.* Its plumage is so thick and close and impervious to wet, and, moreover, its skin is so tough and strong, that it is much prized by the natives of Northern Europe for making into warm articles of clothing. Among the Laplanders more especially I have seen it so em-

* Lloyd's 'Scandinavian Adventures,' vol. ii., 487.

ployed. The generic name, *colymbus*, is simply the Latinized form of κολυμβος, 'a diver.' The specific, *glacialis*, 'living amongst the ice,' marks it at once as an inhabitant of Arctic regions; and the Swedish *Is Lom* and the German *Eis Taucher*, 'Ice Diver,' are a close translation of *Colymbus glacialis*. Provincially, on some parts of our coast it is called the 'Great Doucker,' which is clearly the same as the German *Taucher*. It is also known to fishermen as the 'Immer,' or 'Ember Goose,' and also as the 'Herdsman of the Sea,' from its habit of driving before it the fishes which it pursues, even to a very great depth. In France it is *Plongeon Imbrim*; in Germany, *Schwarzhalsiger Seetaucher*, 'Black-necked Sea-Diver'; in Italy, *Mergo Maggiore*. Though all the three species of Divers occur sparingly on our coasts, and from each we have had one or more visits in Wiltshire, the Great Northern Diver is that most frequently found inland; and of its occurrence in this county I have no less than ten instances. Lord Arundell informed me that one was killed at Wardour about ten years ago; Lord Methuen possesses a specimen which was killed on the water at Corsham Court; Lord Bath tells me that one, if not two, have been taken at Longleat; Lord Nelson has one killed at Trafalgar; Mr. Grant reports one killed at Whitley in December, 1869, by falling on the ice on a Sunday in the midst of a number of people. The late Rev. G. Marsh had an immature specimen in his collection, shot by his brother in the river at Salisbury in 1831; and also an adult specimen, killed on the borders of the county near Bath, in February, 1838. Holliday, a bird-stuffer at Calne, informed me that he had preserved one which was shot at Bowood in 1855. A very fine specimen was taken in a brook leading from Spye Park to Chittoe in November, 1853, and came into the possession of Captain Meredith, the particulars of whose capture I recorded in the *Zoologist* at that time;* and another was killed on Major Heneage's water at Lyneham, and is now preserved in the hall at Compton Bassett House.

* *Zoologist* for 1854, p. 4166.

211. BLACK-THROATED DIVER (*Colymbus arcticus*).

I think this is one of the handsomest birds when in full-breeding plumage which I have ever seen in a wild state, and I met with it frequently in Norway. The arrangement of black and white feathers, the square and lozenge-shaped spots of pure white on a black ground, the velvet black of the neck, set off by a collar of black and white lines and the pure white of the under surface of the body, combine to give it a most attractive dress though it has no bright colours in its plumage. In all their habits and powers of diving, swimming, and flight, the Divers resemble one another, and all are equally ungainly on dry land, so that 'the peasants of Norway have the somewhat irreverent saying that when first created their legs were forgotten, but subsequently thrown after them. This in their eyes accounts for their pedestals being placed so singularly far behind.' It is also believed, in consequence of its difficulty in coming ashore, to carry about its two eggs, each in a hollow which exists for the purpose under either wing, and there, without the necessity of leaving her favourite element, or of climbing on to the hated land, the parent bird hatches out her young in comfort and in security. Another strange fiction in regard to this bird, commonly believed by the Scandinavian peasant, is that when its two eggs are hatched, finding a difficulty in providing for two young ones, it immediately destroys one, and devotes itself to the maintenance of the other. To pass from fable to fact, I found this species many times in Norway on the lakes in the interior, and sometimes in the more retired fjords, but more especially on the lakes of the upper mountain plateaux, the coldness and dreariness of which nothing can exceed, for they never seemed at any time in the summer to be secure from snow and frost and ice and cold biting winds. I suppose it was the solitude and wildness of these lakes which made them so attractive to the Black-throated Divers; certainly they preferred them to other lakes lower down the mountains, and most certainly they were seldom disturbed there, and very seldom intruded on

by man. The Lapps are very fond of ornamenting their dresses and tobacco-pouches with the feathers of these handsome birds, as well as using their skins for articles of clothing; and I bought of them a small bag of reindeer's skin, which they had tanned for themselves and ornamented with tufts of feathers from these birds. Its skin is also said to be highly prized by the Esquimaux for its warmth and beauty, for which purpose they are much sought after and dressed and made into garments, such as that much-to-be-pitied people wear. This species is somewhat larger than its red-throated congener; hence known in Norway as *Stor Lom*, or 'Great Lom.' Of all three species of Divers this is the most rare on the English coast; and I am happy in being able to add it to our Wiltshire list, on the authority of Mr. E. Baker, of Mere, who himself saw the bird, and described it in transition plumage, though killed in the month of December, 1872, in the neighbourhood of Salisbury. I have since learned from Lord Methuen that he possesses a specimen which was killed on the water at Corsham Court. In France it is *Plongeon lumme ou à gorge noire*; in Germany, *Der polar Taucher oder Schwarzehliger Seetaucher*, 'Black-throated Sea-Diver.'

212. RED-THROATED DIVER (*Colymbus septentrionalis*).

Of this species I have three occurrences in Wiltshire to record. The first was captured after a severe storm on Knoyle Down, when it was so exhausted and unable to rise that Mr. R. Godwin struck it down with a riding-whip and so secured it, when it came into the collection of Mr. Baker, of Mere. The second was shot at Lyneham in 1866, and is now in the possession of Major Heneage; and the third, as Mr. Grant informs me, was killed at Erlestoke in November, 1876. I found it very common in Norway, both on the inland freshwater lakes and on the salt-water fjords. In the latter, however, they generally get up towards the extreme end, where the narrow arm of the sea penetrates far into the interior of the country, often as much as eighty or a hundred miles from the sea-coast. Here the fjord becomes much like an inland lake; and as large streams and torrents are

perpetually pouring their waters into it on every side, and especially at the extreme end of every arm, these fresh waters have in some parts so great power over the sea water that the fjords at their heads, though true branches of the sea, have but little taste of salt in their waves: and here the Red-throated Diver retires to breed; and whether sailing about on the waters they have appropriated to themselves, or flying high in the air with long necks outstretched, and with a wailing scream, they never failed to impart additional interest to the scene. In Norway it is *Små Lom*, or 'Little Lom,' being somewhat smaller than the Black-Throated. Mr. Cecil Smith says that in Devonshire it is known as the 'Loon,' which is evidently the same as the Norsk *Lom* and the Lapland *Lumme*, which is said to mean 'lame,' in reference to its hobbling mode of progression on land. Sometimes it is called the 'Speckled Diver' and sometimes the 'Rain Goose,' as it is apt to utter hoarse cries before rough weather. Elsewhere it is known to the fishermen as the 'Sprat Loon,' from the partiality it shows for that fish; but in Finmark, in consequence of its harsh and disagreeable cry, it is called in derision 'Lofodden's Nightingale.' Of its amazing powers, both of diving and swimming, and, I may add, of flying, I can speak by experience, having spent many hours in chasing it in a boat manned by sturdy Norwegian boatmen before I could secure the specimens I desired to add to my collection. It comes to the British coast oftener than either of its congeners, and may at any season and age be readily distinguished from them by the slightly upturned bill. In France it is *Plongeon Cat-marin ou à gorge rouge*; and in Germany, *Rothkehliger Taucher*.

ALCADÆ (THE AUKS).

This family comprises the Guillemots, the true Auks, and the Puffins, and it is strange that I am able to record any member of the family as a visitor, however rare, to Wiltshire, so seldom do they straggle so far from the coast, and so thoroughly maritime a race all the members of Alcadæ are. Indeed, so entirely marine are their habits, that they pass almost all their

lives in and on the sea, and accordingly their legs are placed so far behind that they are wholly incapable of walking on land; not, however, at so great an angle with the body as in the Divers, so that they are able to sit in an upright attitude, resting equally on the feet and the whole length of the tarsus. Then their wings are little more than rudimentary, and are advanced so far forwards that, though admirable as oars or fins in propelling them through the water, they are of comparatively little service in enabling them to fly through the air. But they do literally fly through the water, the wings having exactly the same action, though not quite so much extended nor so rapidly moved, as when they are flying in the air. On this account the presence of any member of this family in our inland county is indeed marvellous.

213. COMMON GUILLEMOT (*Uria troile*).

This is more abundant, perhaps, than any other of the sea-birds which swarm in some portions of our coasts, and is common enough all round our island. But its powers of locomotion on land are very limited, owing to the backward position of the legs, and the shortness of the wings; so that it is wonderful how any individual of this species ever reached Wiltshire. I am indebted to Mr. Grant, of Devizes, for the information that it has been found in our county, one having come into his hands for preservation, which had been killed at Salisbury in December, 1871. It breeds in vast colonies on the precipitous cliffs on the coast, laying its one large egg on the narrow ledge, in close proximity to scores of others, but the variety of colour, shape, and size of these eggs is astonishing. There is no nest, but the Guillemot sits in an upright position on her single egg, which is conical in shape, and very broad at one end, and very narrow at the other; and this form protects it from rolling off the shelving rock on which it is deposited, since if accidentally disturbed it merely describes a circle within its own length. I have four eggs in my possession which, common as they are, and only worth a few pence, I value more than any others in the whole collection,

for they were given me by Mr. Waterton when I was on a visit to him at Walton Hall, and he described to me how he took them with his own hands at Flamborough Head, on the coast of Yorkshire, when he made the perilous descent of that lofty cliff, and was let down by a rope from the top, after the custom of the adventurous fishermen who have pursued that dangerous practice for generations. The young bird, when about three weeks old, is carried down to the sea on the back of the mother, who soon instructs it in the arts of swimming and diving, and carries it out to sea far from the shore. This is another species which penetrates to Polar regions. Nordenskiöld* observed it in great numbers hovering about the tops of the rocks, and settling on the ledges in Northern Spitzbergen, as early as the 4th of March; and Sir Edward Parry met with it in latitude 81°. As regards the name, we have adopted the French term, 'Guillemot,' derived from the cry of the adult; but on the south coast it is called 'Willock' or 'Willy,' which is supposed to represent the cry of the young bird. Elsewhere it is known as 'Murre,' from the murmuring noise of the assembled multitudes at their breeding haunts: and by the fishermen on the east coast as 'Scout,' perhaps from its short or 'cutty' tail; also as 'Marrock' or 'Marrot.' In Sweden it is *Sill Grissla*, or 'Herring Grissler'; and in Germany, *Dumme Lumme*; and by us the 'Foolish Guillemot,' because it is so unsuspecting of harm, and so confiding as oftentimes to endanger its life. In Portugal it is *Airo*. The B.O.U. Committee says that the specific name, *troile*, was intended as a compliment to Troil the Iclander.

214. LITTLE AUK (*Mergulus alle*).

This is another thoroughly oceanic bird, and chiefly at home in the more northern part of the Polar seas, where it has accompanied the most intrepid of the Arctic explorers to the farthest point attained by them. It is commonly known to English sailors and to Arctic voyagers generally as the 'Rotche,' and the numbers congregated in some spots of the

* Nordenskiöld's 'Arctic Voyages,' p. 217.

far North appear almost incredible; but there it finds an unlimited supply of the crustaceans and other small marine animals on which it subsists. Colonel Sabine related that off the coast of Greenland, in latitude 76°, in the channels of water separating fields of ice, 'hundreds were killed daily for food,' and the ship's company supplied with this acceptable change of diet. Nordenskiöld speaks of an '*Auk-fell* in Spitzbergen inhabited by millions of Auks, which sit closely packed together in all the clefts and crevices of the rocks, and the air was literally darkened by the multitude of fowl on the wing at one time. Other vast flocks were sitting upon and between the ice-floes, seeking their food.' In another part he came to a mountain fifteen hundred feet in height which, 'from the hundreds of thousands of Auks which frequent it, was called *Alk hornet*, "the Auk horn," and here land, sea, ice, and sky seemed darkened with the dense flocks:' while in the same dreary country Admiral Beechey 'frequently saw a column of Rotches which by means of a rough calculation he estimated as consisting of nearly four millions of birds on the wing at one time.* The Little Auk is only a winter visitor to our coasts, and then seldom comes to land, except when driven in by stress of severe storms, so that I esteemed myself fortunate in obtaining two specimens for my collection, which had been so carried inland on the coast of Norfolk. It is a quaint-looking, heavy bird for its size, with short wings, but great powers of diving. *Mergulus* indeed signifies 'Little Diver,' but *alle* is a Lapp name, presumably taken from the bird's note. In addition to the familiar names given above, it is also known provincially as the 'Sea Dove,' and the 'Little Black and White Diver,' but in Sweden it is promoted to the rank of royalty, being known there as *Sjö Kung*, or 'Sea King.' In France it is *Guillemot nain*, 'Dwarf Guillemot'; in Germany, *Der Kleine Alk*; in Italy *Uria minore*. I am again indebted to Mr. Grant for the information of its occurrence in Wiltshire, two specimens having

* Professor Newton in *Ibis* for 1865, p. 204; Captain Beechey's 'Voyage of Discovery towards the North Pole,' 1818, p. 46; Nordenskiöld's 'Arctic Voyages,' 1858—1879, pp. 53, 68; Lieutenant Greeley's 'Three Years of Arctic Service,' vol. ii., p. 373.

come into his hands, one on October 26, 1869, from Gore Cross Farm, on the Market Lavington Down, and the second on October 17, 1870, which was taken on Wilsford Down.

215. PUFFIN (*Fratercula arctica*).

Most marvellous, indeed, is the appearance of this bird, and even ludicrous its aspect, on account of the singular form and colour of the bill, which is higher than long, very much compressed at the sides, both mandibles arched and grooved and notched towards the point, and very highly coloured with the brightest orange and yellow and bluish-gray. Singular, however, as it is to look at, this beak is extremely powerful, and can bite the intruding hand thrust into a hole in search of its egg in a way not readily forgotten. And now it has been discovered that the Puffin sheds portions of its bill in autumn, the horny frontal sheath scaling off in pieces like plates of armour.* This species is truly oceanic in its habits, and never resorts to fresh water. It breeds in a rabbit burrow or other hole in the ground, and lays but one egg. Unlike the young of the Guillemot, which its parents convey at a tender age from the giddy heights on which it is hatched to the sea below, the young Puffin remains at the end of the rabbit-burrow or hole in the rock in which it is bred until it is able to fly down to the sea, unaided by its parents. Once on the sea, it finds itself thoroughly at home, for it dives with the utmost facility. Its flight, too, for a short distance is rapid, but cannot be continued far, for its short narrow wings seem scarcely able to support its heavy body. It is strange that this bird, which penetrates as far as Greenland and other high latitudes in the breeding season, should be so little known in Sweden that it is called by the fisherman *Utländsk Alk*, or 'Foreign Razor Bill.' Off the northern coast of Norway, however, it is exceedingly abundant, and in one island named *Fugle-Ö*, or 'Bird Island,' its numbers are incalculable. The same may be said of the slopes of *Lundy*, or 'Puffin' Island, deriving its name from the Scandinavian word

* Fourth edition of 'Yarrell's British Birds,' vol. iv., p. 95.

Lunde, 'Puffin,' and *ey*, island, a name given it by the northern rovers who once made it their residence, and here the Puffins still burrow in myriads. We can imagine how warmly their arrival was welcomed by the Arctic voyagers, when, after a long dreary winter in the ice, they first caught sight of these summer migrants, not so much on account of the fresh meat which they afforded, but from their lively manners and the return of summer which their presence proclaimed. As early as the reign of Edward I. the Crown rent was paid in Puffins, not for the sake of their flesh, but for their feathers: as for the same reason the rent of some of the western islands of Scotland continues to be paid in birds to this day. So the Scilly Islands—once owned by a Wiltshireman—were held under the Crown at the rent of fifty Puffins, or 6s. 8d., per annum. In 1484 the islands were returned as worth, in peaceable times, forty shillings; in war times, nothing.* This bird is said to have derived its name *Fratercula*, 'Little Brother,' from its sociable gregarious habits and its habit of dwelling in communities, and *arctica*, as it is to be met with in the far North; but its provincial names are too many to enumerate, 'Sea Parrot,' 'Bottle Nose,' and 'Coulter-Neb,' all alluding to its extraordinary beak, being among the most common. The word 'Puffin' is, on the authority of Skeat, either from its puffed-out, rounded stomach, or, more probably, from its peculiar swelling beak, like that of a parrot. The Rev. T. A. Preston sent me for identification a specimen which had been found near Marlborough in the autumn of 1869. It was in immature plumage, and was, in fact, a bird of the year, having neither arrived at the size nor the distinctive characteristics of the parents; indeed, except for a faint indication of transverse grooves along both mandibles, neither the shape, colour, nor markings of the beak betokened the remarkable formation peculiar to this bird when in adult dress. There were two individuals which made their appearance near Marlborough, and both of which were seen by Mr. Preston in the flesh. They were not found together, but one was caught on the banks of the

* *Wiltshire Magazine*, vol. i., p. 156.

Kennet on the 25th of October; the other was subsequently picked up dead, and was in so emaciated a condition as to imply that it had died of starvation. Another instance is given by the Rev. A. P. Morres, who says that a bird of the year, but of full size, was brought to him in the winter of 1863, which a carter had caught on a high-lying fallow in the parish of Britford, and which had bitten his fingers so severely that in exasperation he killed it. Mr. Grant records another specimen killed at Salisbury, December 28th, 1871, which came into his hands for preservation; while the Marlborough College Natural History Reports mention two seen at a pond near the Warren at St. Catharine's, Savernake Forest, one of which was captured on November 21, 1879. In France it is *Macareux moine*; in Germany, *Arktische oder Graukehliger Alk*; in Norway, *Lunne Fogel*; in Spain, *Cagafet*; in Portugal, *Papagaio do mar*.

216. RAZOR-BILL (*Alca torda*).

Here we have another species which abounds on our coasts, though perhaps not in quite such overpowering numbers as either of those mentioned above. It partakes of the same habits on sea and land as its congeners, breeding with the Guillemots on the ledges of cliffs, and showing itself equally expert in diving and swimming. For this constant immersion in the sea they need waterproof clothing, and the plumage with which they are provided is very thick and close-set, and quite impervious to the action of water. The adult birds are furnished with a bill partaking, in some degree, of the character of that of the Puffin—that is to say, it is much compressed and curved and grooved towards the point. Like other birds with largely developed beaks—as the Hoopoe, Crossbill, Spoonbill, etc.—that feature in the Razor-Bills and Puffins when first hatched is quite narrow, and for some time shows no sign of the transverse furrow which it afterwards assumes. When it takes wing, which it does with evident reluctance, it invariably flies low, just above the surface of the water: and, like the Guillemots, it carries its young on its back from the cliffs to the sea. Bishop Pontoppidan's account

of this species is somewhat quaint and amusing: 'They can fish and swim beyond many others, but are very weak at flying or walking, because the legs are placed so very far behind that it is troublesome to move them on land; the bird therefore totters like a drunken man.' On this account is the saying, 'Drunk as an Alk.' I should add that *Alca* is the Icelandic, and *torda* the name by which it is known in Gothland. Provincially it is called 'Parrot-billed Willock,' or 'Willy.' In France it is *Pingouin macroptère*; in Germany, *Tord Alk*; and in Sweden, *Tordmule*. The young bird of the year of *A. torda* was for a long time considered a distinct species, and honest old Bewick describes it (though evidently with some hesitation) under the title of the 'Black-billed Auk'—*Alca pica*; but Colonel Montagu has no such scruples, and boldly contends that Dr. Latham in his Synopsis is mistaken in supposing it to be no other than the immature Razor-bill. More careful observation, however, has proved that the doctor was in the right. Mr. Grant, of Devizes, mentions a specimen killed at Melksham early in February, 1862; and a second, shot by Mr. E. Gibbs at Chitterne at the end of January, 1871; also a third killed at Netheravon, January 18th, 1866, and a fourth at Salisbury at the close of 1871, all of which came into his hands for preparation. Besides these the Rev. A. P. Morres records that one was picked up by a dairyman on the downs near Wittsbury, close to Britford, on February 19th, 1883, which was preserved by Mr. White, of Salisbury.

PELICANIDÆ (THE PELICANS).

We pass on to the Pelicans, which is a high-sounding title; but the British members of that aristocratic race are but humble and degenerate offshoots of a noble family, and can only claim to rank as remote relations of a lordly house. For the true Pelicans are magnificent birds; and seen (as I have many a time watched them within the tropics of Upper Egypt and Nubia) proudly sailing on the broad Nile; or swimming at their best pace down the stream, while my Arab boatmen gave chase.

in our small boat ; or rising in the air and flapping with enormous wing overhead, with the sun shining on their cream-coloured plumage tinged with pink, are a sight not readily forgotten.

The principal characteristics of this family are to be observed in the foot, which consists of four toes, all directed forwards, and all connected with a membrane ; in the beak, which is strong, large, and terminating with a powerful hook ; in the legs, which are remarkably short, sturdy, and strong ; and in the wings, which are moderately long and equal to very vigorous flight. There are two genera belonging to this family in the British list, the Cormorants and the Gannets, and I have instances of the appearance of both of them in Wiltshire.

217. COMMON CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).

In many respects this bird partakes of the general habits of the Divers and Auks : thus on land it sits erect, and is awkward enough, although it can walk with somewhat more ease than the Colymbidæ or Alcadæ : it swims with the body deeply immersed ; and it dives with great readiness and celerity : but unlike that family it can perch on trees, and grasp the branches with its toes ; while its flight is strong and rapid. It lives on fish, and (perhaps to enable it to retain the slippery body of its victim) the claw of the middle toe is serrated or indented with comb-like teeth. The quantity of fish it consumes is enormous, and it is not without reason that it has become the type of gluttony. Moreover, it is an ill-favoured, slouching, unclean bird, and seen sitting on the rocks gorged with food, and staring with haggard, scowling eyes, and spreading out its wings to dry, coupled with its foul odour, it always reminds me of that most unsavoury bird, in my eyes, the Egyptian Neophron, and accordingly is no favourite with me. Montagu, however, has a good word to say for it, for he describes it as docile, and by no means of a savage spirit, and easily domesticated, while its diving powers are incredible. He adds that it has a habit of violently beating the water with its wings, without moving from the spot, each beating being succeeded by a shake of the whole body, and ruffling of all

the feathers, at the same time covering itself with the water. It may often be seen perched on rails or posts at the water's edge, more especially on the buoys which mark the channels through the shallow waters of the Wash on the coast of Norfolk and other similar mud-banks at the mouths of rivers; and very unpleasant and uncanny do they look as they so perch themselves, in my opinion. It will not be forgotten that Milton, with great judgment, as I think, represented the arch-fiend as taking the form of a Cormorant. They breed in colonies, occasionally in trees, like the Herons, but more commonly on lofty cliffs and precipitous rocks. It kills its prey previous to swallowing it, by squeezing it in its powerful and hooked beak. The colour of its plumage is bluish-black, with metallic green reflections; and it has patches of pure white on its thighs, and a white throat. The tail is composed of stiff hard feathers, and is frequently used on land as a prop to support the body. It is tamed by the Chinese, and trained to take fish, being cast into the water after its finny quarry, much as a falconer will, in hawking, cast off his bird at a heron, or the courser slip his greyhound after a hare; only in the case of the voracious Cormorant it is found necessary to fasten an iron ring round the bird's neck, or the prey would be instantly swallowed. This sport, which is still practised in China, was at one time an English pastime, and was in great repute in the sixteenth century; and as there are still the high offices attached to the court of 'Master of the Buckhounds,' and 'Hereditary Grand Falconer,' so in former days it was no slight honour to be 'Master of the Cormorants' to our sovereign lord King Charles I. Previous to his reign, fishing with Cormorants had become a fashionable amusement in the reign of James I., who had a regular establishment for these birds at Westminster; and the royal Cormorants trained for fishing wore leather collars, often ornamented with silver.*

It is a very common bird on all our rocky coasts; and I have met with colonies of it far up the Nile, at least 450 miles from the sea; so that fresh water must be as palatable to it as salt,

* Harting in his edition of 'White's Selborne,' p. 164.

provided only the supply of fish is sufficient. In this county I have an instance of one killed in 1856, on Mr. Heneage's water at Lyneham, whence the Great Northern Diver was obtained; and another (as I learned from a paragraph in the newspaper) was killed at Bradford-on-Avon, in September, 1859. Lord Arundell reports one killed at Wardour Castle about twenty years ago: and Mr. W. Wyndham that one was shot at Lower Teffont; Lord Nelson possesses one killed at Trafalgar; and Lord Methuen says that one has been killed on the water at Corsham Court and preserved. Lastly, the Rev. E. Goddard has just reported one seen perched on the spire of Salisbury Cathedral this summer.

The Rev. A. P. Morres reports that on one occasion three Cormorants appeared in the water-meadows of the parish of Britford, perched on some of the hatches; and that the keeper shot one of them, which proved to be a young bird in immature plumage, but full grown. They were all busily employed in fishing when he came upon them. Some years after Mr. Morres saw a single bird in the same locality. Again on August 13th, 1885, an immature specimen was shot on the stream at Mere, and about a week after two others were killed at Stourton, all three proving to be young birds. The ponderous name *phalacrocorax* signifies the 'bald-headed raven,' from *φαλακρός*, 'bald-headed,' and *κόραξ*, 'a raven,' and *carbo*, 'a coal,' has reference to the soot-black plumage of the bird. Amongst many provincial names, 'Skart' is that by which it is most generally known, and 'Great' or 'Black' Cormorant to distinguish it from its only congener. The word 'Cormorant' is altogether a misnomer, for it is literally *corvus marinus*, a 'sea crow,' but very far indeed is it removed from the Corvidæ. In France it is *Cormoran*, and Professor Skeat says that, though of Latin origin, it has probably been modified in spelling by the Breton word *Morfran*, derived from *mor*, 'the sea,' and *bran*, 'a crow.' So in Spain it is *Cuervo marino*; in Portugal, *Corvo marinho*; in Italy, *Corvo aquatico*, and also *Marangone*, 'the Carpenter,' I know not why. But in Germany it is *Der Schwarze Pelikan*, and in Sweden *Stor Skarf*, 'Great Skarf.'

218. SHAG (*Phalacrocorax graculus*).

This is a smaller species than the last, from which it may also be distinguished by its plumage of a deep glossy, black-green, with no intermixture of white feathers, and no white patch upon the thighs. It never nests in trees, but always on the rocks, and very frequently within caves or deep fissures. Both species have the claw of the middle toe serrated or pectinated on the inner edge, the use of which has never been satisfactorily determined; for it is now stoutly denied by some that it was ever used, as was formerly supposed, for the purpose of assisting to hold their slippery prey. In its habits the Shag resembles the Cormorant, excepting that it is more maritime in the localities it frequents, for it seldom leaves the sea coast, as it is not accustomed to ascend rivers as its larger relative so often does. Therefore Montagu expressed surprise on learning that one was shot so far inland as Newbury, but he concluded the bird had been 'enticed so far by that noble river the Thames, into which the Kennet flows.' I am able, however, to give an instance of its occurrence in Wiltshire, on the same river Kennet, but, in this case, very near the source of that stream; for my excellent neighbour, Mr. Thomas Kemm, of Avebury, himself a lover of birds, wrote me word on October 26th, 1876, that in the previous week Mr. Gwatkin, of Lincoln's Inn, when shooting there, had killed a fine specimen, though a young bird, of this species. Lord Methuen also mentions one killed on the water at Corsham Court; and the Marlborough College Natural History Reports record one shot at Durnford Mill, in the parish of Mildenhall, by Mr. Sidney Willis, September 8th, 1871.

The fishermen on our coast give to this species also the name of 'Skart;' others call it the 'Green Cormorant,' and the 'Crested Shag.' In Sweden its true name is *Topp Skarf*, or 'Crested Skarf,' but these are not distinctive names, inasmuch as both species assume a crest in their breeding plumage. More commonly it is known in Sweden and Norway as *Hafs Tjäder*, or 'Sea Capercaillie,' and sometimes as *Äl Kräka*, or 'Eel Crow,' because

it feeds greatly on eels; but I believe they apply these terms indiscriminately to both species. The Norwegian naturalist of olden time, Bishop Pontoppidan, has many marvellous tales in regard to this bird. In France it is *Cormoran nigaud*, 'Foolish Cormorant'; in Germany, *Krahen Pelikan*, 'Crow Pelican.' In Spain and Portugal it shares the same name as its larger congener. The English word *Shag*, meaning 'rough,' or 'shaggy,' is supposed to refer to its rugged crest.

219. GANNET (*Sula alba*).

Known also as the Solan Goose, and is common enough on our coasts. In general form and in regard to the peculiar structure of foot, it closely resembles the Cormorant, but in habits it widely differs from that bird: for it never dives, though it sometimes floats on the water, and Knox says that in mid-Channel off the Sussex coast, where it is abundant during the herring season, it sleeps on the waves so profoundly as sometimes to allow the boats to pass over it. But it is almost continually on the wing, and in seeking its prey soars to a great height, and then, partially closing its wings, suddenly darts down upon it with amazing impetus; but, indeed, its power of flight seems inexhaustible, and being of a light and buoyant nature, and provided with an internal supply of air-cells, it can float on unwearied wing without exertion. Montagu says that intermediate air is dispersed between the skin and the body, which is not only a great security against cold in the upper regions of the atmosphere, where it passes so much of its life, but also lessens the concussion in its rapid descent upon the water when it precipitates itself on its prey. Though so light and buoyant, it is a large bird, with an immense expanse of wing. It has a strong sharp-pointed beak, not hooked as in the Cormorant. It has also the claw of the middle toe serrated on its inner edge. It lays its single egg on the lofty crags which overhang the sea, and which are often quite inaccessible. Stack Island, the Skerries, and St. Kilda are some of the chief breeding-places of the Gannets. Every year a boat makes an expedition to them to collect the young Gannets

for their down, feathers and flesh, when several thousands are ruthlessly slain.*

The adult is of a yellowish-white colour with black tips to the wings; but the immature, known also as the 'Spotted Booby,' and in France as *Le Fou tacheté*, is of a clove brown, spotted with pure white, as if a snow shower had fallen upon it; and as it takes four years in arriving at maturity, it was for a long time considered a distinct species. Why this bird is called by us 'Booby' and by the French *Fou*, and by the Germans *Tolpel*, is simply because, being of a confiding nature, and unsuspecting of harm, it suffers itself to be approached by its enemies without taking alarm, and to be attacked without resistance. The authors of the B.O.U. list of British Birds derive *sula* from the Norse *sule*, 'an awkward fellow,' or 'a dolt;' but it is to be observed that *sule* is an old Norwegian word also signifying 'Swallow'; and *Hafs-Sula* or *Hav-Sule*, by which it is commonly known in Scandinavia, means 'Sea-Swallow,' a term which may well be applied to it from its rapid and continuous flight. Sometimes it is known in those waters as *Sill-Bas*, 'Herring Persecutor,' since it persistently follows the shoals of that fish. The specific name, *bassana*, is derived from the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth, because at one time it was supposed to breed nowhere else, and it has pretty well monopolized that isolated rock, and converted it into an extensive nursery. In Germany it is *Der Bassanische Pelikan*; in Portugal it is *Patóla*, 'Fool.' Very commonly in the South of England it is called the 'Solan,' 'Solent,'† or 'Channel Goose;' but, indeed, the word 'Gannet' is no other than 'Little Goose,' the first syllable occurring in our word *Gander*, and in the German *Gans*, to which is added the diminutive suffix *et*. Young birds are sometimes called 'Black Gannets.' Four times within my knowledge has this species occurred in Wiltshire of late years; once (as I learned from Mr. Marsh) a specimen was taken on the borders of the county

* *Ibis* for 1869, pp. 23, 24, 30.

† In a very able monograph on this species by Dr. Cunningham in the *Ibis* for 1866, pp. 1-23, it is suggested that the 'Solent' more probably takes its name from this bird, and not the bird from the channel.

towards Bath, which came into his collection; for the second instance I am indebted to the daughter of Captain Meredith, who informed me of one killed at Heddington about 1856. The Rev. G. Powell told me that early in September, 1870, during the prevalence of violent gales, a Gannet, doubtless blown inland by the tempest, was knocked down by a labourer on Mr. Woodcock's farm at Bemerton, and came into the collection of Mr. James Rawlence, of Bulbridge. Mr. Powell saw the bird when it arrived at the bird-stuffer's at Warminster, and described it as emaciated and starved. Subsequently, in July, 1874, I received a letter from the Rev. Gray Lawson, informing me that one was shot by Mr. Nippress at Littleton Drew, at the extreme north-west of the county, in a pasture adjoining the churchyard, in the previous month. Canon Jackson also wrote to me to the same effect, at the same date, alluding without doubt to the same specimen, but mentioning the adjoining parish of Luckington as the scene of its capture. The Right Hon. E. P. Bouverie tells me he has a specimen which was shot on Cheverell Down, in November, 1881, and Mr. Grant mentions another shot at Netheravon by Mr. Newman. For the marvellous account of this bird, as imagined in olden time by an advanced naturalist in Norway, I must again refer my readers to the pages of Bishop Pontoppidan.

LARIDÆ (THE GULLS).

We have now reached the last family of birds, and it is a very large one, comprising the great tribe of Terns, the still larger list of Gulls, and the Petrels. They are all long-winged, and enjoy a prodigious power of flight, which is not only extremely rapid, but can be indefinitely prolonged and apparently without exertion, at all events without causing fatigue. They are all web-footed, and seek their food on the surface of the sea or on the shore where it has been washed up by the waves; but though they float with buoyancy on the ocean, they are unable to dive. They are consequently rather birds of the air than of the water, and their evolutions on the wing are extremely

graceful and pleasing; and as the distances they traverse are very great, they are frequently seen far inland, so that we are well acquainted with many of them in this county, to which an excursion from the southern coast is a mere morning's amusement.

220. COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*).

The 'Sea Swallows,' as all the species which compose this genus are commonly called, represent the fissirostral tribe of the Insectores, and are of light and elegant shape, with small slim bodies, but with wings of prodigious length and deeply forked tails, the latter being a characteristic feature shared in common by all birds of extraordinary powers of flight; and when they dash down with unerring aim on some luckless fish swimming near the surface, it is with very great velocity and amazing power. As they shoot over the waves or skim through the air, and occasionally dip into the water, they bear a close resemblance in general appearance to the real Swallows, whose arrival we hail with such joy every spring. But in reality they have no connection whatever with the *Hirundinidæ*, for in anatomical structure and habits they are true water-birds, and all their food is derived from the sea or from freshwater rivers and lakes, from which they are never long absent, and on whose shores they make their nests. They are said to be very bold in driving away any who trespass within the vicinity of their breeding haunts, even attacking the intruder, and having been known to strike his hat in their indignation and alarm. St. John remarks farther, that though they hover about the place where the nests are placed to drive away strangers, they do not care to sit upon their eggs during fine weather in the daytime. Their beaks are long and straight and sharp-pointed, and their legs are short and their feet small. By many modern authors this species is called *fluviatilis*, from its habit of ascending rivers to a considerable distance, and sometimes visiting inland lakes far removed from the sea; but when its powers of flight are considered this will not seem surprising. In Sweden and Norway, where it is the most common of all the Terns, it is distinguished

as *Fisk Tärna*, or 'Fish Tern'; but by the fishermen it is more generally known as *Mackrill Tärna*, or 'Mackerel Tern,' from its habit of following the mackerel shoals in order that it may pick up marine insects, crustacea, and small fish which these in their progress frighten up to the surface of the water. Its provincial names on the British coast are so numerous that I will not attempt to recount them. The Common Tern is in France *Hirondelle de mer pierre garin*; in Germany, *Gemeine Meer-schwalbe*; in Portugal, *Andorinha do mar*; and in Spain, *Golondrina de mar*, all bearing the same meaning of 'Sea Swallow.' The Common Tern is not, however, so generally distributed on our shores as its name would seem to imply. It is, however, abundant in some favoured localities: more common on the western than on the eastern coasts of Great Britain. Montagu expresses surprise that it has been found so far from the sea as Bath, but many such instances must now be familiar to all observers. Lord Methuen tells me it has been killed at Corsham Court; I hear of another killed at Kennet in 1881, and one at Poulshot in 1861. But, indeed, I have had so many notices of its occurrence from time to time, both in North and South Wilts, that it would only be tedious to enumerate them. I may mention, however, that Mr. Grant alone has had the following specimens pass through his hands: In 1866, September 20, one from Collingbourne; in 1868, August 21, one from the Canal, Rowde; and October 3 one from Devizes Locks, and another from Potterne; in 1869, September 23, two from Berwick Bassett; in 1871, September 29, one from Erchfont; in 1874, May 29, one from Great Bedwyn. Its general plumage is pearl-gray above and white below; but the velvet-black crown of the head and the bright red beak, legs, and feet conduce much to the really handsome appearance of this slender, graceful bird.

221. ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna arctica*).

This species is perhaps numerically more abundant than the preceding, to which, indeed, it bears a very close resemblance,

and with which it is doubtless often confounded. It is only to be distinguished from *S. hirundo* by its shorter and deeper-coloured beak and by the darker under plumage, which is of a light gray colour. It is most probable, therefore, that several of the instances recorded above really belonged to this species. Without doubt it must be a frequent visitor in Wiltshire, and Yarrell mentions Devizes as one of the places visited by considerable numbers in the strange irruption of these birds in 1842, as recorded by Mr. Strickland in the 'Annals and Magazine of Natural History' for that year. Beyond this notice I have other evidence of its occurrence in our county: first, in a note from Mr. Elgar Sloper, who informs me that three were brought to him which had been killed on the Kennet and Avon Canal, near Devizes, after a gale from the west in October, 1844; and secondly, from the Rev. G. Powell, who wrote me word on September 28, 1870, that an Arctic Tern was killed by Mr. Charles Phipps at Charlcote a few days previously. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports speak of one found on the Canal at Savernake in 1867, and another in 1881 on the Canal at Wootton Rivers; and Mr. Grant received one from Mr. T. Kemm, of Avebury, in October, 1875. As its name implies, it frequents high northern latitudes. Reinhardt found it breeding in Greenland; and Professor Newton records that it breeds in numbers in Spitzbergen, where it feeds principally on surface-swimming animals, crustaceans, mollusca, and the like,* and it has been noticed in still more northern regions by Arctic voyagers. But *S. arctica*, which certainly, more than either of its congeners, is found in polar regions, has been of late deprived of its title by some modern ornithologists, and designated *macrura*, with the meaning of 'long-tailed,' from *μακρός* and *οὐρά*; while in Norway it is *Röd-näbbad-Tärna*, or 'Red-billed Tern,' neither of which appear to me to distinguish it sufficiently from its fellows. In France it is *Hirondelle-de-mer arctique*. The flight of this and all the other Terns is exceedingly graceful, and Harting calls attention to the very interesting sight of a

* *Ibis* for 1865, p. 215.

flock of these birds fishing in undisturbed enjoyment; and Sir William Jardine observes that all the Terns are very light, and the body being comparatively small, the expanse of wings and tail so buoys them up, that when shot in the air they are sustained, their wings fold above them, and they whirl gently down like a shuttlecock.*

222. BLACK TERN (*Sterna fassipes*).

The dark sooty colour of its plumage at once distinguishes this species from its congeners. Although in every respect a true Tern, it differs in habits from those previously described, inasmuch as it seeks freshwater lakes and rivers in the interior, where it lives upon such flies and other insects as suit its palate. Hence it has more frequently been met with in Wiltshire than any other of its congeners. Thus I was informed by Mr. Withers that three specimens had been brought to him for preservation in the spring of 1853, one of which was killed at Compton Bassett by Mr. Heneage's keeper, and two at Berwick Bassett. The Rev. G. Marsh showed me two in his collection which were killed near Bath in 1845. The Rev. Henry Methuen not only recorded the capture of one at All Cannings on May 2nd, 1849, but generously presented it to our Museum at Devizes (a very considerate and liberal act, which I cannot too highly commend to the imitation of any who may obtain specimens of our rarer birds killed in Wiltshire), and Mr. Elgar Sloper informed me that one was killed near Salisbury in 1840, and added to his note in reference to this species, 'I may here remark that I have scarcely known an April or October without hearing of the occurrence of some of the *Sternidæ*.' Mr. Baker possesses two specimens in his collection, one killed at Mere in summer plumage, and another shot at Norton Ferris in 1860 in winter dress, and also records the capture of a third, which hovered over the water quite close to him when he was fishing at Steeple Langford on April 29th, 1884, and which proved to be an adult bird in full breeding plumage. The Rev. A. P. Morres, too, had

° 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 247.

a personal interview with one, for while he was rowing on the river at Downton one of these birds, in adult plumage, flew round and round the boat, coming so close to him that he had a perfect view of it. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports mention, on the authority of Mr. Dixon, of Pewsey, that a specimen was shot at that place on May 18, 1876, and two others in the middle of May, 1880, the one at Hungerford, the other at Ramsbury. Mr. Grant reports one killed at Fyfield by Mr. Lavington in May, 1876, and Mr. Rawlence one killed at Wishford. In France it is known as *Hirondelle de mer épouvantail*, 'Scarecrow,' or 'Bugbear Sea Swallow,' probably from some superstitious terror on account of its sombre dress; but in prosaic Germany it is *Schwarzgraue Meerschwalbe*; in Sweden, *Svart Tärna*; in Italy, *Sterna Cenerina o di testa nera*; and in Spain, *Fumarel*. Modern systematists have removed this species from the true Terns, and relegated it to a small group of 'Marsh Terns,' and inflicted on it the tremendous name of *Hydrochelidon*, or 'Water Swallow.' The specific name, *fissipes*, arises from the fact that the membranes which connect the three toes in front are short and deeply scalloped—a distinctive mark recognised by the fishermen, who in some parts call it provincially 'Cloven-foot Gull.' Formerly, before the fens and marshes of the eastern counties were drained, it used to breed in great numbers in Norfolk and Lincolnshire; in the former it was known as the 'Blue Darr,' and in the latter as 'Car Swallow.' Selby compares its flight, which is peculiarly buoyant, to that of the Nightjar; and Montagu described how it escaped from the repeated pounces of a Peregrine Falcon by means of the rapidity of its flight and the dexterity and singular quickness of its manœuvres.

223. LITTLE GULL (*Larus minutus*).

The Gulls differ from the Terns in their more sturdy and less elegant shape, in their stronger, shorter beak with curved tip, in their longer and stouter legs, and in the partial or total absence of fork in the tail. They seem equally at rest, whether floating

buoyantly on the surface of the sea, gently flapping on powerful wing through the air, or standing quietly, often on one leg, on the beach. Though they float like corks on the waves, they seldom swim and never dive. They may be almost called omnivorous, so welcome to their insatiable appetite is every kind of animal food they can secure. The Little Gull, the smallest of its genus which figures in the British list, and, I believe, of the whole genus, is distinguished in most languages by a name which calls attention to its diminutive figure. In France it is *Mouette pygmée*; in Germany, *Die kleine Meve*; in Sweden, *Dverg-Måse*, or 'Dwarf Gull'; but in Russia, where it is best known, it is honoured with the distinguished title of *Scheik*. It is by no means a common bird, even on our coasts: but I have three undoubted instances of its appearance in Wiltshire, as the Rev. G. Marsh had a specimen in his collection which was killed on a pond at Rodbourne in 1848, and sent to him by Mrs. Pollen. The Rev. George Powell informed me that a very good specimen, in winter plumage, was killed in January, 1869, at Upton Scudamore, near Warminster. It was quite alone when discovered, and had doubtless been driven inland by one of the south-westerly gales which prevailed at that period. And a third was picked up dead on March 28, 1870, on Rockley Down, near Marlborough, as I was informed by the Rev. T. A. Preston, who secured the specimen for the admirable museum which was established by his efforts at Marlborough College. The home of this elegant little bird is in Central and Northern Russia and Siberia, where it is said to congregate in immense colonies and to literally swarm in the air a few feet above the surface of the lakes, like Swallows over a river on a summer's evening, or like mosquitoes, which (as some of my readers may know to their cost, or if not, let them take the word of one who has often and in many lands been driven in by their attacks) hover over their favourite pools in countless myriads.*

* W. H. Simpson in *Ibis* for 1861, p. 362.

224. BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Larus ridibundus*).

I consider this to be the most common species of Gull on our British coasts; and the immense numbers which congregate together for breeding purposes at their well-known haunt, Scoulton Mere, in Norfolk, must be seen to be understood. This is a true cosmopolite, and I have met with it both near the Arctic circle and within the tropics. One specimen I brought home from Nubia, which I shot on the Nile no less than seven hundred miles up the river: and it has been repeatedly found as far from the sea as the lakes of Central Asia. Occasionally it is found in North Wilts, and Mr. Grant has received specimens from Biddestone, near Chippenham, in August, 1873, and a few days later from Cheverell; and in October, 1878, from Broadleas, near Devizes. It is often seen on Salisbury Plain and on the downs of South Wiltshire, following the ploughman after the manner of Rooks, and greedily devouring the grubs which are thus exposed. For it differs from all its congeners in the localities it frequents, turning its back on the sea and the seashore, and preferring freshwater lakes and rivers, and meadows and plains; and when the breeding season comes, resorting to some chosen inland morass or marsh, and not to the precipitous rocks overhanging the sea, which is the usual nesting-place of the Gulls. The eggs laid by this species vary in colour and in markings more perhaps than those of any other species; and, though they differ from them much in colour and still more in shape, are often sold to the indiscriminating public in London and elsewhere as Plovers' eggs. Perhaps as a salve to the conscience of such fraudulent dealers, this species is provincially called the 'Peewit Gull.' The specific name, *ridibundus*, 'full of laughter,' in German, *Lachmeve*; in French, *Mouette rieuse*; in Norsk, *Skratt Måse*, are all derived from the hoarse cackling note which is generally supposed to resemble a human laugh. It is also called the 'Sea Crow,' 'Mire Crow,' and 'Blackcap.' Cordeaux says it is an unfailing weather prophet, and that when

it soars high and flies round in circles it is a certain sign of wind and rain within twenty-four hours.*

225. KITTIWAKE (*Larus tridactylus*).

This, too, is a common species on our coasts, though seldom seen in winter; but considering its abundance, it is, though occasionally met with on our downs in summer, by no means a frequent inland visitor. Indeed, its legs are so short that it is unable to run or walk with much freedom. In consequence it is more thoroughly marine in its habits than others of its congeners, and derives almost all its food from the surface of the sea or the seashore. Also, unlike the species last described, it never breeds on the open ground, but always on the cliffs and precipices which it finds overhanging the sea. However, I have many instances of its occurrence in Wilts. The first was recorded by Mr. Elgar Sloper as having been picked up dead on the snow in the neighbourhood of Devizes in November, 1847; the Marlborough College Natural History Reports mention one killed at Brimslade in 1881; Sir H. Meux tells me of another shot at Fyfield, near Marlborough; Lord Heytesbury informs me of a beautiful specimen picked up on his property about ten years ago, and now in the possession of Mr. Henry Swayne, of Heytesbury; and Mr. Grant's list enumerates no less than sixteen of this species which have come into his hands from the following places: in 1863, from Lavington; 1864, from Swindon; 1865, from Netheravon and Lavington; 1866, from Tinhead; 1868, from Stanton; 1869, from Charlton, Bromham, Chitterne, Wilcot, Edington, Bratton, Bulkington; 1872, from the Crammer Pond, Devizes; 1879, from Clatford, killed by Mr. Hussey; and in 1881, from Enford, killed by Mr. Sargent. It is called *tridactylus*, and in most Continental languages the equivalent to 'three-toed,' from the imperfect development, almost, I may say, the absence, of a hind toe, which peculiarity at once distinguishes it from the Common and other Gulls of about the same size and colour. Our English word, 'Kittiwake,' is supposed to syllable the note

* 'Birds of the Humber District,' p. 202.

it utters, 'Kitti-aa, Kitti-aa,' which, Mr. Seebohm says, imagination likens to 'Get away, get away,' especially when the intruder is near the nest.* Sir R. Payne-Gallwey gives a very graphic account of the preparation of the nest in the breeding season. He says: 'About the beginning of February they may be seen to come and view their old nests to see whether the storms have swept them away. Then they wheel round the caves a few times and depart. Then they squabble over any nests which may happen to have remained intact since the previous spring, great chattering and disputing going on all the while. Nodding and chattering ends in biting and fighting, in violent struggles, often in clinging together, and falling and rolling sometimes a hundred feet into the sea below. Laying the foundation of a nest is an important and anxious piece of architecture. Wet clay is brought and placed on the small projecting piece of rock, often not more than six inches square. Each time a fresh supply is fetched and laid down it undergoes a process of hardening and consolidating by the little black feet of the builder. Round and round he tramps, here a little and there a little. If, as is sometimes the case, he has not room to make a complete circuit, by reason of his tail striking the wall of cliff, up and down he pats it smooth, now more clay, now grass, then sea-weed, more tramping, and the nest is ready.† In France it is *Mouette tridactyle*; in Italy, *Gabbiano terragnala e galetra*; in Sweden, *Tre-täig Mäse*, 'Three-toed Gull'; but in Portugal, in common with several other species of Gull, *Gaivota*.

226. COMMON GULL (*Larus canus*).

I doubt whether this species, numerous though it is, deserves its trivial English name so much as *L. ridibundus*; but, perhaps, in Wiltshire it may fairly be entitled our 'Common Gull.' In the southern parts of the county it is very frequently met with, and I have often seen it in North Wilts passing overhead, or perched on the downs. It is also an indefatigable attendant on

* 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 342.

† 'The Fowler in Ireland,' pp. 169, 270.

the ploughshare, frequenting the interior of the country the greater part of the year in search of worms. The Rev. A. P. Morres says it is very frequently seen flying up and down the river near him, and picking up any refuse matter it can find on the banks. The late Rev. G. Marsh used to say that in South Wilts it obtained the sobriquet of 'Barley Sower.' The Rev. W. C. Lukis kept one alive for some time that was captured at Great Bedwyn in 1854, and was present when another was secured in the parish of Burbage, in March, 1857, during a snow-storm, by which, and the furious gusts of wind which prevailed on that day, it seemed quite overcome and exhausted. Perhaps, too, the same violent gales had driven it from the coast, and it may have been faint from hunger. It is called *canus*, 'hoary,' from its light-coloured plumage of pure white and pearl gray, than which no Quaker's dress could be more subdued in colour, or more pure and spotless. In France it is *Mouette à pieds bleus*; in Italy, *Gabbiano mezza mosca*, 'Half-gray Gull.' In Sweden it is the *Fisk Måse*, or 'Fishing Gull'; and in Germany the *Sturm Meve*, or 'Storm Gull,' though why such a title should be applied to a species which is the first to seek shelter from the coming tempest I know not; for this species only comes to land at the approach of rough weather at sea, hence the popular rhyme:

'Sea-gull, Sea-gull, sit on the sand,
'Tis never good weather when you're on the land.'

Throughout Norway and up to the North Cape, in the interior as well as on the sea coast, it is found in immense numbers. Whatever it may be in Great Britain, it is certainly the 'Common' Gull of Northern Europe.

227. LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*).

Though common enough on the coast and within a few miles of the sea, this species is generally supposed not to venture very far from salt water, but yet it certainly does come boldly inland, both for the food it finds on meadows and pasture lands, and also for breeding purposes; in proof of which I have several instances of its appearance in various parts of our county. The

first of which I have any record was shot many years since in the middle of Salisbury Plain near Tilshead, as I was informed by Mr. George Elgar Sloper. Again the Rev. G. Powell wrote me word in December, 1875, that he had seen a specimen about three months previously, which was said to have been killed in Wilts; and Mr. Grant tells me of nine specimens which have come into his hands for preservation; one killed at Bromham, August 29th, 1865; one taken at Wexcombe, near Marlborough, August 30th, 1872; one from Biddestone, near Chippenham, August 12th, 1874; another from Brimslade, and another from Cheverell at about the same date; in 1876, one from Tilshead and one from Rowde; in 1877, one from Nonsuch; and in 1879, one from Avebury. It is well called *fuscus*, as the dark colour of the upper plumage distinguishes it at once from its congeners of the same size: its bright yellow legs also are no less characteristic of the species. In France it is known as *Gôeland à pieds jaunes*; and in Germany as *Gelbfussige Meve*; but in Sweden this species is *Sill-Måse*, or the 'Herring Gull.' As Harting well observes: 'Gulls appear to be longer in arriving at maturity of plumage than perhaps any other class of birds. Many species of birds attain the adult plumage after the first moult; but most, if not all of the Gulls, pass three years in a state of gradual transition before they display the colours of their parents.'*

228. HERRING GULL (*Larus argentatus*).

This is the commonest of all the species of Gulls on the southern and western shores of England, and with the Black-backed and some other species frequents the newly-ploughed land for grubs: and Montagu says it will trample the ground upon the same spot, turning about in all directions to make the worms emerge; and Selby attributes to it a like movement on the sand, in order to bring to the surface the shrimps and worms from beneath. It is a sad pilferer of its neighbour's goods, and is sometimes called the 'Egg-Gull,' from its habit of devouring the eggs of other sea birds. Its note is a wild cry or hoarse

* 'Birds of Middlesex,' p. 261.

laugh, and when its ringing shriek is heard, it is the signal of alarm to other birds, and puts them on the alert. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says this species takes five years to obtain maturity of plumage. The specific name *argentatus*, 'silvery white,' sufficiently describes its light-coloured dress, as do the French *Gôeland cendré*, the German *Weissgraue Meve*, and the Swedish *Grä Trut*; but, as with ourselves, the Italians mark its fishing propensities, and call it *Pescatore*. The Rev. A. P. Morres has often seen these birds passing overhead in the neighbourhood of Salisbury. Mr. Baker has often found them near Mere. I am informed by Mr. Stratton, of Gore Cross Farm, in the parish of Market Lavington, that he has killed this bird on his own land on the downs; and that he has often seen them passing over his fields, and wondered whither they were going, for they always flew in the same direction, viz., to the north, so he conjectured they were making for Gloucester and the Severn. On January 23rd, 1885, an immature specimen, in the plumage of Bewick's 'Wagel,' was sent me for identification by the Rev. T. A. Preston. It was shot close to Marlborough; and Lord Methuen tells me there is a stuffed specimen at Corsham Court, which was shot on the waters there.

229. GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*).

This, the largest of all the British Gulls, is sparingly scattered round the coast of Britain, but on the mud-flats on the shores of the Wash in Norfolk I have seen it in some numbers, and a giant indeed it looks amongst its congeners, as big and masterful, and conspicuous among the smaller Gulls, as the Crane when stalking amidst the smaller waders on the sand-banks of the Nile. Moreover, it is a bully and a robber, overpowering any weaker animal, fish, flesh, or fowl, within its reach, and purloining eggs whenever it can find them: for it is of voracious appetite, to which nothing comes amiss, and has well been designated 'the Scavenger of the Shore.' Its flight, though easy and buoyant, and even majestic, is decidedly slow, as are all the movements of this overgrown species. Its note is very loud and

harsh, a sort of rough barking noise or a hoarse laugh. It is also most wary and suspicious of danger, and is not easy of approach. Sir R. Payne-Gallwey says: 'Black-backed Gulls are as "Vultures of the Sea," and scent plunder from afar. They will attack a disabled Wigeon or Teal, and tear it in pieces in a few seconds, ripping open the breast as with a knife. They may be often seen to lift their prey with the bill, a few yards into the air, only to let it fall. They would like to carry it to the land to feast at leisure, but their feet not being formed for grasping, they cannot retain a hold of their capture.* In Kent and Essex it is called 'Cob,' from its large size, after the same rule by which we call a large species of nut a *Cob-nut*, and a big pony a *Cob*, etc. In Sussex it is called the 'Parson Gull,' from a supposed resemblance in its black and white plumage to the hood and surplice of a clergyman. In Sweden, too, it is generally known as the *Prost*, or 'Deacon,' as its dress is said to resemble the attire of a Lutheran priest in full canonicals, or—as some wickedly declare—from its lugubrious voice! The Rev. A. P. Morres has several times seen them flying overhead at some elevation, both in his own parish and quite recently at Clarendon, when they were at no very great height above him. Mr. Grant has received at various times three specimens of this fine Gull for preservation; one from Wootton Bassett, on July 24th, 1873; another from Bromham, July 30th of the same year; and the third on August 27th, 1874, from Cheverell. In France it is *Gôeland a manteau noir*; in Germany, *Mantel Meve*, 'Cloak Gull'; in Sweden, *Hafs Trut*, 'Sea Trut.'

230. COMMON SKUA (*Lestris cataractes*).

The robber Gulls, of which this is the more common species, may be distinguished from their more honest peaceful brethren, described above, by the formidable hooked beak and strong crooked talons with which they are armed, and with which they are able to hold fast the prey they have seized, and to tear it in pieces while so holding it. In these respects they resemble the

* 'The Fowler in Ireland,' p. 88.

raptorial birds which stand at the head of our list. In habits, too, they are persecuting and exacting, for no sooner do they behold their quieter congeners returning from their fishing excursions, than they give instant chase, and do not desist from harassing their unoffending fellows till they have compelled them to disgorge the fish they have swallowed, and which they seize before it reaches the water, and carry off in triumph. They are known as 'Parasitic Gulls,' because they are supported on the food procured by other Gulls; and 'Brown Gulls,' from their prevailing colour; while the generic name, *lestris*, 'robber,' aptly describes them. They are called 'Skua Gulls' because the cries they utter are supposed to resemble the syllables 'Skui.' They are natives of the Arctic regions, and are often found in very high latitudes. Their flight is performed by a succession of jerks, and is strong and rapid, as indeed is indispensable for such marauders. They are so fierce and bold that they will attack any animal—bird or beast—and even man, if he should intrude upon their nests; and they will kill and prey upon other Gulls, splitting open their heads with a single blow of their powerful beak, and rending them in pieces with their crooked talons. Mr. Morres well observes that they ought to be called the 'Bullies of the Sea.' In some respects they show much affinity with the Petrels.

I have several instances of the occurrence of this bird in Wiltshire: one which I saw in the hands of Mr. Withers, taxidermist at Devizes, in December, 1857, and which had just been killed by Mr. Hooper, of Lavington, and which Mr. Withers described to me as the 'Black Gull'; another of which the Rev. George Powell wrote me an account, shot at Heytesbury in September, 1863, by Mr. O'Brien, son-in-law of Lord Heytesbury, while partridge-shooting, and which proved to be a young female. Since which Lord Heytesbury tells me a second specimen has been killed in his water-meadows within the last four or five years. Another was also seen in a field of Mr. Norman Wentworth's at Avebury, with a broken wing, and attacked by a number of rooks, in January, 1872, and was

brought to Mr. Grant for preservation. It measured four feet six inches across the wings, and 23 inches in length, and weighed 3 lb. And a fifth specimen was caught in my own parish of Yatesbury, by Mrs. Tanner's shepherd, at the latter end of August, 1882. It appeared to have been wounded, and was unable to rise from the ground. It was preserved at Calne, and is now in the possession of Mr. Munday, late bailiff to Mrs. Tanner. The Marlborough College Natural History Reports mention one seen in that neighbourhood in 1882; and Mr. Grant tells me of one killed at Wedhampton in 1861, and of another taken at Swindon in May, 1864. The Rev. A. P. Morres was informed by Mr. White, the taxidermist of Salisbury, that one of these birds was picked up on the downs at Orcheston St. Mary, by Mr. Mills, on October 31st, 1882. The same species is found in the Southern Ocean, where it is known as the 'Cape Hen' of the sealers, and the 'Port Egmont Hen' of Captain Cook, and displays the same fierce daring disposition as with us.* By Yorkshire fishermen it is called the 'Morrel Hen,' and by others the 'Sea Eagle,' on account of its boldness in attack and its violence. It is called *cataractes* from its habit of rushing down on its prey like a cataract, Latinized from the Greek *καταρράκτης*. In France it is *Stercoraire cataracte* or *Le Gôeland brun*; and in Sweden, *Stor Labbe*, 'Great Labbe.'

231. RICHARDSON'S SKUA (*Lestris crepidatus*).

Sometimes called *L. Richardsonii*, sometimes *L. parasiticus*, and sometimes *L. arcticus*; but inasmuch as all the Skua Gulls are visitors to Arctic regions, and parasitic in their habits, such specific names are only confusing. It is called *crepidatus*, 'wearing sandals,' from its parti-coloured feet, but this peculiarity of yellow legs and black toes belongs to the immature bird only. With equally little reason it is sometimes called the 'Black-toed Gull.' More characteristic and more appropriate, because they refer to the long and slender tail feathers which belong to the adult bird, are the Continental names for this

* Hutton in *Ibis* for 1865, p. 277, and for 1867, p. 185.

species, as in France, *Le Stercoraire à longue queue*; in Germany, *Struntmeve*, 'Tail-Gull'; in Italy, *Stercorario di coda longa*; in Sweden, *Spets Stjertad Labbe*, or 'Pointed-Tailed Labbe.' Bishop Pontoppidan, when speaking of this bird, calls it *Jo-tyv*, or 'Jothief,' and says it is an enemy to all other birds. The fishermen and sailors on our coasts call it the 'Boatswain,' or 'Bo'sun,' as, indeed, they call almost all birds with pointed tails, because they carry their 'marline-spike,' the boatswain's emblem of office in the merchant service, as is the whistle in the navy.* Elsewhere it is called the 'Teazer,' which is very appropriate. In its mode of flight, persecution of birds of inferior power, and thievish propensities, it resembles its congener described above. It is not by any means uncommon on our coasts all round the island, though, of course, more abundant as we advance towards the north, for its home is in the Arctic regions, and Sir E. Parry found it as high as 82° north latitude. I have the pleasure of adding this species to the Wiltshire list on the authority of Mr. Baker, for he reports a specimen killed at Heytesbury in October, 1879, which he had an opportunity of examining at the bird-stuffer's at Warminster, and pronounced it an immature bird, the two central tail-feathers not having been developed. And I have since learned from the Marlborough College Natural History Reports that a specimen was shot near Martinsell in 1881.

232. MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus anglorum*).

The Petrels are at once recognisable by their peculiar beaks, which are very much curved, arched, and hooked towards the point, and also furrowed and indented and furnished with tubular nostrils, through which they can eject at will a quantity of oil, and for which latter valuable article they are highly prized by the hardy natives of the Western Isles of Scotland. Their legs are placed far backwards, which facilitates their singular practice of running along the surface of the waves in

* Fourth edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. iii., p. 683.

search of food;* but on land they can neither stand nor walk upright, but shuffle along on the breast. They are true birds of the ocean, and, I may say, birds of the storm: for during the darkest nights and the most tempestuous weather they may be descried following in the wake of the ship in ease and comfort, skimming along the surface of the water, and even resting in the greatest composure in the most tremendous seas. Their principal food is fat or whatever floating animal substance they can find which is reducible to oil. The Manx Shearwater, though rarely seen on the eastern, is abundant on the western coasts of England; but from its habit of passing the day in the holes or burrows where it breeds, and only sallying forth by night, it is not very generally met with. When on land they sit very nearly in an upright position. This bird is not in reality a Puffin, nor does it even belong to the same family as the well-known grotesque species which we know so well under that name; but it has come to be generally recognised as *Puffinus* from Willoughby having called it 'the Puffin of the Isle of Man': nor, indeed, has it special claims of Manx citizenship beyond the fact that the western coasts of Great Britain are the localities it chiefly affects. But it retires to the Mediterranean for the winter. This is the species so numerous on the Bosphorus, where long files of them are ever flying through the channel, an up and down train several hundred yards in length being often in sight at the same time. These are commonly believed to be the *âmes damnées* of Sultanas who got the sack under the old *régime*.† I am aware of but two specimens having made their appearance in Wiltshire, one that was taken by a boy at Market Lavington from a hole in a hayfield and carried to Mr. Elgar Sloper at Devizes; and the second, as Mr. Thomas Kemm informed me, taken by his son at Avebury alive, but apparently wounded, early in September, 1879. In France it is *Pétrel Manx* and *Le Puffin cendré*; in Norway, *Skrapa*; and in Spain, *Baltridja*, and in some parts *Viro*t; but from

* Selby's 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' vol. ii., p. 527.

† W. H. Simpson in *Ibis* for 1861, p. 366.

their habit of dashing hither and thither in the gloom of night, they are known to the Malaga fishermen as 'Animas' and 'Diablos.'*

233. WILSON'S PETREL (*Thalassidroma oceanica*).

The Petrels are at once to be distinguished by their remarkable beak, which differs from that of all other birds; and they possess the power of squirting from their tubular nostrils a clear liquid oil. They are of very rapid flight, and, though far separated in all respects from that family, bear a general resemblance in appearance and colour to the Swallows, whence Temminck called them *Petrels Hirondelles*. They are of nocturnal habits, remaining underground in the holes where they breed during the day, for bright daylight seems to overpower them, and they abhor the brilliant sunshine: and they come forth in the evening to fly with astonishing speed over the waves. Stormy weather, however, attended as it generally is with a darkened sky, tempts them forth in the daytime: and hence they are looked upon by superstitious sailors as the harbingers, if not the promoters, of a tempest, and are hated by them accordingly.† The scientific name, *thalassidroma*, sufficiently describes the habit of the species which compose this genus of running on the surface of the waves; whence, too, their English and French name of 'Petrel' is derived, in allusion to the incident narrated in the Gospels, of the Apostle St. Peter walking on the water. Wilson's Petrel is one of our rarest British birds, but three or four specimens alone having been obtained in this country. It is therefore with especial gratification that I am able to record, on the unimpeachable testimony of the late Rev. G. Marsh, that a fine specimen of this bird was picked up dead from exhaustion in Sutton Benger Mead in November, 1849. The labourer who found it took it home to his cottage, with the intention of taking it to the Vicarage; but on his wife persuading him that it was only a Swift, he threw it out into

* Howard Saunders in *Ibis* for 1871, p. 401.

† *Zoologist* for 1859, p. 6492.

the road. But happily another labourer passed by, who had a better knowledge of ornithology; and satisfied in his own mind that a Swift did not possess webbed feet, he picked it up and brought it to Mr. Marsh, doubtless to the ultimate satisfaction of both of them. So nearly, however, was this most rare and most valuable specimen being lost. There were no remarkable gales blowing at that time, but it was observed that it was just previous to a long-continued frost. It may be distinguished from its congeners by the superior length of leg and by the absence of a hind toe; and Mr. F. Godman, who fell in with this species at the Azores, observed that in flying they carry their legs stretched straight out behind them, and their feet protruded about an inch beyond the tail, producing the effect of two long feathers.* The name of *oceanica*, 'belonging to the open sea,' is very applicable, for when ships have advanced into the broad Atlantic, hundreds of miles from shore, this little bird has often been seen careering in headlong flight among the great waves, or sheltering itself from the violence of the wind under the lee of the vessel.

234. FORKED-TAILED PETREL (*Thalassidroma Leachii*).

This species is considerably larger than the Common Storm Petrel, which otherwise in general appearance and habits it very much resembles. The forked tail, too, from which it derives its name, at once distinguishes it, and its shorter legs separate it from the species last described. Like the other Petrels, this bird is seldom seen at sea but in tempestuous weather, in which it appears to rejoice; and yet, after severe gales, it is often picked up dead far inland, as if unable to withstand the violence of the wind, and, driven far from its native haunts, perishes miserably of starvation. In the *Zoologist* for 1866, p. 101, Mr. Henry Blackmore records the occurrence of two specimens of this somewhat rare species near Salisbury, one of which was picked up on the 27th of October, 1859, by a railway porter on the Great Western Railway, two miles from the city, having

* *Ibis* for 1866, p. 104.

apparently met its death by flying against the wires of the electric telegraph; the other was supposed to have been killed in the same manner, as it was also found near the railway embankment with its wing broken on the 25th of November, 1866, at East Grimstead, near Salisbury. I learn from Mr. Grant that on January 10th, 1867, a specimen was brought to him which had been taken at Pewsey. On March 21st, 1876, a note from Major Spicer, of Spye Park, informed me that about six weeks previously his keeper had picked up between the house and the stable a specimen quite dead, which he conjectured must have been blown off the sea by a gale of wind and starved to death, for it was in an emaciated condition. In December, 1884, I received the fifth Wiltshire specimen, sent me for identification by Rev. T. A. Preston, which had been picked up dead in Savernake Forest by one of the keepers on November 28th of that year. In France it is, as in the old scientific name, *Pétrel de Leach*; but by modern ornithologists it is now commonly called *leucorrhœa*, from λευκός, 'white,' and ὄπισθος, 'the rump,' from its white hinder parts.

235. STORM PETREL (*Thalassidroma pelagica*).

The last bird on the British list is also the smallest of the Order of Swimmers, and this is the Common Petrel, which is known to all, and which sailors have designated as 'Mother Carey's Chicken,' 'Little Witch,' and a variety of other appellations indicative of the superstitious awe they feel towards these innocent little birds, which, as I said above, they consider not only the forerunners of stormy weather, but the actual cause and origin of the tempest. It is true that all the Petrels are more often seen during the prevalence of gales than in calms; and they seem thoroughly to enjoy the most boisterous weather, when they will skim over the crested waves, patting them with their feet as they run over the surface, or fly down into the hollows of the great waves and then up and over some gigantic billow, in evident delight at the storm of elements raging around. Sometimes they will stand for a moment on the summit of a

billow, with wings expanded, while they pick up some dainty morsel at top of the wave, for they procure all their food from the surface of the sea; but they seldom alight on the water for swimming, and they are quite incapable of diving. Considering their thorough appreciation of angry weather, it is strange how many specimens are annually picked up either dead or in a dying, exhausted condition, during stormy weather in inland districts, as if buffeted to death by the violence of the gale. Possibly it may be that, driven from their proper element, they are faint from starvation, and so unable to contend against the fury of the wind; at all events, not an autumn passes without many such casualties to the Storm Petrel occurring in our inland counties. In Wiltshire I had a notice from my friend the Rev. W. C. Lukis of a specimen picked up dead by a labouring man, in the parish of Ludgershall, in November, 1859. Mr. Grant reports a specimen found at Cherrington, November 9, 1863. The Rev. Townley Dowding, then Vicar of Marlborough, told me that in April, 1865, he distinctly saw a bird of this species fly to a portion of the Kennet at the foot of his garden, where it remained some five minutes dabbling in the water, then flew off, and alighted again a short distance farther down the stream; and lastly, as a fitting conclusion to this long catalogue of Wiltshire birds, wherein I have derived so much assistance from the records furnished me by my late lamented friend, the Rev. George Marsh, I mention a specimen of which he informed me, which was picked up dead at Somerford Parva in the year 1830, which had evidently died from exhaustion, and which was preserved by Mr. Wightwick, of Brinkworth, but subsequently became moth-eaten, and no longer exists.

If Wilson's Petrel deserved the name of *oceanica*, certainly this species is no less entitled to *pelagica*, 'belonging to the open sea;' for what can be more truly oceanic than this little bird, which, as Montagu says, alone of the feathered creation dares venture so far from shore as the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, where it appears to find subsistence, and only retires during the breeding season? From its enjoyment of rough

weather it has derived its name in most countries. With us it is the 'Storm Petrel;' in France, *Pétrel tempête*; in Germany, *Kleinster Sturm vogel*; in Sweden, *Liten Storm Svala*, 'Little Storm Swallow; in Portugal it is *Alma de mestre*, 'Soul of the Master.' Among Norwegian fishermen it is known as *Lever-Lars*, or 'Liver-Laurentius,' because, being of a fearless nature, it approaches close to the fishing boats in the North Sea, and greedily devours the offal, and especially the fish-liver, which is thrown overboard. Bishop Pontoppidan calls it *Hav Hest*, or 'the Sea-horse,' and gives a most singular portrait as well as a marvellous account of it. In 1756, in County Kerry, this bird, of all others, was esteemed a delicacy for the table, and was named the 'Irish Ortolan.' There is certainly no accounting for taste; but it must have been a very strong and a very oily morsel.

With this pretty little species I close the list of birds which have appeared within the County of Wilts.

CHAPTER XII.

ON MIGRATION.

I HAVE already remarked that there is almost always migration going on amongst our feathered tribes, sometimes on a large, but generally on a small scale; sometimes across the sea and for long distances, but more often from one inland district to another, or from the interior of our island to the sea coast. And the principal motive which impels this so frequent movement, and urges the restless flocks to pass on to pastures new, is not altogether, as many suppose, the inclemency of weather, or the extremes of heat and cold, but the profusion or the scarcity of the food upon which their very being depends. See the countless troops of little warblers which—as soon as the warm days of spring waken vegetation, and quicken into life the insect hordes—arrive on our shores, and soon spread themselves over this island, revisiting each its own old haunt of former years, the native place where it was reared, maybe; or mark the vast flocks of birds which, taking leave of us in the spring, penetrate to distant northern lands, there to spend the short but brilliant summer within the Arctic Circle; and in either case their arrival coincides with the development of countless myriads of insects which are absolutely essential to the very existence of their young. None but those who have visited those northern lands can have any notion of the immense quantities of gnats and mosquitoes which literally cloud the atmosphere; and, revelling in perpetual sunshine, with no chills of night to check their increase, they make the most of the few months of continuous daylight, and abound in the greatest profusion. To the unhappy traveller, indeed,

they are a source of perpetual irritation and annoyance, to a degree scarcely to be conceived by those who have not experienced it; but to the birds which resort in such numbers to those sequestered breeding-places, what an inexhaustible store of the food best suited to their tender brood! In a very much less degree indeed numerically, but perhaps, in proportion to the birds which breed in this inland district, not so far behind, are the insects which spring forth into life with the warm days of early summer, and which afford an ample supply of the food they need, not only to the soft-billed Warblers which fill our coppices and gardens in spring, but to the hard-billed Finches and others, whose tender young equally require an insect diet during the days of their dependence on their parents, while they are yet confined to the nest. The profusion or scarcity of food, then, is, I believe, the chief motive which regulates the migration of birds, which also leads them to abound at one time in, and to absent themselves altogether at another from, their favourite haunts. But I do not say it is the only motive. The Warblers, which come to us in the spring, would doubtless be led to seek their breeding quarters in a temperate climate, more suitable to their nature than the hotter latitudes wherein they passed the winter. Those species, too, which leave us in the spring for the far North, are doubtless attracted in some measure by the solitude of the districts they frequent, where they can breed undisturbed by the presence of man. But when the short Arctic summer is ended, and the frosts of early winter paralyse the insect hordes, then the parent birds lead their now full-fledged young to a more genial climate in the South; while our less hardy Warblers in like manner move off with their broods to warmer latitudes. It is very wonderful, indeed, if we reflect upon it, how such diminutive creatures, so short-winged, so light, and so feeble, as some are (the Golden-crested *Regulus* for instance), can prolong their flight, as we know they do, over the Northern Sea; or how others, equally unfitted, as we should suppose, for so long a journey (the Willow Warblers for example), pass on every autumn to the interior of Africa, to return again to Wiltshire the following

spring! Whether they rise to a great height and are carried along by currents in the upper atmosphere, how they find their way, and how they steer their course, for the most part so unerringly, are some of the many problems connected with migration upon which we are as yet but little informed. So impossible, indeed, did migration to distant lands seem to our older writers on ornithology, including even the accurate Gilbert White of Selborne, that they had recourse to the utterly untenable hypothesis that the Swallows and their *compagnons de voyage* resorted to the reed-beds as autumn drew on, and hibernated at the bottom of rivers! not to revive and seek the upper air until the entire winter had passed away and spring had returned! A wider experience and the observations of naturalists in other countries have taught us whither our summer visitors betake themselves, so that we can trace them on leaving our coasts to the warm districts of North Africa, and see many of them prolonging their journey to the equator and even beyond it. More and more marvellous, indeed, does this seem, when we recollect the feeble flight of some diminutive Warbler, as it flits across one of our meadows in Wiltshire from one hedge to another; or the laboured flapping of wings when some short-winged species hurries off at its greatest speed, when suddenly alarmed. And yet, by some means or other, when the season for migration comes round, the diminutive and the feeble, the short-winged and the heavy-bodied, generally collect into flocks or parties and move off in a body, and in due course reach their destination. Much of their journeyings necessarily takes place at night; but neither darkness, nor fogs, nor storms—unless of unusual violence—nor wind, nor rain, nor anything else seems to baffle them. On they go with unerring instinct, straight for the point they desire to reach; and generally, and within a very few days of their usual appearance, they may be found in their old familiar haunts, as much at home as if they had never been absent. How they know the direction, by what intuitive perception they steer their course so accurately, is another problem in reference to migration which we cannot explain; and this incom-

prehensible act reaches its climax when we consider that some (the young Cuckoos for example) have to make the long journey alone and for the first time, with no parents to show them the way, for they have long ago departed; and yet the young Cuckoos, too, *somehow* make out the route to be taken, and these, too, arrive at their destination in due course.

To return again to the vicissitudes of weather which they must encounter, on which I have briefly touched. Think of the furious gales, the torrents of rain, the pelting hail, the scorching suns, they must at various periods of their travel meet with: how can such frail bodies, supported by such tiny wings, endure such tremendous assaults of the elements, and survive amid such difficulties and dangers? I make but small account of the excessive cold to which in their passage they must often be exposed, because I conceive that most birds are capable of enduring a very low temperature without inconvenience. And I am not disposed to make too much of rain-storms, because I have a notion that most birds on migration ascend to a great altitude, above the clouds, where they probably meet with currents of air which waft them in the required direction. But even if we allow them these advantages, they have difficulties enough to contend against. That many species keep together in the flock in which they started, and do not lose one another on the darkest of nights, by means of the perpetual clamour they keep up, is certain, for the cry of a migrating host may be often heard as it passes overhead; and it is not improbable that the smaller species in like manner communicate to one another their mutual positions by twitterings and call-notes peculiar to themselves.

But, however successful their passage, that they are generally exhausted when they reach the land, and drop down to rest in the nearest available cover, is well known to all who are favourably situated for observing them, on our eastern and southern coasts more especially. The Quail which I mentioned above* as having dropped down in my garden at Mentone, after a passage over the Mediterranean from Africa, and suffered itself to be taken up in

* *Supra*, p. 336.

the hand, having apparently no further strength left for self-preservation, is the greatest proof I ever saw of such utter prostration after a prolonged journey: but similar accounts are constantly given by those who have witnessed on our eastern coasts the arrivals from Northern Europe. Vast numbers, too, undoubtedly perish in the sea, unable to prolong their flight when adverse winds have buffeted them beyond their powers of endurance; so that though they *must* depart when the restless spirit of migration seizes on them in spring and autumn, it is a perilous path which they are pursuing, beset with many difficulties and dangers, and oftentimes a fatal path which only leads to a watery grave. The great bulk, however, of our migratory birds does, I suppose, succeed in the enterprise, and arriving here from the South, or departing hence for the North, all are busy during the six months of spring and summer with their nurseries, and then the return journeys are entered upon, when in most cases their numbers are much increased by the vast flocks of young which accompany their parents.

These few preliminary remarks on the great subject of migration are only intended to introduce a table of our Wiltshire migrants, which may be looked for at their respective dates every year. In preparing this table, and in assigning specified days for the arrival of each species, I have taken considerable pains to arrive at as correct a date as possible, first by careful examination of the notes which I have kept as accurately as I could during the last thirty-five years, both at Yatesbury and at Old Park; and then by comparing them with similar tables, put forth by other observers in other localities, both within this county and outside it. When I add that in the case of many of the more favourite migrants, I have no less than fifty such tables lying before me, it will be seen that the dates which I assign are not mere guess work, but are corrected by the experience of many other observers similarly employed with myself. It is obvious that these dates of arrival vary with forward and backward seasons, as was to be expected; but by adding the earliest and latest days on which their first appearance has been recorded in

the tables before me, I mark the range within which the species under examination has been first noticed. This, however, is only supplementary to the true date on which each migrant is declared to be due in Wiltshire.

To proceed, then, with the list of migratory birds in the order of date in which they visit us, omitting occasional and rare visitants, and confining myself to the common regular birds of passage :

Name of species.	General date of first arrival.	Range of first arrival.
1. Lapwing	March 2	Feb. 15 to March 23.
2. Pied Wagtail	" 18	" 11 " " 25.
3. Wheatear	" 26	March 13 " April 23.
4. Chiffchaff	" 30	" 11 " " 12.
5. Wryneck	April 11	" 29 " " 25.
6. Sand Martin	" 14	April 5 " May 1.
7. Nightingale	" 15	" 5 " April 30.
8. Blackcap Warbler	" 15	" 5 " " 28.
9. Willow Warbler	" 16	" 2 " " 28.
10. Meadow Pipit	" 17	" 8 " May 5.
11. Redstart	" 17	" 7 " " 12.
12. Tree Pipit	" 18	" 10 " " 3.
13. Swallow	" 18	March 28 " April 30.
14. Ray's Wagtail	" 19	April 3 " May 8.
15. Martin	" 20	" 1 " " 3.
16. Common Cuckoo	" 22	" 1 " " 5.
17. Common Whitethroat	" 22	" 4 " " 5.
18. Whinchat	" 23	" 16 " " 9.
19. Reed Warbler	" 23	" 12 " " 6.
20. Lesser Whitethroat	" 24	" 12 " " 11.
21. Sedge Warbler	" 26	" 1 " " 15.
22. Garden Warbler	" 26	" 12 " " 15.
23. Wood Warbler	" 28	" 5 " " 12.
24. Grasshopper Warbler	May 2	" 16 " " 11.
25. Turtle Dove	" 4	May 1 " June 1.
26. Night-jar	" 6	April 15 " May 25.
27. Common Swift	" 6	" 21 " " 31.
28. Red-backed Shrike	" 8	" 27 " " 30.
29. Land Rail	" 10	" 25 " " 28.
30. Spotted Flycatcher	" 11	" 13 " " 31.
31. Common Snipe	Sept. 15	Aug. 12 " Oct. 30.
32. Jack Snipe	" 24	Sept. 6 " " 30.
33. Woodcock	Oct. 10	" 14 " " 31.
34. Short-eared Owl	" 10	" 30 " " 21.
35. Fieldfare	" 20	" 27 " Dec. 13.
36. Redwing	" 22	Oct. 1 " Nov. 23.
37. Merlin	" 30	Sept. 11 " " 21.
38. Golden Plover	" 30	" 24 " " 26.
39. Teal	" 30	" 7 " " 12.
40. Mountain Finch	Dec. 8	Nov. 19 " Dec. 20.

The dates assigned above, upon which the arrival of our commoner migrants may be expected in Wiltshire, will perhaps appear to some to be generally full late; but whether it is that Wiltshire is colder than most counties, and our migrants in consequence defer their arrival here later than elsewhere, which I do not apprehend to be the case; or whether, as I suspect, exceptionally early dates of first appearance are oftentimes alone remembered by superficial observers, and the ordinary times of arrival are passed by without notice, is a fair subject for inquiry; but I venture to insist that the only way to insure a correct estimate on this point is by registering dates of arrival with as great accuracy as possible, and comparing such registers after a long series of years. Figures and dates and statistics may be dull, tedious, and prosaic, but in this case they alone will give a true verdict, and enable us to arrive at a right conclusion. The whole question of migration is indeed an exceedingly difficult one; but great light has been thrown upon it within the last few years through the exertions of a select band of ornithologists, deputed by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, to institute inquiries; and this has now, for several years past, been systematically pursued, not only by the personal observations of men of science specially qualified for the task, but also by enlisting the assistance of those in charge of the lighthouses and lightships, who enjoy extraordinary opportunities of witnessing the migrations of birds. It is, indeed, quite surprising what vast numbers of birds on migration commit involuntary suicide, by dashing themselves against the lighthouses, round which vast flocks will occasionally flutter, like moths round a candle, apparently lost in the darkness and unable to tear themselves from the fatal light. To those who are interested in the subject I commend these British Association Reports on Migration, eight of which have now been published since the Committee began its work; and I would also call attention to a work on 'Bird Migration,' by Mr. William Brewster, President of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, and published in the Memoirs of that Club in the United States of America.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE NESTING OF BIRDS IN WILTSHIRE.

OF all the interesting questions connected with bird life, there is not one which, in my opinion, excites our admiration and astonishment so much as the building of the nest. All the details connected with the preparation of that receptacle for the eggs, and which shall afterwards serve as the nursery for the young brood, show such marvellous skill that we stand amazed as we consider them. Let us take the familiar case of the nest of the common Rook; awkward enough, and inappropriate as we should suppose, and unwieldy are some of the sticks which we see carried off in the bird's bill to the top of some lofty elm; but the foundation of the nest must be firmly fixed indeed, buffeted as it will assuredly be, and swayed to and fro, by the equinoctial gales of spring; and yet these awkward sticks are *somehow* placed so securely as to defy the fury of the tempest, and enable the nest to ride out in safety the persistent assaults of the high winds of March. If man were to try his hand at building a Rook's nest, and if he were provided only with the materials and the implements which those birds use, I think he would utterly fail in completing a structure which should answer the required purpose and withstand the blasts of wind to which it would be exposed. But the birds, inheriting the instincts of their ancestors, know how to arrange the sticks so securely that they build a firm foundation, and upon it, little by little, prepare the nest which shall conveniently and safely shelter their eggs and afterwards their young. Or take the case of the common

Wood-pigeon, whose nest we may find in every plantation. As we walk beneath the branch on which it is laid, so flimsy does it seem, so fragile and so slight, that we can positively see the two white eggs through the interstices of the few sticks on which they are laid; and if we climb up and examine the nest more closely, we marvel to see how flat it is, with no protection at the sides for retaining upon it the eggs, and afterwards the young; only a slight platform or wicker ledge, from which one would expect the eggs to roll at the slightest stirring of the breeze. But no; the narrow stage has been found sufficient by hundreds of generations of Wood-pigeons, and precisely the same nest as their ancestors built is prepared by the Wood-pigeons now.

Next mark the variety of positions for their nests selected by the several species. The Song Thrush chooses a thick bush; the Blackbird, the bank of a ditch; the Misseltoe Thrush, the exposed branch of an apple-tree; the Wheatear seeks a deserted rabbit-burrow, or some other hole in the ground; the White-throat chooses a nettle-bed; the Spotted Fly-catcher, the support of a beam or rafter; the Titmouse, a hole in a stump; the Skylark, the open cornfield; the House-sparrow, the thatch of a cottage or barn; the Starling, any hole it can find in the roofs of our houses; the Rook, the top of an elm-tree; the Wood-pecker, a hole in the tree-stem; the Nuthatch, a hole in a brick wall; the Kingfisher, a hole in the river-bank; the Sand-martin, a hole in a dry sand-quarry; the Swift, a hole in the church-tower; the Nightjar, a mere depression of the ground at the foot of a tree; the Partridge, the meadow where growing crops afford concealment and protection; the Lapwing, the open cornfield or down; the Waterhen, a floating bed of rushes; the Little Grebe, a wet mass of sedge at the margin of the stream. These are but samples of the principal localities which the several species choose, and the list might be very much prolonged; but enough is given to show how various are the situations adopted by the breeding birds.

Next let me draw attention to the variety of materials which are sought for by the nest-builders, and these comprise almost

everything which can be made available which comes within their reach. First we see some species acting as plasterers, preparing their mortar, kneading it, and working it, till it attains the proper consistency, and then daubing it on, not in lumps, but in thin layers; and like wise builders as they are, suffering one layer to dry and harden before the next is added. As examples of those which in one form or other adopt this material, I instance the Thrushes, the Nuthatches, the Swallows and the Martins. Next come the Weavers, and under this head indeed we may range the great majority of species which have any pretensions to nest-making; for most birds, whether as regards the fabric of the nest itself, or whether only with reference to its lining, weave the moss and hair and feathers together so cleverly that the result is a smooth and even surface to the walls of the cup-shaped cradle they have so skilfully prepared. Sticks, as we have already seen, and fibrous roots, are often used for foundations, and (besides the substances mentioned above) wool and lichens and leaves and grass, stems and cobwebs and the down of various seeds, are brought into requisition, either as lining, or as an outer covering for protection or concealment.

Then, what opposite views are entertained by the different species of what their nest should be! The Guillemot and the Razor-bill on the ledge of some sea-cliff, and the Lapwing and the Partridge on the open cornfield, are contented with the bare ground on which to deposit their eggs. The Sand-martin and the Bee-eater have little beyond the smooth surface at the end of the holes they have severally excavated in the sand or the river-bank. The Kingfisher has a nest, if it may be so called, peculiar and indeed unique, composed of the fishbones and indigestible remains of the fishes which it casts up. The Woodpeckers and the Owls want no more than the hole in the tree or the hollow stump where they can deposit their eggs. But the great majority of species are not so easily satisfied. The Thrushes, the Warblers, the Titmice, the Buntings, the Finches, the Crows and the Herons are examples of those which require, each to its own taste, more substantial nurseries, and some of these

prepare a very elaborate structure, which exhibits no little architectural skill on the part of the artificer. I would instance first the doomed nests of the Common Wren and the Willow Warblers: what warm, snug habitations for their young; how well protected, how cleverly constructed for shelter and concealment, how softly lined! Or see the neat, trim nest of the Chaffinch; how admirably finished off with its lichen adornments, which serve to impart a resemblance to the branch on which it is placed! What consummate skill does this compact, pretty nest evince! Mark again the well-constructed nest of the Golden-crested Regulus, suspended beneath the branch of some yew-tree or spruce-fir: what a charming receptacle for the smallest eggs we know in the British Isles! And as a climax of perfection of architectural ingenuity, let me point to the oval nest of the long-tailed Titmouse, with which nothing else can compete for efficient shelter and warmth, as well as for the less substantial virtues of beauty, symmetry, and finish. These are but samples of the various nests which we find around us, and, as we examine them carefully, we cannot fail to be astonished at the excellence of their workmanship, and at the perfect adaptability of each to the object for which it was intended. How the several species succeed so well in producing nests exactly resembling those of their respective ancestors is an interesting question on which I will not here enter. Whether it be by reason, or by instinct, or by hereditary habit, or by imitation, has been discussed at length by advocates of each theory, and to their arguments I would refer my readers.*

And now I come to the interesting question of the colouring of the eggs. As a rule, those which are not exposed to sight, but are placed in holes in trees, or house roofs, or in banks or in the ground, are either white or so faintly tinted as to be approaching to white, as, for example, those of Owls, Wheatears, Starlings, Woodpeckers, Wrynecks, Kingfishers, Martins, Swifts. With others, again, the colouring of the eggs assimilates in some

* See especially Wallace's 'Natural Selection,' pp. 211-231; Darwin's 'Descent of Man,' vol. ii., pp. 166-182; an admirable chapter by Mr. Charles Dixon, 'On the Protective Colour of Eggs,' in Introduction to vol. ii. of Mr. H. Seebohm's 'British Birds;' and Canon Tristram in *Ibis* for 1867, p. 74.

sort to the general hue of their surroundings. This is curiously the case with the highly coloured eggs of the Ptarmigan, Grouse, and Quail; with the sombre tints of those of the Sedge-warblers, the Wagtails, Buntings, and Larks; and especially the mottled marbled eggs of the Nightjar. But with the great majority of the eggs of birds, I should say that the colouring is so conspicuous as rather to attract notice, and that not only from man, who is in comparison but dull of sight at the best, but from the pilfering Magpie, Jay, or Carrion Crow, marauders who are ever on the look-out for a meal, such as an unguarded nest of eggs would supply. See the Hedge Accentor, one of the earliest breeders among our commoner birds, whose nest can readily be discerned in early spring in the quickset hedge, as yet destitute of leaves; can anything be more conspicuous than the bright-blue eggs of that familiar warbler? See, again, the ruddy eggs of the Redbreast, the speckled eggs of the Willow Wrens, the blue eggs of the Thrush, the brick-red eggs of most of the Falcons, the green eggs of the Crows, the mottled eggs of the Pipits, the Garden Warbler and the Blackcap, the spotted eggs of the Finches, and the blotched eggs of the Crakes; and it must be admitted that these variously-coloured eggs, however pleasing to the eye of the naturalist, are undoubtedly too conspicuous for safety, unless they are in some way concealed. But in order to protect their eggs from observation, it is the habit with some species on leaving the nest to cover their eggs with leaves, moss, or flags, according to their several surroundings. Familiar instances of this we have in the Pheasant, the Partridge, and the Little Grebe. With others, again, the female bird which broods over the nest is of dull and sombre colour, which harmonizes with the tints of the nesting site; and as long as the eggs are covered by the sitting bird, they are, of course, completely shielded from view. For securing this object, we may notice how many of the hens are of sober, subdued colour when compared with the brilliant plumage of their respective mates: for example, the Blackbird, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Pheasant, and the whole family of Ducks.

I proceed now to enumerate the species which have been known to breed in this county; and the table which I here offer is for the most part that with which I supplied Mr. A. G. More when, in 1864, he was preparing his valuable treatise, 'On the Distribution of Birds in Great Britain during the Nesting Season,'* when he applied to me to furnish him with a list from Wiltshire; and in compliance with his request, I went carefully into the subject, with a view of contributing as accurate a list as I could draw up. It is a copy of that list, with such additions and modifications as the further experience of the last twenty-three years has given, that I now lay before my readers. Those printed in italics have either altogether ceased to breed in Wiltshire, or have only vary rarely been known to breed within the county. To each of these species I propose to call attention in due course. Let me, however, here remark that, for every nest discovered, there are probably two or three which escape detection; so that even those species which have only been recognised once or twice as nesting within our borders may possibly do so somewhat more frequently than is generally supposed.

1. *Peregrine Falcon*.—That this noble bird used to breed in Wiltshire even so late as the beginning of this century we have seen above; for they had a nest in Wilton Park annually, until driven away by the overbearing Ravens. And that they bred, or attempted to breed, on the spire of Salisbury Cathedral in quite recent years we are also positively assured (see above, p. 70).
2. Hobby (see p. 73).
3. Kestrel (see p. 80).
4. Sparrow Hawk.
5. *Kite*.—Fifty or sixty years ago the nest of this species was well known in Wiltshire (see p. 83, 84), but now, not only is the nest never found amongst us, but the bird, too, is no longer to be seen within the county.

* Printed in the *Ibis* for 1865, pp. 1-26, 119-143, 425-458.

6. *Common Buzzard*.—This bird, once so common, as its trivial name shows, has long ceased to breed in Wilts; and I have heard of no recent nest within the limits of the county.
7. *Rough-legged Buzzard*.—I am more fortunate in regard to this species; for in 1882 a pair succeeded in hatching out five young ones near Tisbury (see p. 87).
8. *Hen Harrier*.—Not many years since, this species used to breed regularly on Salisbury Plain; and it is not improbable that a nest still may be found in suitable localities; but that it is surely, if gradually, being exterminated from Wilts is only too certain (see p. 94).
9. *Montagu's Harrier*.—This species, which I believe to have bred pretty regularly in Wiltshire in days gone by, still occasionally is found nesting in the county. (See p. 96 for a very interesting account of a nest of this species in the gorse at Fifield Bavant, communicated by Mr. Tyndall Powell.)
10. Long-eared Owl (see p. 105).
11. Barn Owl (see p. 109).
12. Tawny Owl (see p. 112).
13. Red-backed Shrike (see p. 122).
14. Spotted Flycatcher (see p. 125).
15. Missel Thrush (see p. 128).
16. Song Thrush.
17. Blackbird.
18. *Ring Ouzel* (see p. 139 for the evidence of a nest of this species being found near Mere).
19. Hedge Accentor.
20. Redbreast.
21. Redstart (see p. 147).
22. Stonechat.
23. Whinchat.
24. Wheatear (see p. 152).
25. Grasshopper Warbler (see p. 153).
26. Sedge Warbler (see p. 154).
27. Reed Warbler (see p. 155).

28. Nightingale.
29. Blackcap Warbler.
30. Garden Warbler.
31. Common Whitethroat (see p. 160).
32. Lesser Whitethroat.
33. Wood Warbler (see p. 162).
34. Willow Warbler.
35. Chiff-chaff.
36. *Dartford Warbler*.—From the nature of the localities which this bird frequents, viz., the thick gorse on the unfrequented downs; from its retiring, shelter-loving habit of dropping down into concealment in its impervious retreat on the approach of an intruder; and from the position of its nest in the very thickest part of the densest gorse, there is perhaps no bird which breeds annually in the county whose nest is so seldom found. The patient watcher, however, who will devote time to the task, may by dint of careful and prolonged examination be rewarded by the discovery of the well-concealed nest; or he may quite as probably, notwithstanding all his labour and patience, go away baffled and disappointed.
37. Golden-crested Regulus (see p. 168).
38. Great Titmouse (see p. 170).
39. Blue Titmouse.
40. Coal Titmouse.
41. Marsh Titmouse.
42. Long-tailed Titmouse (p. 172).
43. Pied Wagtail (see p. 176).
44. Gray Wagtail (see p. 178).
45. Ray's Wagtail.
46. Tree Pipit (see p. 180).
47. Meadow Pipit.
48. Skylark.
49. Woodlark.
50. Common Bunting.
51. Black-headed Bunting.

52. Yellow Bunting.
53. Cirl Bunting (see p. 191).
54. Chaffinch (see p. 193).
55. House Sparrow.
56. *Tree Sparrow*.—I am assured that the nest of this species has been found in Wilts; but I have no personal knowledge of it; and I confess that I admit it amongst Wiltshire nest-builders with considerable hesitation (see p. 198).
57. Greenfinch.
58. Hawfinch (see p. 199).
59. Goldfinch.
60. Common Linnet.
61. *Lesser Redpole*.—This is another species which breeds freely in the northern counties of England, but has only on rare occasions been known to nest in this county (see p. 207).
62. Bullfinch.
63. Common Starling.
64. Raven (see pp. 222-232).
65. Carrion Crow.
66. Rook (see pp. 238-240).
67. Jackdaw (see p. 241).
68. Magpie (see p. 244).
69. Jay.
70. Green Woodpecker.
71. Great Spotted Woodpecker.
72. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.
73. *Wryneck* (see p. 256).—This bird, so common in many parts of England, but very rarely breeds in Wiltshire; indeed, in the West of England generally, it may almost be considered an accidental straggler.
74. Common Creeper.
75. Wren (see p. 261).
76. *Hoopoe*.—For the very remarkable occurrence of the nest of this bird in Wiltshire, I refer to the account given above, p. 267.
77. Nuthatch (see p. 269).

78. Common Cuckoo (see pp. 272-291).
79. Kingfisher (see p. 296).
80. Swallow.
81. Martin (see p. 305).
82. Sand Martin (see p. 306).
83. Common Swift (see p. 308).
84. Nightjar (see p. 312).
85. Ring Dove (see p. 318).
86. Stock Dove (see p. 320).
87. Turtle Dove.
88. Pheasant.
89. Partridge.
90. Red-legged Partridge.
91. Quail.
92. *Bustard*.—Now, alas! extinct; but within less than a hundred years a regular breeder on the Wiltshire Downs (see p. 353).
93. Great Plover (see p. 378).
94. Lapwing (see p. 387).
95. Common Heron (see pp. 395-402).
96. *Curlew*.—Mr. More expresses a doubt whether this bird really breeds in Wiltshire and Dorsetshire, and conjectures that where this has been stated the Stone Curlew (*Ædicnemus crepitans*) was mistaken for *Numenius arquata*; but, though it is unquestionable that there is often much confusion between these two species, I am satisfied, by the assurance of those on whose authority I can rely, that the true Curlew (*N. arquata*) does occasionally breed on the fallows of the open downs (see p. 413).
97. Woodcock (see p. 428).
98. *Common Snipe*.—Occasionally, but rarely, found breeding in Wiltshire.
99. Land-rail.
100. Water-rail.
101. Moor-hen.
102. Common Coot.

103. Mute Swan (see p. 472).
 104. Wild Duck.
 105. *Teal*.—Occasionally, though rarely, a nest has been found in Wiltshire ; but more frequently in the neighbouring counties of Hants and Dorset.
 106. Little Grebe.

In addition to those enumerated above, there is a strong probability of the correctness of the information in regard to the breeding of two other species in Wiltshire ; but the evidence seemed scarcely strong enough to warrant their insertion in the list of those which have undoubtedly bred within the county. These are :

Great Grey Shrike (see p. 120).

Golden Oriole (see p. 140).

Before I conclude this chapter, I would say a few words on the subject of bird-nesting, for I maintain that if a man should be defined as a 'reasoning animal,' in order to distinguish him from all the rest of the living creatures around him, then with equal aptitude should a boy be designated as a 'bird-nesting animal,' so universal, so innate, so all absorbing is the passion in the mind of a boy for seeking after and finding the nests and eggs of birds. Now, to attempt to prevent boys from bird-nesting altogether would be about as hopeless a task as to try to dissuade the birds themselves from nesting, migrating, or following out any other instinct of their nature. It would be like trying to turn back the rushing stream towards its source. I, at all events, am not about to attempt any such impossible work ; but still I hope that this chapter may not be without profit, as well as interest, to the youthful part of the inhabitants of Wiltshire, if I try to point out to my younger friends how their hobby may be most advantageously as well as pleasantly ridden, not indiscriminately, not cruelly, not recklessly, but how it may be carried on with the greatest delight to themselves and the least injury to the birds they love so well. For it is not, be it remarked, the more intelligent collector of eggs who does the mischief, for he requires no more than four or five of a species for his collection, which are all

the better specimens if they are selected separately, one from a nest. But it is the indiscriminate glutton, who with senseless recklessness destroys wholesale, his only object being to amass great numbers of eggs on a string, amongst which he knows no difference, pretends to no order or arrangement, and who rejoices in quantity, without reference to variety. He it is who is such an enemy to the whole feathered race, and his plunderings of eggs can only be characterized as heartless and selfish, and denounced for their cruelty. But for him who desires to make a collection of real value and interest, I offer a few remarks, and I venture to lay down certain broad rules which should be rigidly adhered to.

1. First, let it be thoroughly understood and determined that any egg, however handsome in appearance, rich in colour, and strange to our experience, is perfectly useless as a specimen, and to be ruthlessly ejected from the cabinet, unless it is certainly identified and absolutely known to be that which it professes to be.

2. Let every egg admitted to the cabinet be prepared, first by drilling a single hole on one side with an egg-drill; then by means of a small glass or metal tube, manufactured for the purpose, blowing out the contents; afterwards injecting a little water, and rinsing out the interior, taking care to remove every particle of the inner skin; and then injecting a very small quantity of solution of corrosive sublimate. The egg will then be safe from the ravages of mites. *Mem.*—For very small and delicate eggs the latter part of the treatment above described is neither necessary nor advisable.

3. Every egg prepared for the cabinet as above described should at once be marked with ink on the shell near the drill-hole, either with the name of the species, the date, and the locality where taken, or else with a letter and number, referring to a catalogue in which these details are given.

4. Eggs so prepared and inscribed should on no account be affixed to a card, but laid on a bed of cotton-wool in the cabinet, each species in its own compartment, and all in systematic order;

and every such compartment should be marked with a label printed for the purpose.

But for all these principal rules, as well as for full and detailed instruction in all that appertains to the subject of egg-collecting, I would refer my readers to the short but exhaustive pamphlet by the pen of Professor Alfred Newton, entitled 'Suggestions for forming Collections of Birds' Eggs.'*

I will also add that egg-drills, blow-pipes, labels, and every apparatus required by the field oologist may be procured of any good naturalist, such as Messrs. Cook, Museum Street, Bloomsbury, or Messrs. Doncaster, 36, Strand.

It is, perhaps, almost unnecessary to add that, of course, the eggs must not be varnished (though I have more than once seen even that enormity committed), for such a process manifestly destroys at once the natural appearance of the egg, and renders it worthless as a specimen.

* Originally printed in 1860, in America, in a circular of the 'Smithsonian Institution.' Reprinted in England in the *Zoologist* for the same year (pp. 7189-7201). Translated by Dr. Baldamus into German, *Journal für Ornithologie*, 1860 (pp. 447-459); and by M. Jules Verreaux into French, *Revue et Magazin de Zoologie*, 1862 (pp. 285-292, 319-331).

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLEA FOR THE ROOKS.*

It is hard to fight against the prejudices of mankind, but inasmuch as in some districts of Wiltshire, not content with the annual ruthless slaughter of the newly fledged brood, some have thought fit to begin a war of extermination, by wholesale poisoning and otherwise, against the whole family of Rooks, it is time for the friends of those ill-starred birds to expostulate, and point out the suicidal policy of those short-sighted men who, under a mistaken notion of their true character, are destroying some of the best friends the farmer has.

It would be fair, in the first place, to bespeak in behalf of this persecuted tribe the goodwill of all who love country life, by calling to mind the cheery note, so eloquent of lengthening days and advancing spring, which charms the ear of those who live near a rookery; or by pointing out the animation which all Nature derives from their presence, and the sad blank which would exist in our meadows and fields, in the event of their destruction: but as we may fairly conjecture that such pleas border too much on the romantic to weigh with such matter-of-fact minds as those of their would-be-destroyers, I will waive all such considerations, and rest my cause on their substantial merits alone.

I begin by stating at the outset that it is not at all my intention to endeavour to prove my protégés perfectly harmless and immaculate, because I am well aware that a certain amount of

* The substance of this chapter was read before the Wiltshire Archæological and Natural History Society during the annual meeting at Malmesbury in August, 1862.

mischief is occasioned by them, and I have no wish to slur over their bad qualities, and magnify their virtues ; convinced as I am that such a proceeding would be fatal to my favourites, and that no good purpose is ever answered by too violent partisanship. Moreover, I am so confident of the strength of my case, that I desire nothing more than the plain unvarnished truth to be stated on both sides, and have no fear for the verdict; being perfectly certain that, on investigation, it will be acknowledged by every fair and candid mind, that the benefits conferred on man by those members of the animal kingdom whose cause I am advocating far outweigh, indeed utterly obliterate, any harm they may at certain seasons commit.

To plunge at once, then, *in medias res*, and to take the bull by the horns. The charge so often brought against Rooks by the agriculturist is, that they will occasionally pilfer and devour corn and other crops, and undoubtedly, unless watched and scared away by the bird-boy (or *crow-tender* as he is termed in some districts), they will at certain seasons make considerable havoc, and do no small mischief. This is the one single misdemeanor alleged against them, and of this, too, it is never pretended that they are guilty but for a very trifling portion of the year, and even here, too, though I allow that it is a true bill in the main, they are sometimes accused when innocent, and when they are intent upon very different food, the wireworm and the grub ; and are busily engaged in the farmer's service in exterminating those most destructive pests ; but granted that they will for a very short period, if not prevented, commit depredation on the corn, let us examine how they are employed, and where they feed, and on what they subsist, during the remaining nineteen-twentieths of the year, and we shall see that it is on the larvæ of a variety of noxious insects, wireworms of various sorts, and grubs of cockchafers, and a thousand other kindred ravagers of crops, which swarm throughout our fields, and which, but for the assistance of Rooks (and other members of the animal kingdom which come to our aid, and, making them their prey, rid us of the evil), would breed a famine in the land, by their enormous number and voracity.

Now, the Rook is an omnivorous bird, and nothing seems to come amiss to its appetite. We have seen that it will occasionally eat corn, but its food principally consists of worms and insects, an astonishing number of which a single Rook will devour in a single day; and when we consider the vast flocks of these birds which abound in every parish, I may almost say on every farm, we shall be lost in wonder and admiration, for the mind falters at the amount, and fails to take in the *enormous* quantity of injurious insects which these useful birds destroy every year.

And now that I have shortly stated my case, I proceed to prove it by the testimony of all our best and soundest ornithologists, and most accurate out-door observers; and here I can bring such an array of witnesses, and names of so great and so deserved notoriety on the point, that he must be a bold and hardened sceptic, who still holds out and refuses credence to their united assertions.

There can be no question that in former days public opinion in this country was entirely against Rooks, as we may infer from the following entry among certain presentments concerning the parish of Alderley in Cheshire, in 1598, being the fortieth year of Queen Elizabeth's reign: 'We find that there in no Crow-nett in the parish, a payne that one be bought by the charge of the parish.* A pretty clear proof that the destruction of these birds was at that day regular and systematic; and I need not stop to point out that from that day to this, though I hope not regularly and systematically, Rooks have met with persecution, under the impression of their mischievous habits. To prove, then, that this was a gross libel on their character at that day, and that it is not through education or strict discipline that they have mended their manners in these days, I will adduce as my first witness in their favour our own countryman, Aubrey, who flourished about the year 1670. In his 13th chapter, he says, 'In the peacefull raigne of King James I. the Parliament made an Act for provision of Rooke-netts and catching Crows to be given in charge of court barons, which is by the stewards observed, but I never knew the execution of it. I have heard knowinge countrymen affirme that Rook wormes, which the

* 'Stanley on Birds,' i. 248.

Crows and Rooks doe devour at sowing time, doe turne to chafers, which I think are our English locusts ; and some yeares wee have such fearfull armies of them that they devour all manner of green things ; and if the Crowes did not destroy these wormes, it would oftentimes happen. Parliaments are not infallible, and some think they were out in this bill.' Such was Aubrey's opinion, and good old Bewick* follows in the same strain, 'They are useful in preventing a too great increase of that destructive insect the chafer or dor-beetle, and thereby make large recompense for the depredations they may occasionally make on the cornfields.' The accurate Selby says,† 'The Rook has erroneously been viewed in the light of an enemy by most husbandmen, and in several districts attempts have been made either to banish it, or to extirpate the breed. But wherever this measure has been carried into effect, the most serious injury to the corn and other crops has invariably followed, from the unchecked devastations of the grub and caterpillar. As experience is the sure test of utility, a change of conduct has in consequence been partially adopted ; and some farmers now find the encouragement of the breed of Rooks to be greatly to their interest, in freeing their land from the grubs of the cockchafer (*melolontha vulgaris*), an insect very abundant in many of the southern counties. In Northumberland I have witnessed their usefulness in feeding on the larvæ of the insect commonly known by the name of " Harry Longlegs" (*Tipula oloracea*), which is particularly destructive to the roots of grain and young clovers.' So far Selby. Yarrell (who is a host in himself), writes thus ‡ 'Early in the morning Rooks visit meadow-land while the grass is yet wet with dew, to break their fast on worms and slugs, which the moisture of that period induces to crawl forth. Later in the day, they may be seen either searching newly-ploughed ground for the various insects there exposed, or again visiting pastures for other purposes. There they are accused of destroying the grass by pulling it up by the roots ; but it has been stated, and I believe

* 'Bewick's Birds,' i., p. 72.

† Selby's 'Illustrations of British Ornithology,' vol. i., p. 353.

‡ Yarrell's 'British Birds,' vol. ii., p. 94.

truly, that this is an error arising out of the following circumstance. In searching for grubs which are concealed in the earth, and supported by eating the roots of the grass, the Rook pulls at the blade of grass with its bill, and when the grass comes up readily, the bird knows that there are under it insects which have destroyed its roots, and in this way detects them; but if the blade of grass is firm, the Rook goes to another part of the ground. In a field where grubs are very abundant, the Rooks scatter the grass everywhere, so as to give the appearance of having rooted it up, while they have only exposed the depredations of the insects by which the roots have been destroyed.' The author of the 'Journal of a Naturalist,' speaking of the readiness with which Rooks detect the places where grubs are sure to be found, says: 'I have often observed them alight on a pasture of uniform verdure, and exhibiting no sensible appearance of feathering or decay, and immediately commence stocking up the ground. Upon investigating the object of their operations, I have found many heads of plain-tains, the little autumnal dandelions, and other plants, drawn out of the ground, and scattered about, their roots having been eaten off by a grub, leaving only a crown of leaves upon the surface.' It may readily be supposed that extensive injury at the root of a plant cannot exist long without some alteration in the appearance of the leaves, or other parts, above ground, and the Rooks seem to have learned by experience how to select those plants which are the most likely to afford them some recompense for the trouble they take in grubbing them up. Jesse,* in his instructive 'Gleanings,' says: 'A gentleman once showed me a field which had all the appearance of having been scorched, as if by a burning sun in dry hot weather: the turf peeled from the ground as if it had been cut with a turfing spade, and we then discovered that the roots of the grass had been eaten away by the larvæ of the cockchafer, which were found in countless numbers at various depths in the soil. This field was visited by a great quantity of Rooks (though there was no rookery within many miles of the neighbourhood), who turned up, and appeared to devour the grubs with

* Jesse's 'Gleanings in Natural History,' p. 30.

great satisfaction.' To prove their utility on other occasions, two or three quotations from the *Magazine of Natural History*, among many others, will suffice: 'A flight of locusts visited Craven, and they were so numerous as to create considerable alarm among the farmers of the district. They were, however, soon relieved from their anxiety, for the Rooks flocked in from all quarters by thousands and tens of thousands, and devoured them so greedily that they were all destroyed in a short time.' Again, 'It was stated a few years ago, that there was such an enormous quantity of caterpillars upon Skiddaw, that they devoured all the vegetation on the mountain; and people were apprehensive they would attack the crops in the enclosed lands; but the Rooks, which are fond of high ground in summer, having discovered them, in a very short time put a stop to their ravages.' I have not yet done with my authorities. Jesse, in the second volume of his 'Gleanings in Natural History,' makes the following remark on this subject: 'In order to be convinced that these birds are beneficial to the farmer, let him observe the same field in which his ploughman and his sower are at work; he will see the former followed by a train of Rooks, while the sower will be unattended, and his grain remain untouched.' Bishop Stanley, in his charming 'Familiar History of Birds,'* writes: 'We feel quite certain, that notwithstanding the depredations which may fairly be laid to their account, on striking a fair balance, the advantage will be in favour of preserving the Rooks, and that, if every nest were pulled to pieces, the farmers would soon do all in their power to induce the old birds to rebuild them, finding out, when too late, of what immense service they are, in destroying those large white grubs of beetles which, living underground no less than from three to four years, devour incessantly the tender roots of grasses and every description of grain;' and again the Bishop says, 'It is scarcely necessary to name the wireworm as one of the greatest scourges to which the farmers are exposed, and yet it is to the Rook chiefly, if not entirely, that they can look for a remedy. Cased in its hard shelly coat, it eats its way into the heart of the roots of corn, and is beyond the

* Stanley on Birds, i. 249.

reach of weather or the attacks of other insects, or small birds, whose shorter and softer bills cannot penetrate the recesses of its secure retreat, buried some inches below the soil; the Rook alone can do so; if watched when seen feeding in a field of sprouting wheat, the heedless observer will abuse him when he sees him jerking up root after root of the rising crop; but the careful observer will, if he examines minutely, detect in many of these roots the cell of a wireworm, in its silent and underground progress, inflicting death on stems of many future grains. Their sagacity, too, in discovering that a field of wheat or a meadow is suffering from the superabundance of some devouring insect is deserving of notice. Whether they find it out by sight, smell, or some additional unknown sense, is a mystery, but that they do so is a fact beyond all contradiction.' And now as a climax I come at last to the evidence of him whom I consider the first of modern naturalists, Mr. Waterton,* and he says in his first book of Essays, wherein he has devoted a whole chapter to the Rooks: 'Now, if we bring, as a charge against them, their feeding upon the industry of man, as, for example, during the time of a hard frost, or at seed time, or at harvest, at which periods they will commit depredations, if not narrowly watched, we ought, in justice, to put down in their favour the rest of the year, when they feed entirely upon insects,' and then he refers us, 'if we wish to know the amount of noxious insects destroyed by Rooks,' to an admirable paper on the services of the Rook, in the *Magazine of Natural History*,† and concludes by saying, 'I wish every farmer in England would read it; they would then be convinced how much the Rook befriends them.' But in the second series of Essays‡ the same excellent writer is again provoked to defend his sable friends by a threatened extermination of them in Scotland, and he says, 'We have innumerable quantities of these birds in this part of Yorkshire, and we consider them our friends; they appear in thousands upon our grass lands, and destroy myriads of

* Waterton's 'Essays in Natural History,' first series, p. 134.

† Vol. vi., p. 142, paper by T. G. Clitheroe, Lancashire.

‡ Waterton's 'Essays in Natural History,' second series, p. 169.

insects. After they have done their work in these enclosures, you may pick up baskets full of grass plants all injured at the root by the gnawing insects. We prize the bird much for this, and we pronounce them most useful guardians of our meadows and our pastures. Whenever we see the Rooks in our turnip fields, we know then, to our sorrow, what is going on there: we are aware that grubs are destroying the turnips, and we hail with pleasure the arrival of the Rooks, which alone can arrest their dreaded progress. The services of the Rooks to our oak trees are positively beyond estimation: I do believe, if it were not for this bird, all the young leaves in our oaks would be consumed by the cockchafer. Whilst the ring-dove is devouring the heart shoot of the rising clover, you may see the Rook devouring insects in the same field.'

I trust that such a host of witnesses as I have adduced, and witnesses of the first order in intelligence and intimate acquaintance with the subject, will not have failed to carry conviction to my readers; but as facts are stubborn things, and preconceived opinions are hard to eradicate, and the world is apt to accuse ornithologists of riding their hobby too hard, and concealing everything that tells against their favourites, before I conclude, I will state the experience of practical men, who, thinking to interfere with the balance of powers as arranged and sustained by nature, have thus recorded their failure.* 'The inhabitants of Virginia contrived to extirpate the little crow from their country at an enormous expense, and having done so, they would gladly have given twice as much to buy back the tribe.† 'A reward of threepence a dozen was offered in New England for the purple grackle, which commits great havoc among the crops, but protects so much more herbage than he destroys, that the insects when he was gone caused the total loss of the grass in 1749, and obliged the colonists to get hay from Pennsylvania, and even to import it from Great Britain. A few years since an Act was

* *Quarterly Review*, January, 1858, Article on 'Sense of Pain in Men and Animals,' p. 203.

† Stanley on Birds, i. 252; King's Narrative, ii. 217.

passed by the Chamber of Deputies to prohibit the destruction of birds in a particular district of France; they had been recklessly killed off, and the harvest being swept away in its first green stage by millions of hungry reapers, the earth had ceased to yield its increase.* In our own country, on some very large farms in Devonshire, the proprietors determined a few summers ago to try the experiment of offering a great reward for the heads of Rooks; but the issue proved destructive to the farms, for nearly the whole of the crops failed for three successive years, and they have since been forced to import Rooks and other birds to restock their farms with.' A similar experiment was made a few years ago in a northern county, particularly in reference to Rooks, but with no better success; the farmers were obliged to reinstate the Rooks to save the crops. I have been also credibly informed by an intelligent farmer in Norfolk that 'the trees in a neighbouring rookery having been cut down for the repair of farm-buildings, and the Rooks thereby banished, he has lost hundreds and hundreds of pounds by wireworm and a peculiar beetle which abounds in cornfields, which Rooks alone destroy:' by which I conjecture he means the grub of the cockchafer described above. While another occupier in the same county told me 'that one boy after another, placed by him to keep off the Rooks from a piece of wheat, having 'played him false' (as he called it), he determined to leave it alone; when the Rooks actually swarmed on it, and he expected no crop, but to his great surprise, when harvest came, he had the best crop he ever saw.' But perhaps the best proof of the advantage supposed to be derived from these birds is, that in some districts enlightened farmers are going to considerable expense and taking some pains to introduce them on their property.

With such facts before us and such unanswerable evidence of the value of Rooks, and of the grievous want of them where they have from any cause been expelled, I feel the greatest confidence in pleading for their preservation; and to sum up all that has been said in the words of an excellent article in an old volume of

* Yarrell, ii., p. 96.

the *Quarterly Review*:* ‘While the grub of the cockchafer commits great ravages both upon grass and corn by gnawing the roots of the plants so that entire meadows are sometimes denuded by it, the Rook eats those destroyers by thousands, and by one act gets food for himself and protects the wheat which is the staff of life to man; they are the grubs which chiefly attract him to follow the plough, and when he plucks up a blade of grass or corn it is almost invariably for the sake of some description of worm which is preying upon its root. The plant which he eradicates will be found upon examination to be dead or dying, and by devouring the cause of the mischief he saves the rest of the field from blight. Unobservant persons, who never look below the surface, often mistake the policeman for the thief: luckily, their power to injure their benefactor is not equal to their will, or they would exterminate him altogether, and leave the depredators unmolested to consume the whole of the crops. When an unhappy success has attended efforts of this kind, we have seen that the evil consequences have been signal and immediate.’

A flight of Rooks, then, renders services which could not be performed by all the cultivators of the soil put together; and if the poor birds are occasionally mischievous, they are richly worthy of their hire. Make the largest possible allowance for their consumption of a portion of that crop, the whole of which they preserve, and they are still immeasurably the cheapest labourers employed upon a farm. Volumes would be required to tell all the mistakes which are committed in the blind rage for destruction, and in the readiness of man to believe that everything which tastes what he tastes is a rival and a loss.

But I do trust that that day of short-sighted ignorance is not to return to Wiltshire, and that we no longer jumble in one miserable confusion our friends with our foes. I trust that we have learnt to know our benefactors; and if the Rooks do take a little of our newly sown grain, or, when pinched by hard weather,

* *Quarterly Review*, January, 1858, p. 204, on ‘Sense of Pain in Men and Animals.’

if they are driven by starvation to peck holes in our turnips and potatoes, let us not grudge them the petty theft, but call to mind the vast benefits they confer on us at other seasons, and protect them as our best allies, and encourage them by every means in our power.

CHAPTER XV.

A PLEA FOR SMALL BIRDS.

THROUGHOUT the whole range of Natural History there is perhaps no more popular delusion than that which respects blight, and yet I need hardly observe that there are delusions enough and errors enough abroad in every department of Natural History. Let the air be thick and hazy during the prevalence of an east wind, and nineteen out of twenty people—of the educated classes, I mean—will tell you that it is a ‘blight,’ having said which they are perfectly satisfied that they have sufficiently explained the whole matter, and no more need be said; while by the uneducated classes in Wiltshire I have more than once heard that state of atmosphere denounced as a ‘blightning,’ through the manifest jumbling of this peculiar dark haziness with the vivid concomitant of the thunder-storm. But if you are unreasonably inquisitive, and, being scarcely satisfied with the explanation given, persistently push your inquiries as to *how* the blight came, and *whence* it arose, the chances are ninety-nine in a hundred that you will be informed it came with the east wind, borne along on the breeze; and your informant will triumphantly point to the haziness of the atmosphere, and tell you that it is the *blight* or *blightning*, as if the air was really thick through myriads of the tiny insects literally darkening the sun.

Now, I am the last to say that the air may not be momentarily darkened positively and sensibly by the passage of an insect cloud, for I have seen this very thing in the case of a vast flight of locusts in Syria; but that is a very different matter from

the haziness which often attends the east wind in this country, and which sometimes continues during several days.' And when I mention that the blight on the rose-tree, on the gooseberry, the apple, the larch, the beech, the oak, the lime, the hop, the bean, and other plants or trees, does not consist of the same species of insect which infests them all, but that the several trees and plants have each their own particular blight, peculiar to themselves, it is manifest to every thinking mind that it is beyond the bounds of possibility that the east wind should, with discriminating exactness, bear each species of blight to its own individual tree or plant. The *blight*, then, I make bold to assert, does not come on the wings of the east wind. Let us get rid of that error first.

In one sense, however, 'blight' may be said to come with the east wind; in the same way that grass may be said to come with the genial south-west wind in the spring. Just then as nobody of course supposes that grass is actually borne along to us by the balmy breezes of May, but everybody understands that the especial state of the atmosphere which fosters the growth of the young herbage prevails, and has its effect on the plants: so precisely in the same manner the east wind—harsh and disagreeable though it is to many animals—according to the old proverb,

'When the wind is in the east
'Tis neither good for man nor beast'—

exactly suits the requirements of the 'blight' of various species: and on the principle that 'tis an ill wind that blows nobody good,' the east wind, so detested by many, presents just that state of atmosphere best suited to the development of all kinds of blights, so that those pests of our gardens and fields flourish when all else is drooping under the pernicious blasts of the much-dreaded east wind.

It is time now to inquire *What is blight?* and I reply that it is in every case an insect, especially adapted for the particular tree or shrub or plant on which it is found, and whose proper name, by which it is known to entomologists, is *Aphis*. It belongs to the large order of *Hemiptera*, and the suborder *Homoptera*, which

contains many genera, and a vast number of species differing from one another in many essential particulars, though united in general form and habits, and having many affinities in common. These several *Aphides*, more vulgarly known as 'plant lice,' have many very remarkable peculiarities in their mode of life, wherein they differ from all other insects; some of them being at one period of their existence viviparous, and at another oviparous; some of those of the same species being winged, and others wingless: but they all follow the same occupation of preying on the juices of the several plants they infest, to the carrying out of their own economy, but to the manifest injury of the plant. By way of example, let us take the case of the gooseberry blight or fly, with which everybody is familiar, and let us very shortly follow its career. The fly, a handsome, gay, innocent-looking insect enough, as it darts about in the sunshine on its gauzy wings, repairs to the gooseberry-tree, where she lays her eggs. This species is one of the Saw Flies, and by means of her saw or ovipositor she contrives to lay her eggs on the under side of the leaf she has selected, all along the midrib, and then along the side ribs, till all the principal ribs are garnished with eggs in regular rows, and about seventy eggs are laid on that particular leaf. Within a single day, these eggs begin to grow rapidly, and within a week or ten days the grub makes its appearance, and immediately begins to eat. After a short time the grubs descend the footstalks, and, wandering in different directions, each finds a leaf for itself, and the work of devastation progresses in real earnest.

This is but a sample of the career of the gooseberry blight, and the mischief it effects. But there are many other blights even more pernicious than this—the 'hop blight,' for example, upon whose absence or presence in the hop gardens every year depends the success or failure of the crop. There are 'turnip blights,' again, which, as every farmer knows to his cost, in dry seasons in early summer, destroy successive sowings of that valuable root, and very materially injure the farmer's provision of food for his sheep. There are 'apple blights' and 'pear blights' (more particularly watched for in cider-making counties), which deposit

their eggs singly in the very centre of the bud or calyx of the opening blossom of the apple-tree; and from every such egg a grub is hatched, which eats into the blossom and destroys the fruit. There are blights, again, familiar to every observer in the oak, the larch, the rose, the lime, and many another tree or plant. Indeed, I believe I may say without exaggeration that there is no plant without its plant-louse, or aphid, or blight, just as there is no species of animal or bird or insect without its parasite. These blights vary in colour: sometimes they are black, sometimes black and white, sometimes gray; but (far more often than all other colours put together) green of various shades and hues. The true blight or aphid has a long trunk or sucker which is used as a pump or siphon, through which the sap of the plant is drawn up; and as all blights infest the young and juicy shoots and leaves of plants for the purpose of sap-sucking, they cause no small injury to such plants as they honour by their visits.

There is one advantage which some of the aphides confer—in the *honey-dew*, as it is called, so well known to bee-keepers, and so highly esteemed by bees. Honey-dew is, without doubt, a secretion from the aphides, and is appreciated by ants no less than by bees: nay, there is nothing in the whole range of entomology more curious and interesting than the affection which ants show for the aphides, which some naturalists have described as their domestic ‘cattle,’ and which it is certain they diligently wait upon, which they regularly milk, and in whose produce they delight. Patient observation has determined that they do this with the utmost care, licking them with their tongues, and protecting them from the parasites which infest them; for the aphides, too, are troubled with parasites, after the famous saying,

‘Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite ’em,
The little fleas have lesser fleas, and so *ad infinitum* :
And the great fleas themselves have got some greater fleas to go on,
And greater fleas have greater fleas, and greater fleas, and so on.’

But as I am not writing a history of the aphides, I forbear to dilate on this very interesting race, but for further particulars refer to the splendid monograph on them, by the pen of

G. B. Buckton, published in four volumes by the Ray Society, and fully illustrated with coloured figures. My object now in view is gained if I have pointed out what myriads of these minute insects infest our plants, shrubs, and trees, and how injurious, nay, how destructive, they would be to vegetation generally, were their numbers unchecked. But simultaneously with the hatching of the aphides in the spring come the troops of Warblers which soon overrun our gardens and hedgerows in every direction, and make their presence known by their joyous songs. At once they begin to feast on the new-born aphides, but by the time they have built their nests and hatched out their young, the aphides are swarming on all sides, and now begins their wholesale destruction, when the parent birds have to supply their ravenous young with an insect diet; and it is almost incredible how large a number of these injurious insects are destroyed in a single day by each pair of diminutive Warblers catering for their brood.

Nor are the Warblers alone in their raid on these insect hordes. The Titmice and the Finches are not far behind-hand, for they, too, must provide the same soft diet for their callow young. Even the much-abused House-sparrow lends his aid in their destruction, and carries home supplies of insects for his young brood in the thatch.

Then turn to the Swallows, Martins, and Swifts, careering through the air on rapid wing—what hosts of gnats does not every one of them consume, catching them on the wing, and clearing the air as they go of the superabundance of these pests to man! Or think of the Thrushes and Blackbirds—what hosts of noxious grubs do they not destroy, what vast quantities of slugs and snails, so destructive of many valuable plants, do they not devour!

But as one ounce of fact is worth more than ten pounds of argument, let me call attention to the action of the United States, which, at considerable expense of time and money, found it advisable, for economic purposes, to introduce a number of European small birds into their country; and amongst these was particularly specified the Titmouse, which the English gardeners more espe-

cially persecute for its supposed delinquencies amongst their fruit-trees, but which the far-seeing American more correctly pronounces 'one of the most successful foes of insects injurious to vegetation.'*

See, again, a similar course of action which the authorities of New Zealand deemed it advisable to pursue, when, in order to rid themselves of the insect hordes which threatened to overwhelm them and destroy their crops, they imported large numbers of small birds from England, though the cost of such importation from so great a distance, and of so perishable an article, was necessarily attended with great expense. Accordingly we read that one vessel alone carried out from England 1,130 living birds; viz., Blackbirds, Thrushes, Starlings, Goldfinches, Redpolls—of each, 100; Hedge-sparrows, 150; Linnets, 140; Goldfinches, 160; Yellowhammers, 170; and, lastly, Partridges, 110. Arrived in New Zealand, they were let fly under proper authority; and a heavy penalty was enforced against shooting at or in any way injuring any of these birds. For, however little appreciated their gratuitous services are here, the New Zealand farmers declared that they could not get on without them, for they alone would keep down the insects that ravage the crops. It was also estimated that one little bird single-handed would, from his size and build, be able to get at and destroy in a few hours more insects than ten men would in a week.†

Supported thus by such undeniable evidence, I do not hesitate to say that the small birds, which the gardener so often condemns, are in reality the very best friends he has. He sees them busy at the fruit-trees—and I do not deny that many species will have a share of the fruit if they can get it—and then he condemns them and persecutes them to the death, as if they were his bitterest foes. Whereas, during all the rest of their sojourn in this country, they are employed in his service, ridding him of a real evil, which he is powerless otherwise to overcome, and which, without their aid, would overwhelm his fruit-trees altogether, to the utter destruction of blossom and leaf, and all hope

* *Zoologist* for 1873, p. 3696.

† *Ibid*, 1875, p. 4336.

of a crop. Let him, then, net his fruit-trees, or otherwise protect his crop, but let him cherish and protect the small birds as his most invaluable allies; for they are the policemen who alone can catch the real thieves, and they are the volunteers who alone can defend his goods from the destructive raids of a powerful enemy. I conclude this short chapter with a paragraph from the *Farmer*, dated July 21, 1879, under the head of 'Winged Guardians': 'The Swallow, Swift, and Nighthawk are the guardians of the atmosphere. They check the increase of insects that otherwise would overload it. Woodpeckers and Creepers are the guardians of the trunks of trees. Warblers and Flycatchers protect the foliage. Blackbirds, Thrushes, Crows, and Larks protect the surface of the soil. Snipe and Woodcock protect the soil under the surface. Each tribe has its respective duties to perform in the economy of nature; and it is an undoubted fact that if the birds were all swept away from off the earth, man could not live upon it; vegetation would wither and die, and insects would become so numerous that no living thing could withstand their attacks.'

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