

BRITISH BIRDS OF THE SEASON.

[The proprietor of the ILLUSTRATED LONDON ALMANACK having requested me to point out which of the birds of our islands would form appropriate illustrations of the bi-monthly seasons, and to suggest and revise some popular essays respecting them, I have acceded to the request, with a view to obliging Mr. Ingram, and of increasing, if possible, a taste for ornithology. Further than pointing out to Mr. Wolf the birds which I considered it would be desirable to figure, and to Mr. Martin the kind of descriptions required, I lay no claim to any interest these essays may elicit: whatever merit they possess is due to those gentlemen.]

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JANUARY AND FEBRUARY.

THE new year begins in midwinter; and most appropriate is the name of the first month, January, from the two-faced deity Janus: one face directs its gaze upon the irrevocable past, and stern and melancholy is its expression; the other looks onward to the future, and the features are lighted up by hope. The moral implied appeals to every heart—we should weaken its force by comment. This is the dead season of the year; so, at least, is it often called:—

the cheerless empire of the sky
To Capricorn the Centaur Archer yields,
And fierce Aquarius stains th' inverted year.
Hung o'er the farthest verge of heaven, the sun
Scarce spreads through ether the dejected ray;
Faint are his beams; and insectual shoot
His struggling rays in horizontal lines
Through the thick air; as, cloth'd in cloudy storms,
Weak, wan, and broad, he skirts the southern sky.

Yet to the naturalist this is not so dead a season as the unobservant may imagine. Walk abroad through country hedgerows, woods, and copses; or along the margin of the bubbling stream. Leafless, it is true, are the trees, upstanding like giant skeletons, with every branch and twig clear and defined against the dull, grey sky; but look at the massive stem: there green and grey mosses, and many-tinted lichens, in full luxuriance, adorn the bark, and start from every crevice—attractive to the painter's eye. Look, too, at our evergreen shrubs and trees, that now contrast so favourably with the deciduous species stripped of their foliage. Up the tall trunk of the elm wreaths the green ivy, embowering its topmost branches, as if desirous of throwing a sheltering mantle over them. Up rises the tall holly, with its glossy leaves and scarlet clusters of berries, a welcome provision for many a bird, in conjunction with those of the mountain-ash, and the hawthorn. On the old, gnarled apple-tree the mistletoe, that sacred parasitic plant, enshrouds the moss-grown branches—sometimes, as we have seen, altogether hides them. Who knows not the mistletoe, with its singular leaves and its snowy berries? These berries, succulent with a viscous pulp, are the favourite food of the thrush tribe, at least of one species, by whose agency the propagation of the curious parasite is said to be maintained. Once revered by the Druids of old, the mistletoe bush has not even yet in these degenerate days lost all its magic influence: it has its worshippers; and prose and poetry have been alike dedicated to its virtues. Of the laurel and its kindred, with other ornamental evergreens of the cultivated lawn, nothing need be said.

Thus, even as far as natural vegetation is concerned, this is not altogether a dead season. Still less so is it if we turn from the vegetable to the animal kingdom. In contemplating the aspect of nature at any portion of the year we cannot dissociate these two kingdoms. We ask, therefore, no pardon for the foregoing comments: they tend to form a brief and sketchy prelude to the more immediate object before us—namely, the presentations of animal life in winter within our island.

Nature does not die without leaving a provision for the maintenance of the species; so, to consider the course of nature in another point of view, the months of the year do not accomplish their journey without a conjoint influence of heat and cold, rain and frost, telling upon vegetables and animals, the latter of which so largely and directly derive their support from the former that we cannot avoid a glance at them.

Thus, then, the depth of winter does not necessitate the starvation of whole tribes of birds and quadrupeds; but it does necessitate some means for the preservation of such as derive their support either from perishable orders of plants or from the failure of insects which feed on these plants, whose blossoms are successively the glory of spring, summer, and autumn.

There are, then, two great laws which more or less decidedly manifest in their operation throughout all latitudes, especially in the northern and temperate, the end of their operation being the preservation of life.

These two laws are migration and hibernation. It is a remarkable fact, as has been observed by Mr. Gould, in his great work on the Birds of Europe, that the situation and mean temperature of the British islands render them peculiarly favourable for the study of these two fundamental laws, from the influence of which we must not exclude the vegetable world, more especially as regards hibernation.

Let us take each of these laws into direct consideration, illustrating our comments by interesting examples. The law of migration, from its general prevalence, may perhaps claim precedence.

There are two great seasons of migration to and from our island, viz.: spring and autumn. The spring influx consists of birds returning from the southern latitudes, which have afforded them a temporary asylum. The autumnal influx consists of birds which, having bred in the northern latitudes—even within the arctic circle—are drawn to us, as to a delightful climate, by the prospect of snug winter quarters; our salt marshes, our fresh-water fens and lakes; and certainly the embouchures of our rivers are unfrozen, while our berry-laden hedge-rows and copses, hips and clover, ivy and privet berries in abundance; our fallow-fields, our uplands of haws, of turnips, and artificial grasses, offer at once a good harvest, and a comfortable asylum.

It is midwinter. Our summer visitors have long since vanished. The swift, one of the latest birds to come, one of the earliest to depart, has long since left us; the cuckoo and the wrenneck, followed; the nightingale has some months since given us a parting husky croak (for to such his rich voice degenerates); the blackcap, the flycatcher, the fauvette warblers, and many of their kindred, have bid us farewell. The vast flights of swallows and martins surprise us as they wheel about, till evening shuts in day; and in rain may we look for the wheatear on the Sussex Downs. We expressly mention these birds out of a long list, because it will appear that all are insectivorous birds, some essentially—although

there are some others, as the blackcap, which add luscious garden fruits, and even succulent peas, to their diet. It is then of insectivorous birds that our orchards and hedgerows are now deprived. Their music has passed away. They fled towards the intertropics before the gales of the past autumn. But their place is not unfilled; the chilly gales before which they quailed and fled have brought from the ice-locked regions other tribes, differing greatly (with a few exceptions) as to habits and instincts from our departed birds of summer.

Turn we now to our illustrative plate. Under the arched covert of tall reeds, bending beneath broad flakes of frozen snow, is portrayed a group of wild swans, with other waterfowl; while, perched above, a kingfisher looks down intently on the open spaces of the water icebound along its sheltered margin.

It is in high air, sometimes barely within human vision, but always in long, single files, or in a wedge-like figure, two distinct files converging to a point (that point being a leading marshal), that the waterfowl perform their great migratory movements. As they proceed along they utter from time to time discordant, hoarse, or clangorous cries, which, softened by the distance of 2000 feet, fall with an indistinct murmur on the listening ear. Having attained their destined localities, they gradually descend from their exalted pathway, and split up into smaller or larger flocks, according to circumstances; each flock maintaining a watch-and-ward system; for wary, suspicious, and vigilant are our waterfowl, as the shooter and the decoy-man can well attest. Different are the localities which the different species affect. Some choose lakes and estuaries, some reedy marshes following the course of rivers, and some make the upland corn-fields and open turnip and clover acres, their habitual feeding-grounds, while their nightly roosting-place is often at a considerable distance. Such is the habit of the bean-goose, our ordinary winter visitor, and of which numbers at this season may be often seen in the London poultry markets. This species, we may remark *en passant*, is not the origin of our domestic tenant of the farmyard, which derives its origin from the grey lag. This, in former times, before industry had drained our vast meres and fens, was a permanent resident; and it still visits us from the higher latitudes, though not so abundantly as its smaller relative, the bean-goose, which is a more decidedly northern species. But we must pass over the wild swan, called also the hooper, whooper, or whistling swan; der singschwan of the Germans (*Cygnus ferus*).

The visits of the hooper to the southern counties of our island depend much on the severity of the season; for, if the weather be mild, it contents itself with the lakes and estuaries of Scotland and the northern border districts. Its appearance in the Orkneys and Western Isles is regular; but in seasons of unusual severity, when the waters whence it derives its sustenance (viz., the roots, stems, and leaves of aquatic plants) are frozen up, it then changes its quarters for more favourable localities, where open lakes, marshes, fen-lands, intersected by deep and wide drainage cuttings, and low, extensive, inundated meadows, invite the flocks to sojourn. But few return northwards; the flock is harassed, vigilance is met by vigilance, and the gun does its destructive work. No winter passes without the exposure of British-killed wild swans in the London markets; and there are records of seasons of unusual severity during which these birds were extraordinarily abundant. In 1823 sixty were there exposed for sale in one day; but hundreds must have been killed over the country of which we have no returns.

In the foreground of our Plate are two species of duck, which we are called upon to notice—namely, the common wild duck and the teal.

The wild duck, or mallard (the origin of our domestic stocks), breeds plentifully in our island; at the same time, winter brings thousands of this species from the more northern latitudes of Europe to our comparatively temperate shores. This is not a solitary example, it obtains among birds of a very different order. The goldencrest, the skylark, the thrush, and perhaps some others, are examples, including even the redbreasts—for in northern Europe this familiar bird is migratory, leaving Germany at the end of October, and Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, at a still earlier period.

The teal, like the mallard, breeds on the marshes and along the water-courses throughout the northern counties, we may perhaps say throughout England generally; still, it is one of our winter visitors.

In our characteristic plate appears, as we have said, the river-haunting kingfisher. There are many birds which perform within our islands a partial migration, changing their quarters according to the season, and not unfrequently, in some cases at least, joined by foreign-born relatives. As an instance in point we may adduce the pewit or lapwing. These well-known birds are spread over all parts of our island, where suitable localities afford them a congenial breeding-place. They abound in the fenny lands of Lincolnshire and Cambridge, in the downs and warrens of Norfolk, and myriads are spread over the large commons and oozy moorlands of our central and northern counties. As winter comes, on the multitudinous families associate in large flocks (their frost-bound summer breeding-grounds no longer supplying them with food), and wing their way to the coast. The low salt marshes and long stretches of oozy ground along the shore now afford them a never-failing supply.

Of numbers of our feathered winter visitors we shall not now speak; nor shall we now comment upon the habits of those who, permanently residing with us, brave our biting blasts. Their turn for notice will come in due time.

How expansively might we not dilate upon the hosts of our winter sojourners—some tenanted fresh waters, others the sea along our coasts, low, or rocky and boldly precipitous, but space forbids. So far, however, have we illustrated the law of migration. But we must not forget that we have to comment on another law—namely, hibernation.

Where are our reptiles? Where many of our little quadrupeds, as the bat, the hedgehog, and the dormouse? All are in a state of torpor, held in a trance, each in a retreat according to its kind. Let us await their revival, and then enter into the philosophy of the condition from which they have just passed. March will soon come; for February is closing—February, derived from Februa, one of the names of the goddess Juno. Our Saxon forefathers called it sprout-kale month, for the kale and cabbages of the garden now begin to sprout, giving decided promise of a general revival of nature. Already are the snowdrop and the violet in blossom, and the leafless twig of the mezerion is ornate with flowers. Symptoms of a great change at hand are apparent, definite symptoms, which cannot be mistaken. There is a swelling of the buds of the trees, there is a change in the character of the weather, and there is a restlessness of manner about our winged winter visitors, as if they were conscious of some great coming event for which all their energies are required. They have received a call from their native homes—they have heard a voice which we cannot hear, and which they cannot but obey: it is the voice of Instinct.

BRITISH BIRDS OF THE SEASON.
MARCH AND APRIL.

FEBRUARY bequeaths to the month of Mars a legacy of rains and floods and cloudy skies; but the rough winds from the north-east will soon drive the clouds to the far south, and dry up the humidity with which the globe is supersaturated. So at least hopes the farmer as he surveys his fields, anxious to commence his labours and yoke his team to the plough.

Vegetation is advancing. Bushes are bursting into leaf; the sprays of the sloe are white with blossoms, which come before the foliage; the woods, viewed at a distance, have a purplish-brown tinge, owing to the colour of the sealy investment of the buds, which are rapidly swelling. Many hardy vernal flowers bespangle the sheltered bank and warm nooks in the coppice. Wild violets "ope their eyes," the daisy "glents forth," and the yellow primrose coyly woos the sun. Soon shall "the almond-tree flourish;" and ere the month be past the garden shall present us "daffodils, that come before the swallow dares, and take the winds of March with beauty." So at least says Shakspere, but his March was twelve days in advance of ours. Still, "Flora peers in April's front." Gone or going are all our winter birds of passage. Gone or going is the redwing, with its relative the field-fare, seeking the birch-glens of Norway and the woods of Northern Germany. Gone are our flocks of waterfowl: they have obeyed the voice which called them to their arctic home:—

They seek the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide;
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean side.

There shall they find a summer home and rest,
Reeds shall bend
Soon o'er their sheltered nest.—BRYANT.

But they have left some companions behind—birds indigenous in our island, and to whom they paid a winter visit. The wild mallard and his mate have paired, and are preparing their nest in the reed-grown swamp; so, too, is the teal, in the rushy herbage along the borders of the marsh, or among the bogs of the upland moors.

Let us not forget the things of the earth, for a change has taken place among those that run and creep, as well as among those that pursue their course through the fields of air.

The wanderer through the woods at eve will again mark the padding hedgehog as he hurries across his path. It has emerged from its hybernaculum—a nest of leaves in some obscure recess, under the gnarled roots of a tree, beneath piles of logs or old haystacks, midst dense brambles, and various other localities. Coiled up in its nest of leaves and intertwined moss and herbage, it quietly slept during the winter till the time of its awakening came. Lured by the midday rays, the sly little dormouse creeps forth from its nest, and wanders about the twigs of the hazel coppice; it is a sound winter sleeper. The squirrel is all activity; but the squirrel only partially hibernates; he visits his stores of food even during midwinter, falling to sleep at intervals. Late will it be in March—not perhaps until April has fairly commenced—before the bat wheels in sharp zigzags around the old church spire, or the great scyemoors which overshadow the thatched-roofed barn. The bat makes no nest, but merely suspends itself by the hinder claws in old churches, barns, caverns, and such like places of shelter.

The ditches and pools resound with the croaking of frogs; the water-nets are swimming; about in ponds and drainage-courses, the snake and the lizard timidly crawl forth from their concealments, and seem scarcely as yet restored to animation. It is only when the sun shines with warm beams that these reptiles venture forth. There is a buzz of insects along the lanes and by the borders of the woods, and the beautiful sulphur butterfly flits along on winnowing wings.

Quadrupeds, reptiles, insects, and snails hibernate, but not birds. It was once, indeed, supposed that swallows plunged into lakes and morasses, and that there, in a submerged state, amidst roots and stems of reeds, or even sunk into the oozy beds, they fell into a quiet trance till spring revived them. It is strange that writers of great note—even Cuvier and Humboldt—should have countenanced this theory, which, we need not say, is now universally rejected as utterly destitute of foundation.

That late-bred birds—swallows, martins, and other migratory species—too weak to accompany their companions in their flight, may sometimes remain with us during the winter, and, in sheltered concealment, even survive the rigours of the season, may perhaps be conceded. But then the birds must take food; and in such spots insects are still on the alert during a transient gleam of sunshine; and, though they may be benumbed and somnolent from the effects of cold, they are not in a state of hibernation.

Unconfirmed as is the year, trembling between winter and full-blossomed spring, and before the swallow comes on untriving wing—before the voice of the cuckoo and the "peep" of the wryneck are heard—before the nightingale and the blackcap, with a host of warblers in their train, dare to venture into our land—there is a stir among such hardy birds as have defied our winter skies and winter cold. Nor is the voice of music unheard. Perched on some leafless spray, the little wren pours forth his sweetly clear and high-toned notes; the hedge-sparrow utters his short, low warble; and at morn and eve, perched on the topmost twig of the tallest tree in the grove, the thrush carols loud and bold; nor is the dulcet pipe of the blackbird, hidden in the thicket, unheard. All alert is the house-sparrow—familiar bird!—busy on the top of house or barn, stable or stack; bird of the city and the town, of the village and the farm. Incessant is his chirp, and many are the conflicts with noise and tumult in which rival parties engage—amusing sparrow fights, which end without bloodshed. The lark, too,

Invisible in flecked sky
The lark sends down his minstrelsy.

The flocks of the larks have broken up; some have departed to the northern parts of the Continent; and our home birds have mated. Playful is the lark with his mate; buoyant and undulating is his flight as he accompanies her on the wing; lightly around her he disports; then, as if inspired by some sudden impulse, he makes an abrupt gyration, and he mounts aloft on shivering pinions, singing his impassioned love song.

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world would listen then, as I am listening now.

Such is the concluding stanza of Shelley's exquisite "Ode to the Skylark," a gem among the many which have been addressed to this bird of poetry. Soon under the shelter of some clod, or in some slight depression, amidst the green blades of the rising wheat, will the skylark make his nest; but

already has many a bird built its "procreant cradle," already has the work of incubation commenced. First, the thrush—bold songster of the grove, he fears not the blustering winds of March—constructs his plastered nest in some dense bower, some ample bush, not unfrequently close to the abode of man. Scarcely behindhand is the blackbird, and even more closely to the threshold will he venture to place his nest: we have seen it in the covert of a laurel-hedge, in the playground of a lady's boarding-school, and close to the schoolroom window; we have seen it in the centre of a large Portugal laurel on the lawn, adjacent to the principal pathway, and within a few yards of the door.

To these we may add the missel thrush. More reclusive in its habits, more woodland, this bird fixes its nest in the fork of a branch, especially preferring old mossgrown trees, often in the orchard, often in the extensive kitchen garden, or in the coppice.

Next comes the hedge-sparrow. Who does not know its nest and its bright blue eggs, and what schoolboy knows not where to look for it? The tiny wren, too, is at work; and so is the greater as well as the blue titmouse.

The magpies have held their convocation, and arranged their business to the satisfaction of all parties; and the pairs are now engaged in renovating their old domicile.

What a bustle, what a commotion, there is in the rookery! The sable wanderers have gathered together, and, with energy and clamour, are busy among the topmost branches of the lofty trees. Some are repairing their old nests; some are constructing new ones; some are bringing sticks and twigs to patch up and strengthen a cradle which has already served for several generations; some are contending for a nest to which two parties lay claim (and no doubt, as is too often the case, the law of might will prove the law of right); others, audacious freebooters, are absolutely robbing their neighbours, cunningly despoiling their nests for the sake of furnishing their own. Not always, however, do the marauders go unpunished. Two or three pairs, fired with indignation at the injury received, combine to attack the nefarious couple, tear their nest to pieces, and drive them from the community. Turmoil, squabble, and misrule prevail. Loud is the incessant cawing; great the agitation; and the shifting about, and the going and coming, are without intermission. Gradually, however, litigation ceases, the squabbles subside, and tranquillity prevails. The female is sitting upon her eggs, and her mate is assiduous in supplying her with food.

Turn we to our Plate. It presents us with Mr. Wolf's graphic Sketch of a Heronry in the secluded part of a pine forest.

In former times heronries were abundant in our island. Then the axe had not levelled our forests, nor were our meres and swamps drained. The land could scarcely be said to be under culture. There was no winter pasturage; and the great landed proprietor killed his cattle in summer or autumn, and salted the flesh, lean and coarse, for the consumption of his household during winter. Then, too, the gun was unknown. The crossbow and bolt constituted the fowling-piece, and a clumsy machine it was. But falconry was in vogue; and every gentleman, according to his rank, carried his hooded falcon, or his short-winged hawk, upon his wrist. Woe to the serf or humble peasant who killed a wild hawk or destroyed its eggs; woe also to him who molested a heron, or disturbed a heronry! The cruel Forest Laws were in full force; and easier was it to obtain pardon for homicide than for the slaughter of a deer or for injury done to falcon, hawk, or heron. The times have changed; the serf has become a freeman; the forests have disappeared; the marshes have been drained; the plough is driven over broad acres once the oozy, alluvial bed of the deep swamp; and the land is inclosed. Such alterations have driven from our island many birds—the crane, the stork, the spoonbill, and the bustard—which once were common. The heron, however, still maintains his ground—but not without protection.

There are several fine heronries in England and Scotland—more of considerable extent along the wooded banks of the Findhorn in Morayshire; but we cannot enumerate all. One we well know in a clump of giant trees, rising over an extensive range of meadow land, watered by the Holybrook, near Reading. We have watched it for many an hour. If a rookery be amusing and picturesque, far more so is a heronry. Let us describe it. We must premise that the constituent members of a heronry scatter themselves during winter over the country, often at great distances from their citadel, visiting creeks, the mouths of rivers, and open sheets of water. Early in February they wing their way back to their old home, and, once more collected together, commence their labours. High aloft on the topmost branches are their large flat nests, more or less crowded together; and he who would observe the birds must use a telescope. What a scene of activity! There is a hurrying to and fro, a clattering of bills, and a continuous clanking chatter, suspended at intervals, when one or two, spreading their "sail-broad ears," soar in mid-air, and sweep away in a straight line till lost in the distance. During flight the heron bends his long neck into an abrupt sigmoid flexure—the spear-shaped beak seeming to project at once, like a tilting lance in rest, from between the shoulders. The legs are extended backwards.

Buoyant, easy, and graceful is the flight of the heron; and its power of soaring when attacked by the falcon has been ever celebrated. It was regarded as noble game, and its flesh was in high esteem. In March the females have laid their eggs, and are incubating. During the day their mates stand motionless on the adjacent branches, but morning and evening do they set off to their fishing-grounds, and return with a supply to the patient watcher on her nest. There is supposed to exist a sort of animosity between the heron and the rook; and Bewick, upon the authority of Dr. Heysham, gives an account of a battle in which a colony of herons encountered a colony of rooks. All we can say is this—a noble rookery is closely adjacent to the heronry on the Holybrook, and we have seen herons and rooks cross each other's path in the air; we have seen the rooks pass close to the heronry, and *vice versa*, without the slightest apparent animosity on either side. What, indeed, have they to dispute about?

Looking through our telescope at the heronry, we perceive a woodpecker (the greater spotted *Picus major*) running up the stem of the tall tree crowned by the heron's nest. The decaying pine is the favourite tree of this bird. With its hard, wedge-like bill it works out a deep excavation, often with two openings, and there, on a bed of dry timber-dust, lays its four white eggs. It is an early breeder.

Insenible has March passed into April—the opening month, the month of soft vernal showers, of gales from the south, of expanding leaves and opening blossoms, of birds' nests in copse and hedgerow, of insects on the wing revived from their winter torpor. Soon will the swallow come, the cuckoo, and the nightingale. April introduces them to May.

BRITISH BIRDS OF THE SEASON.

MAY AND JUNE.

MAY opens upon us—"the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." It is the month of Flora, and she scatters her treasures with a liberal hand; blossoms unnumbered adorn bank and hedgerow, copse and dingle, and the vernal air breathes fragrance. The meadows are overspread with a carpet of gold; green are the trees, but not not all green alike; varied are the hues of the foliage, but every hue is tender and delicate—soon, indeed, to deepen, beneath the fervid sun of June. All is life and animation. There is a murmur of insects in the air; clouds of mayflies, ephemeral creatures, are dancing over the surface of the river, from which they have just emerged, and the speckled trout is leaping at them. The angler is abroad, tracking the windings of the stream, with eye attentive, and with hand well skilled, "to fix with gentle twich the barbed hook," "or throw, nice judging, the delusive fly." On rapid wings dart countless dragonflies (*Libellula*), leaving their larva-cases attached to the tall grass stems along the borders of pool or river, recently their abode. Like the ephemere, their incomplete stage of existence is aquatic; their perfect stage aerial. Bees are hurrying from flower to flower; ants are at work, raising their hillocks of sand, with a maze of mines and winding tunnels below. Young lambs are sporting in the pastures, there is sheep-washing in the pool—not without noise and laughter, mixed with the murmur of the overshot water-mill. Such rural pictures invite the pencil of the artist, and May is one of his favourite months.

All our summer birds have returned. The gushing strain of the nightingale resounds from the low, close thicket. The blackcap, from leafy covert, in orchard, lawn, or copse, pours forth his rich and varied warble. The flycatcher is darting to and fro in short flights, returning after each excursion to the same perch of observation. Wheatears, in abundance, are now scattered over commons, heaths, and sheep-walks; and there, too, is the stone curlew wheeling in small flocks. The ruff and the reeve have arranged their affairs, after some contests between rival males, and are breeding in the rushy bogland, where the golden plover and the lapwing have also found a congenial nesting-place. As we traverse the low meadow lands, soon to be invaded by the mower's scythe, the monotone of the corn-crake or landrail is heard on every side around us—crake, crake, crake, is its incessant cry; now it sounds near, as if the cunning birds were close beside us; anon it sounds at a distance,—now in one direction, now in another. Is the bird a ventriloquist, or does it thread the mazes of the grass jungle with such rapidity as to be here, there, and everywhere within the lapse of a few seconds? surely it intones its voice so as to deceive the ear of the listener.

The swallow, the martin, and the little sand-martin are skimming the meads and the ponds in zigzags and circles, snapping at the insects as they pass; and the long-winged swift is wheeling round tower and spire, screaming as he dashes along. Unlike the swallow or the martin, the swift never skims the ground. He pursues his insect prey in a higher region, and it is not improbable that the early failure of the peculiar insects on which he feeds may necessitate his departure early in August. Again, the swift raises only one brood—the swallow and martin two or three. In Spain, as in England, the swift retires in August. The young, two in number, on leaving the nest are strong on the wing, and fitted for the performance of a long aerial journey.

From the swallows, into the history of which our limited space forbids us to enter, we naturally pass to the goatsucker, churn-owl, fern-owl, or night-jar (*Caprimulgus Europæus*), one of our most interesting summer visitors. Much did this bird engage the attention of Gilbert White; not without reason; and we can personally attest to the accuracy of his account. The superstition which attributed mischief from this bird to goats, calves, and even cows (a superstition of great antiquity, as may be concluded from its Latin name *Caprimulgus*, goatmilk) is, we should hope, obsolete. No doubt it arose from the habit which this bird displays of wheeling and sweeping on buoyant wing around cattle reposing at eventide in the pastures. It is not, however, the cattle that attracts it, but the various crepuscular insects which, from one cause or another, are induced to attend them, such as moths and scarabæe, or beetles. Moths and coleopterous insects, especially the two chaffers (*Melolontha*), are the favourite food of the nightjar; and in chase of these it skims sometimes near the ground, sometimes aloft, careering round oak and yew-tree, and occasionally uttering a short feeble squeak as it sweeps along. Wide in the gape of its bill, and well furnished along the rim with stiff bristles, so as to form a fringe; hence it easily seizes and retains the largest insects, whose wings, or elytra (wing cases) it disengages by means of the long expanded and strongly pectinated (comb-toothed) claw of the central foretoe. This claw, probably, also assists the bird in perching lengthwise on the branch of a tree, the top of park palings, or other such resting-places. In the heron and its kindred the nail of the middle toe is similarly pectinated. The nightjar is crepuscular and nocturnal. During the day it reposes in some obscure retreat: sometimes amidst extensive fern-beds—sometimes amidst the thickets of wooded dells or tangled brakes, emerging at eventide. It is then that, perched on some selected station, it utters its vibrating, jarring note (not unlike the loud murmur of a spinning-wheel), continued sometimes uninterruptedly for several minutes, its throat dilated, its under mandible quivering, and its head depressed.

The goatsucker, or nightjar, lays two eggs on the bare earth, sometimes under overreaching fronds of fern, or the slight covert of shrub or tuft.

The leaves of the elm are rapidly developing, and from the now-clothed branches proceeds a call-note which strikes upon the ear. "Peep, peep, peep," is the reiterated cry. It is the call-note of the wryneck. The wryneck is the avant courier of the cuckoo, preceding the latter by a few days; such, at least, is the common opinion. It is a curious and interesting bird; beautiful, also, from the admirable marbling of its plumage, which blends with the brown tints of the bark of the trees it frequents—the elm in particular, so far as concerns the southern portions of our island. Indeed, it is by no means common, as far as our own experience goes, in the more northern counties. We have never seen it in Cheshire, Derbyshire, or Lancashire, nor yet in the adjacent part of Yorkshire; at the same time, we do not deny that it may be an occasional visitant. The elm in those counties is not the ordinary tree that it is in Middlesex, Kent, Essex, &c. In many respects the wryneck approaches in habits to the woodpecker, ascending the trunks of trees with the greatest facility, its feet being zygodactylous, that is with two toes before and two behind; but the tail consists of soft instead of rigid feathers. Its beak is not very long, but conical, and sharp-pointed; and the tongue is long, worm-like,

glutinous, and capable of being projected to a remarkable extent; it is horny at the point, and, when projected, vibrates as if hung on a delicate spiral spring. Ants and their larvæ are its food; it searches for them in the chinks and fissures of the bark, and hesitates not to visit the ant-hills on the ground. By means of its singular tongue (reminding us of that of the anteater, or *Myrmecophaga*), it picks them up with marvellous celerity, and with a motion of the tongue too rapid to be distinctly followed by the eye. The holes of decayed trees constitute the nursery in which it incubates and rears its brood. But why the term wryneck? When molested on its nest it keeps on the defensive, writhing its elongated neck like a snake, erecting its crest, and uttering a hissing sound. When captured it twists its neck with singular contortions, the black streak running down the nape, adding to the effect.

The wryneck, we have said, is the precursor of the cuckoo of "the blythe newcomer," "the beautiful stranger of the grove," "the messenger of spring." Such are the terms with which Wordsworth and Logan greet it; while *Bottom the Weaver* calls it in rustic phrase, and most unpoetically, "the plain-song cuckoo." Welcome is the voice of the cuckoo; we have listened to it in days gone by, when, unpalled by the wear and tear of life, we revelled without alloy in the scenes of nature; and even now can we say with Wordsworth—

O, blythe newcomer, I have heard;
I hear thee and rejoice.

Or with Logan—

Delightful visitant! With thee
I hail the time of flowers,
And hear the sound of music sweet
From birds among the bowers.

Our delights spring from the association of ideas—from the memory of the past—hence we welcome the arrival of the "plain-song cuckoo." At the same time there is much in the history of this bird of spring, for so far excellence may we call it to afford interest. Turn we to our plate—a hedge-sparrow's nest, with two anxious parent birds peeping into it with evident surprise. Above, the cuckoo is uttering its familiar call, while the swallows are giving chase to their insect prey in the clear sky. Gilbert White calls the cuckoo "vagrant," because, being tied down by no incubation or attendance about the nutrition of its young, it wanders without control. The cuckoo is, in fact, a regular impostor, and gulls other birds to hatch its eggs and rear its young to the destruction of their own actual offspring. The cuckoo makes no nest, but the females prowls about, watching the nests of such birds as the hedge-sparrow, the wagtail, the robin, the meadow pipit, whitethroat, &c. During the temporary absence of the legitimate owners it deposits in each a single egg, the small size of which occasions no derangement. There can be little doubt that this egg is introduced by means of the beak. Le Vaillant, indeed, shot cuckoos in Africa carrying their egg in the throat, ready for transference on the first favourable opportunity. Certain it is that the female cuckoo does not press her body on the frail nest of the small warbler, too small to receive her, and which would be greatly disarranged by any such attempt. In fact, Mr. Jesse (see his edition of White's "Selborne," p. 107) states that he has found the egg of a cuckoo in a nest built in so small a hole in a garden wall that it was absolutely impossible for the cuckoo to have got into it. He considers that the egg is deposited by means of the foot—we doubt it. Be this, however as it may, the cuckoo (which it is now ascertained lays several eggs) thus nefariously provides for the rearing of its offspring. * Ill does the young cuckoo repay the care of its foster parents; as it increases in size and strength, instigated, perhaps, rather by want of room in the nest than malice, it dislodges its weaker companions by insinuating itself under them, and by a sort of jerk forcing them overboard. Thus it secures to itself the exclusive attention of its dupes of foster-parents. This process was witnessed by Dr. Jenner, to whom the credit of the discovery is generally attributed; but it was known to Shakspeare—

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 'e'en our love durst not come near your sight.

* King Henry IV., part 1, act v, scene 1.

The habit of depositing its eggs in the nests of other birds is not peculiar to the European cuckoo; it prevails, as Le Vaillant ascertained, among the gilded cuckoos of South Africa, whilst all the species of this genus observed by Mr. Gould in Australia had the same habit. Nay, other birds, very different in most respects from the cuckoo, display the same *modus operandi*. The cowtroopial (*Molothrus Peccoris*), of North America, a bird approximating to the starling, makes no nest, but deposits her eggs in those of other species.

The cuckoo is essentially insectivorous, and its stomach has been repeatedly observed to be coated internally with a dense lining of hairs. These, as microscopic examinations prove, are from the larvæ, or hairy caterpillars of the tiger-moth (*Aretia Caja*). Does this hairy coating ever become detached, rolled up, and regurgitated, as in the case of hawks and owls, which cast out, in the form of pellets, the indigestible portions (as hair, feathers, and bones) of the prey they swallow?

How largely might we here expatiate upon birds' nests! but our space is limited. The early breeders have hatched their broods—such as the rook, the heron, the thrush, and the blackbird. The wild duck is leading her little train along the reedy margin of the lake or pool, long since deserted by her ungallant mate, who leaves to her the entire charge of incubation and nursing, and joins an exclusive club of mallards, similarly situated, in the society of which he finds his enjoyment. So passes May—it blends into June, and still birds are building—some even their second nests, others only their first. Busy are the starlings and the jackdaws on the old tower or steeple: they are feeding their young. So, too, are the ubiquitous sparrows—building in every "coyne of vantage," on temple or hotsetop, on the beams of the barn-loft, as well as in the branches of the trees adjacent.

Most interesting at this season is the farm-yard, replete with its stock of poultry—turkeys, fowls, pintados, ducks and geese. Broods of younglings are wandering about; the old hen is agitated on the slightest appearance of danger to her charge, and if these be ducklings, she views with alarm their familiarity with the water of the pond. Yellow goslings traverse the close-cropped sward, and fierce is the hissing gander in their defence. Bats at eve are flitting around, and the buzz and murmur of insects fills the air. The fulness of summer is come.

* Query—Is the egg introduced by the female or by her attendant male? It is a question yet to be solved, and we invite the consideration of our leading ornithologist, Mr. Gould, to the subject.

BRITISH BIRDS OF THE SEASON.
JULY AND AUGUST.

WITH light and heat refulgent July succeeds to June. The task of the mower has ended, and the rye is ready for the sickle. Oppressed by the heat, the cattle seek the shade,—

on the grassy bank
Some ruminating lie, while others stand
Half in the flood, and often bending sip
The circling surface.

The gadfly is abroad, the terror of the herd. Swarms of wasps invade the garden and the orchard, tempted by the ripe and luscious produce of the plum-tree—for the wasp is omnivorous, devouring with equal relish flesh and the saccharine pulp of fruits, sugar itself being its especial dainty. Sultry is the midday—

the sun has drunk
The dew that lay upon the morning grass;
There is no rustling in the lofty elm.
All is silent, save the faint
And interrupted murmur of the bee
Settling on the sick flowers, and then again
Instantly on the wing.—BRYANT.

Myriads of butterflies are flitting around—ever settling, ever rising, still on ever-moving wing pursuing their wavering and unsteady course. The great tortoiseshell (*Vanessa Polychloris*), the peacock's-eye (*Vanessa Io*), the admiral red (*Vanessa Atalanta*), heath butterflies of sober tints (*Hipparchia*), azure-blue butterflies (*Polyommatus*), and marbled fritillaries (*Metisera*, and *Argynnis*)—these and others are dancing along the shady lane, or disporting on the furze-clad common, where every spiny bush presents us with the white gauzy pavilion of one of the ground-haunting spiders.

The nesting-time of most birds is over. The young are fledged, and in their immature livery. The sparrow perchance, and the house martin, may be engaged in the work of incubation, for they rear a second and a third brood; and it not unfrequently happens that some of the late-hatched nestlings of the latter are too weak on the wing to accompany the vast flocks on their departure from our island in October. That most of these perish we cannot doubt; yet some few may weather through the months of winter. The house martin breeds the latest of all those of the swallow tribe which visit us. Gilbert White remarks that "they have sometimes nestlings on to the 21st of October, and are never without unfledged young as late as Michaelmas." Again he writes—"Young broods of swallows began to appear this year on July the 11th, and young martins (*Hirundines arvensis*) were then fledged in their nests. Both species will breed again once; for I see by my "Fauna" of last year that young broods came forth so late as September the 18th. Are not these late hatchlings more in favour of hiding than migration? Nay, some martins remained in their nests as late as September the 29th, and yet they totally disappeared with us by the 5th of October. To this subject we shall have occasion to revert hereafter.

We have said that the nesting-time of most of our birds is over. To the exceptions already enumerated others may, however, be added. Among those which rear two broods we may mention the skylark, whose second brood is fledged by the end of July or early in August, its song being continuous from spring to the latter part of autumn. There is another bird, very local in its distribution, the nests of which we have seen in July—we allude to the Dartford warbler (*Melospilus provincialis*, Leach). This reclusive species seems to be confined to our southern counties, where it tenants furze-clad heaths, building its nest in the centre of the most dense and impenetrable furze-bush. It is far from being uncommon on Bexley-heath and on Chislehurst-heath, as we can personally testify. It has been found in Devonshire and Cornwall. Its first discovery as a British bird is due to Dr. Latham during his residence at Eitham; and recently circumstances have led us particularly to notice it. Twice in the year at least does the thrush breed, and so also does the blackbird, perhaps also the ring ouzel, its relative, which, contrary to the habits of our migratory thrushes—as the redwing and fieldfare, winter visitors—arrives in our island in spring. Well are we acquainted with this blackbird, with its snowy gorget. It is common throughout the bleak and barren hills of the Peak, where, perched on some jutting stone, it utters a short sweet warble. There, too, breeds the clicking stonechat, unlike the wheatear and the whinchat, a permanent resident; and there, too, along the trout-streams, winding through dale and glen, may we see the dipper or water ouzel (*Cinclus aquaticus*). We know him at once by his snow-white breast, contrasting admirably with the deep blackish-brown of the rest of his plumage. There he stands, perched upon a rugged jutting stone, in the middle of the dashing stream. Ever and anon he depresses his head, and elevates his short tail with a smart and lively action. Suddenly he darts beneath the water, to reappear at a considerable distance; emerging, he settles on some low crag, around which the water boils in tumult, and pours forth a low but pleasing song. We have found his nest in July; but to find it is no easy matter, so artfully is it concealed and adapted to the chosen site—it may be in the fissure of a craggy mass of stone overhanging the water; we have found it between the green, damp stones of a rude dilapidated bridge, and observed it (by watching the parent birds) in a crevice on the face of a low rock, with a small torrent of water forming a cascade, like a screen, before it. The nest is of large size, and domed, with a lateral entrance. It is composed of mosses and lichens, and is lined with dry leaves and a few vegetable fibres. The dipper breeds twice in the season, perhaps even thrice. The first brood is fledged in May. It is a remarkable fact, to the truth of which we can testify, that each pair of dippers occupies exclusively a certain range along the river, beyond which, into the territory of another pair, they do not appear to intrude. Nowhere are they more common than along the rock-belted Wye, near Buxton, in Derbyshire.

The ringdove, or cushat, is now rearing a second brood; so, too, is the stockdove, as it is erroneously called, for the rockdove (*Columba livia*) is the origin of our domestic varieties. The two former are woodland birds; the latter gives preference to precipices along the seacoast, to ruinous towers, and old church steeples. It haunts in myriads the wild, beetling crags of the Orkneys, congregating in caverns. Vast flocks nestle on the rocks and in the caverns of Gibraltar, and also those of the island of Tenerife. It is dispersed over Europe, Northern Africa, and Asia. We must not quite forget the turtle. In May its voice was first heard, and now its second pair of younglings are nearly ready to leave the nest. In Kent and Essex this beautiful migrating dove is very common, tenanting woods and thickets; but it is rare in our midland and northern counties. We have found its nest on the stump of a pollard-oak densely over-canopied by foliage.

But see! the white waterlily (*Nymphaea alba*) opens above the surface of the pool, in the midst of a prairie of floating varnished leaves, and hard by blossoms its yellow relative (*Nuphar lutea*), while the meadowsweet (*Spiraea ulmaria*), the "reine des pres" of the French (queen of the meads), intermingles with the tangled herbage of the humid bank, diffusing the delicate but dangerous odour of prussic acid. Here in embowered pools and secluded nooks lurks the waterhen, or the coot, with its train of nestlings, which have scarcely yet thrown off their first downy covering; here, too, we may surprise the water rail and the dabchick—for in such spots do these birds lurk and breed—lovers of quiet seclusion.

The pheasant is followed in the preserve by her active brood, and young coveys of partridges are crouching in corn and clover field under guard of their watchful parents.

But away to the moorlands! The heath is in bloom: it is a glorious sight—grandly swell the purple mountains, and dark are the pinewoods of glen and gorge, where the blackcock haunts the deep recess. The young, now strong on the wing, are still under the guidance of their female parent, for the polygamous males leave all the care of incubation and rearing to the females. With them they visit bilberry tracks, and corn lands reclaimed from the wild waste of the heath, and interspersed with copes of birch and alder, which afford them refuge when alarmed.

Very different in its habits is the red grouse, bird of the heath-clad moorland; and again different from both is the ptarmigan, which tenants the rocky, sterile summits of the mist-clad mountain, Ben Nevis, towering above the valley of Lochaber and the wide range of Rannoch Moor or Cairngorm, overlooking the pine forests of Strathspey. Such are its haunts, hardly weatherer of the tempest! which drives even the strong-winged eagle from his onward course. There crouch coveys amidst fragments of rock and boulders, feeding on the fruits and shoots of the cranberry, the cloudberry, and other Alpine plants, burrowing during winter under the snow.

Turn we to our Plate—a small pack of red grouse, cowering in their heathery covert. Beautiful is the red grouse, with its many-tinted plumage and its furry feet; bright is its scarlet eyecomb, especially conspicuous in the male when he mates in early spring; for, unlike the blackcock, the red grouse (like the ptarmigan and the partridge) is strictly monogamous.

Already are the young birds strong upon the wing. Their home is on the hillside, amidst the tall, wiry heather. They affect neither the recesses of the pine forest, nor "the difficult summit of the iced mountain-top." More congenial to them is the boldly-swelling moorland, where the arbut and the bilberry, which afford them food. In spring the tender shoots of these plants and of the heather are sufficient. In autumn they visit the adjacent stubble-fields, or patches of rye or oats, where cultivation encroaches upon the moorland borders. Social is the red grouse in its habits, and in July and August friendly families often unite their broods, so as to form large packs, which, unless scattered asunder by the sportsman, keep company till the pairing-time in spring. But, alas, everywhere does man interfere with the polity of nature! He is the constrainer of the land and the sea, and subjects the animal world to his dominion. Such is his destiny upon earth.

There is another point of peculiar interest which attaches to the red grouse, and which we ought not to pass over in silence. Of the capercailzie we say nothing, except that it has been successfully introduced into the pine forests of Scotland, and has been there shot for the Royal table.

The ptarmigan of the bleak mountain range (*Lagopus mutus*) is found in Norway, Sweden, and other portions of the higher latitudes of Continental Europe, as well as in Scotland.

The black grouse, or black cock, is a native of the forests of Norway, Sweden, Russia, France, and the Tyrol.

But the red grouse has been long deemed an exclusive tenant of the British islands. The sportsman prides himself on the assumed fact, and the British ornithologist exultingly adds the weight of his opinion. Foreign naturalists, moreover, concur with their English *collaborateurs*, and deem its presence an ornament of the museum. The red grouse, therefore, may be looked upon as a "bird of mark," and, independently of every other consideration, as worthy the protection which is bestowed upon it. Yet so great is the slaughter of the red grouse during the sporting season that we might be tempted to fear for its gradual diminution, or even its ultimate extirpation. No doubt, some preserves are greatly thinned; but a favourable breeding season and well-timed attention will generally be found to restore the balance. It is, then, for a selfish sake that man pays attention to the preservation of the red grouse, and throws a legal protection around it; yet we should be very sorry to say that all patriotic feeling was absent.

But July has passed into August—the "barn month" of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers—the month of reaping and gathering into barns. The harvest is already ripe for the sickle, and the reapers are in the field. The broad moon, like a golden shield, gleams nightly over the wide tracts of wheat, the choicest gift of Ceres to man. Forth come the creeping things that love the night. At such an hour oft have we met the trampling hedgehog; watched the water-rat ploughing through the duckweed-meadow (strange and curious plant), covering the surface of pond or drainage-course. At such an hour have we marked the great-eared bat, flitting round oak, sycamore, and lime-tree, while moths glanced to and fro, and "the shard-borne beetle" wheeled "his droning flight." The mousing owl, on noiseless wing, has passed us—the wavering goatsucker has glanced by.

But it is August. Away to the moorlands hurries the ardent sportsman, with his guns and his setters. Woe to the red grouse! We left them in July happy in each other's society, little dreaming that evil days were at hand. So dreams man in his hours of prosperity, "knowing not what a day may bring forth." Confident at first, the packs are thinned by the sharp shot dealt forth with unerring aim; and then fortunate for them is a day of storm and sleet, for on that day they have an intermission. Still the work of slaughter proceeds, and the thinned packs become wild and suspicious. More toilsome, too, becomes the work of the sportsman—he sees his marked birds take wing ere he can approach, and dash in terror from the mountain side across glade or glen to the side of a mountain far away—behind him, beyond him, to his left, or to his right. Well it is so; otherwise, protected as they are, our red grouse would soon be on the verge of extermination. As it is, when we look at the display of these birds in the poulterers' shops in London (to say nothing of hundreds elsewhere disposed off), we scarcely help wondering whence they came.

So passes July, so passes August—docked alike with the treasures of Flora and Ceres. September is at hand.

BRITISH BIRDS OF THE SEASON.

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER.

DEFINITE are the characteristics of September. There is warmth at mid-day, but cool at the mornings and the evenings, often chilly; and variable winds, precursors of the equinoctial gales, sweep through the woods with a deep mysterious resonance, like that of the rolling sea. The tall trees bend, and the branches wave to and fro. Clouds gather and disperse, and gather again; and sudden showers accompany rough gusts of wind driving across the wide Atlantic.

The harvest is over; the fields which were lately a waving expanse of corn are now covered only with stubble; the reaper has done his work, and the ploughman is about to begin his labour. And yet, September is not without its pleasant days—it is a refreshing month after the glowing heat of August. It is the month of Pomona, rather than of Flora; not that there are no flowers, for the garden is gay with the monthly rose, the china aster, the golden rod, the hollyhock, the fuchsia, the scarlet geranium, the chrysanthemum, the dahlia, and many more, which linger long, as loath to yield, till subdued by the freezing blasts of winter. The hedgerows, bordering fields and quiet lanes, are adorned with the papyrus snowy blossoms of the great bindweed (*Convolvulus sepium*) trailing up the bank, and intertwining among the matted stems and branches. The bitter-sweet (*Solanum Dulcamara*), known as the woody nightshade, a clustering hedgerow plant, is still in blossom, while bunches of glassy scaly berries show that its true flowering time is over, and that these are but a feeble efflorescence—a last effort. Red, too, are the berries of the bryony, companion of the bitter-sweet, a graceful, tendrilled plant, throwing its long, palmate-leaved stem into many a wreath and fold. Red, also, are the berries of the honeysuckle, the fragrant bower-plant of the copse and thicket. Yes, September is the season over which Pomona presides. The hop-gatherers are busy; the cider-press is crushing the ripe, ruddy apple; the downy peach and fragrant nectarine adorn the southern wall; and the clustering grapes are ripening.

And now, too, the insect tribes display indications of an altered state of things in their general economy. As the weeks pass by, less and less numerous are the butterflies on the wing; less numerous are the night-flying moths; caterpillars are seeking nooks and crannies in which to assume their first stage of transformation—the chrysalis condition. Some in silken cocoons await their final change; some naked and suspended; others buried in the earth, or in the centre of timeworn, mouldering trees; and not a few in the crevices of the bark, or between the bark and the softening timber. But the bee is still busy. In orchard and garden the geometric spider (*Peira dialema*), an industrious weaver by night, spreads her nets of radii and concentric circles, with long lines of rigging stretching from tree to tree, or from bush to bush, across our footpath. We have all heard of the gossamer spider, the aeronautic spider, that on filmy threads mounts high into the atmosphere, sailing over tree and tower, myriads floating aloft, the prey of the swallow and martin. In Germany flights of gossamer are so common in autumn that they are fancifully called "Der Fliegender sommer,"—the departing summer. Such flights are far from being infrequent in our own island. Let a change in the humidity of the atmosphere take place, let their filmy parachutes become saturated with moisture, and a shower of flakes ensues; the hedges are draped with them, they bespread meadow and stubble-field, they fall in showers, showers of delicate gauze, glittering, dew-bespangled, in the rays of the morning sun. Many are the instances on record of extraordinary falls of gossamer-web emulating a fall of snow-flakes; such we have ourselves seen, the fields being carpeted, and the hedgerows and bushes festooned, by shreds of lace from the loom of Arachne.

There is a movement among the feathered tribes; there is a general preparation among our summer visitors for departure, the symptoms of which are more and more decided as September approximates to October.

The swift left us in August. The nightingale is now in haste to follow, and so is the wren. The wheatears are assembling on the downs of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, every day bringing fresh arrivals from the midland counties, till at last they cover the open lands almost as thick as autumnal "leaves in Vallombrosa." At this season they are caught by thousands in snares of horsehair and traps. Perhaps they are less numerous than formerly, for Latham gives the numbers annually captured in the neighbourhood of Eastbourne as amounting in his day to more than one thousand eight hundred dozens; and he adds that a single shepherd has been known to take eighty-four dozens in a single day (Linn. Trans., vol. iv., p. 17). The wheatear is one of the choicest delicacies of the table. It is fat on its arrival in the middle of March, and such also is its condition in the month of September. Small coleopterous insects are its favourite food.

Hark! the sharp report of the double-barrel rings in our ear. On whirling wings a startled covey of partridges hurries off to a distant spot, the extent of their flight depending upon the more or less perfect moulting of their primary wing-feathers, which is generally completed by the end of October. In August the sportsman was toiling through the tall heather of the northern moorlands in pursuit of the red grouse or moor game; he is now working his way through stiff stubble-fields and broad acres of turnips, bent upon the destruction of the partridge. He brings with him his keen-scented, high-bred, and well-trained pointers, staunch dogs, true to their point—standing steadily to their birds. We have many instances on record of the unflinching nerve of the pointer—none, perhaps, more astonishing than was displayed by two favourites in the possession of the celebrated Mr. Daniel. In his "Rural Sports" is an engraving after Gilpin of two pointers—a black dog, named Pluto, and a white bitch, called Juno—which kept their point during the time in which Mr. Gilpin made the sketch of them, and which occupied an hour and a quarter. All this while they stood as if carved in marble, motionless statues, intent upon one object only—the game before them.

Our Plate depicts a covey of partridges, half-concealed amidst tall stubble and trailing weeds. The sportsman is on their track, and they have caught the alarm. Unlike the grouse, the partridge follows cultivation. The drainage and reclamation of waste lands, and the extension of agriculture, while they have tended to render scarce, or even to banish, some species once common in our island, have encouraged the increase of the partridge—a bird delighting in richly-clothed corn-fields, and always the most abundant in extensive arable districts. The partridge rears from twelve to

eighteen chicks at a time, but we believe only one brood during the season, and the duty of incubation falls exclusively to the share of the female. Few birds are more solicitous about the welfare of their young, in defence of which, against hawk or crow, the parents display an unexpected degree of boldness. The young run as soon as fairly hatched, following the old birds and cowering beneath their wings. Much do they feed on the larvae of ants, in order to obtain which the parents scrape open the anthill, letting light into mines and galleries. To these are added small insects generally, and the seeds of various plants. When danger is imminent, many a ruse do the parents practise to decoy the intruder from their lurking-place. The male bird, though he leaves the tedium of incubation to his mate, assiduously attends her, and unites with her in the guidance and protection of the brood. The young obey his warning note, and scatter and crouch accordingly, while he prepares to give battle, or artfully draws the enemy to a distance. Pugnacious is the partridge, and severe are the contests which take place between rival males at the pairing season. In September the young are strong upon the wing, but, unless scattered asunder by the gun, the family form a united covey, often joining another till the ensuing February, when a general separation takes place, and the males choose their mates. The feeding-time of the partridge is early in the morning, even before sunrise, and again towards the dusk of evening. During the day they bask in the sun, and dust and clean their plumage. They pass the night hours of repose—the whole covey crowded together—in the centre of a wide stubble-field or grassy lay. Formerly it was a practice to net partridges both by day and by night. In the former case a trained hawk was employed to hover over the covey, the *locus* of which was indicated by the setting dog. Sometimes a paper kite was used as a means of keeping down the affrighted birds while the net was drawn over them. This unfair mode is now obsolete, and it must be remembered that when in vogue the fowling-piece was in arduous condition, and the sportsman seldom attempted to bring down a bird on the wing. There is in the National Gallery a fine picture, entitled "Rubens's Château," in which we see a fowler cautiously stealing, gun in hand, upon a covey of partridges (the red-legged) for the purpose of firing amongst them ere they take alarm. Such was the ordinary mode of *birding*, as it was called in the olden time, when the gun was beginning to supersede the crossbow and bolt.

Within late years the red-legged or Guernsey partridge, more common on the Continent than our *Perdix cinerea*, has been introduced into several counties, but without advantage. It is a beautiful bird, larger than our ordinary species; but its flesh is decidedly inferior. It affords the sportsman no satisfaction, as it runs before the dog, and cannot be flushed without difficulty. Moreover, it drives away the common partridge, usurping its place, inasmuch as its encouragement would tend to render our own more valued species scarce. Such an exchange is very undesirable.

September and October are the sportsman's months. There is grouse-shooting on the moorlands, and partridge-shooting over the lowlands and the corn-growing champaign; then in October comes the season for invading the haunts of the pheasant; and then, too, we receive our first flight of woodcocks, which resort to brakes of birch and underwood, to thickets bordering the wood, and to jungles overshadowing oozy ground or miry spots, intersected by sluggish rills, pools, or ditches. Flights of snipes, also, now begin to make their appearance, driven from the higher latitudes of Northern Europe. These swell the numbers of home-bred birds; they resort to fens and bogs, to splashy oster-beds, bordering creeks, and drainage-cuttings, or covering low swamps adjacent to the broad mere or winding river.

Nor must we quite forget our furred game, of which the nobles is the red deer; then come the fallow deer and the roe. Among the "beastes of venarie," the hare is to be accounted; but not the rabbit, nor yet the fox. Yet rabbit-shooting affords good sport, and foxes are preserved for the excitement afforded by the hazardous chase. There is deerstalking in the Highlands, and the greyhounds are led out in leash for "the coursing" of the hare. Fowling-piece and rifle, greyhound and foxhound, and harrier, are each and all in requisition. There is the setter on the heath, the pointer roams the stubble-fields, and the spaniel threads the mazes of the pheasant-brake. But the sportsman has yet to wait for the season of waterfowl.

It is October; there is a shivering of leaves in the woodlands, and their dark green gives place to golden yellow, to russet brown, and dark-ensanguined red. How different from the tender greens of spring! more gorgeous these hues, it is true, and the painter rejoices in them; but they tell us of the waning year; and the winds, as they murmur through the branches, sing an elegiac strain. Another stage is at hand: the glories of autumn will fade, and the storm and the tempest will sweep over the desolate fields and through the naked forest. Earnest now are our summer birds of passage in their preparations for departure. Swallows and martins congregate in flocks of myriads, sometimes, as we have seen, like clouds of locusts, darkening the sky. They wheel round reed-beds, settling, not without clamour and tumult, on the stems as evening yields to night. We have seen them cover the willow eyots* in the Thames, and the roofs of the houses on the bank. By the close of October these flocks have all disappeared, with the exception of a few stragglers, which, if they gain sufficient strength, soon follow in the track of the more early broods; if not, they linger and die, for, as we have before said, swallows do not hibernate.

The clouds of swallows, as we have said, are dashing around, crossing each other in every fantastic variety of evolution—some at a higher, others at a lower, elevation. It may be that they are exercising their pinions for a more enduring flight. At the same time it must not be supposed that our summer migratory birds reach their ultimate destination without rest by the way. Many of them are birds of feeble flight and incapable of a stretch of hundreds or thousands of miles. They gradually follow the sun, and proceed by longer or shorter stages, as temperature and the means of sustenance may determine. Strong-winged birds may, indeed, sweep over sea and land with little or no need of rest; but not so the tender warblers, the delicate blackcap, the flycatcher, and many more, nor yet the cornecker, nor the quail; indeed, as is well known, the latter makes only short journeys, and on alighting by thousands is often so exhausted as to become an easy spoil to an expectant populace. Space forbids our reference to the habits of these birds along the shores of the Mediterranean. The trees are rapidly shedding their thin and scared foliage. The redbreast is singing on a leafless spray in the garden. October is closing.

* Eyot, sometimes written ait (eye), is the old Saxon name for a small island. Eyoot, or eyot, is a mere willow-bed in the stream, a smaller islet.

BRITISH BIRDS OF THE SEASON.

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER.

GLOOMY is November—a month of fogs and mists and driving sleets. The heavy gust tears from the trees the last lingering vestiges of foliage, and scatters them far and wide, not without benefit to the various plants that love the woodland glade. They cover tender shoots and buried seeds, protecting them from the bitter blast. Then, decaying as spring comes on, the leafy masses become resolved into a light soil replete with nutriment. Thus, in the course of time, is procured that bed of rich vegetable mould, in which the woodland windflower and the woodsorrel flourish. Now takes place a great change in the condition of our fauna. Few are the insects which claim our notice; it is true that the meshes of the geometric spider may be still seen stretching from bush to bush in the sheltered garden, and the noonday sun still calls forth myriads of dancing gnats, which

mix and weave
Their sports together in the solar beam.

But the quick-glancing myriads, some gleaming with metallic lustre, some gauze-winged, others painted and adorned beyond the reach of mimic art—where are they? Where is the bee? Asleep in its hive. But greatly thinned is the colony, for the drones have been all destroyed. Where are the wasps, which we lately saw in swarms? All dead, save a few females, to whom, with many chances against them, nature intrusts the establishment of new and numerous colonies on the return of the ensuing spring.

Look we now for reptiles. The snake is in its hybernaculum, perhaps a hobbed or manure heap in the rougher portion of the garden, there, intertwined with others of its kind, it lies secreted, torpid, but not dead. The frog has buried itself in the mud of the pond, or of the sluggish drainage course—thousands, collected from all parts, clasped firmly together, a batrachian phalanx, have submerged themselves, and forced themselves deeply into the black ooze. The water newt is also thus ensconced in the mud; but the toad is lurking in some pit or deep hole, or under the cold stone.

All our hibernating quadrupeds, the hedgehog and the dormouse, and the bat (save that the pipistrel is often roused from its lethargy by the warm sun-rays, as are the gnats also, to which it gives chase). The squirrel has collected his hoard of winter provender; but he is too mercurial; he cannot sleep fast as hedgehog or dormouse. The mole comes unfrequently to the surface. He is now driving deep levels, in pursuit of buried worms, grubs, and larvae. Longer and fuller now is the coat of the hare and of the rabbit. The stoat or ermine (*Mustela Erminea*) is now in full fur. In the more northern latitudes of Europe its fur becomes snowy white, with the exception of the tip of the tail, which is deeply black. In our island, if we except the mountain ranges of Scotland, this ferocious species of weasel seldom assumes a pure snowy livery, a slight tinge of fawn or straw-yellow remaining permanent. We need not expatiate on the value of ermine skins. They line the Royal robes of state. Large importations arrive from Norway, Russia, and Siberia to this country.

Our domestic animals now acquire additional clothing—rough and long is the coat of the horse and of the ox, thickened is the fleece of the sheep, and more developed becomes the under-garment of fine fibres, which in every distinct breed differs in staple, in length, and felting qualities, from the long-woolled merino to the genuine short-woolled Southdown. Our very poultry are more warmly clad. Of these enough. Let us visit the heronry and the rookery. The herons have dispersed themselves; one or two perhaps may be seen perched among the deserted nests; but there is silence in the aerial township, where but of late all was clamour and bustle. Scattered too in small bodies over the country, and along the margin of the tidal rivers, are legions of rooks. They forage during the day, returning ere the close of evening in marshalled columns to the tall wood, there, but not among their nests, to repose during the night. Sunrise is the signal for their departure; away they sail, dispersing as they proceed to collect again in long-drawn files

As evening spreads o'er all
Her gradual dusky veil.

Maggies now collect in small companies. During the summer they strictly associated in pairs; but some interested motives, which they keep secret, draw them at this season together. Social birds are jackdaws; they live in communities; and, if we are to judge from their loquacity, they entertain each other with many a pleasant bit of scandal, perhaps at the expense of their co-tenants of the old tower or castellated ruin—the garrulous starlings. At this season starlings, as we have often seen, associate in vast bands, to which extensive reed or willow beds offer especial attraction. Nothing can exceed the precision and beauty of the aerial evolutions of these birds as they wheel and gyrate before finally settling. With them are often conjoined myriads of swallows; but the two species interfere not with each other. Each phalanx acts independently. But the swallows—a few stragglers, whose fate we have yet to learn—pass away as October closes. The starlings are permanent, although we have reason to believe that foreign visitors claim the rights of hospitality and join their Britannie relations. It would almost seem as if the troops were under the direction of skilled field-m Marshals. Instantaneously, as though some signal of command went forth, are the changes displayed. Now they soar, now descend, now separate, and again coalesce; sometimes they sweep along steadily, and then suddenly throw themselves into such an attitude as to exhibit all at once the under surface of the wings and body. At length, after much trouble, ever and anon rising and sinking, the host querulously settles for the night. During the day these congregated troops are dispersed over the country; they intermix with friendly parties of rooks, and intrude themselves into the society of herds and flocks, fearlessly settling upon ox or sheep, and tripping around them, busy in quest of insects; for the warmth and the weight of the cattle induce numbers to emerge from concealment.

Skylarks now, conjoined with relatives from the Continent, congregate in astonishing numbers, resorting to high downs, ploughed lands, and turnip fields. The gun thins their ranks, but the net still more so, for their flesh is in request, and thousands are sent for sale to the London market. Dunstable larks have been long celebrated, but numbers are imported from Holland and Belgium.

In many localities the fields are divided by large, dense, gnarled hedges, every stem and twig of which is covered with lichen; there, and along the edge of brake or thicket, we may follow, without causing much disturbance, whole families of that beautiful little bird, the long-tailed titmouse, so celebrated for its exquisite nest. Most varied are the attitudes which they now assume; not an instant's repose they know: rest-

less, creeping, clinging, pendent, but ever in progress, advancing *part passu*, with the cautious watcher. With microscopic eyes do they pry into every cranny and between every fork in search of insects and larvae. They nip off the delicate closed-up buds, trusting to find some concealed grub. In this respect they remind us of the bullfinch; but the bullfinch, with his strong convex bill, minces the buds to shreds and swallows them; not so this little tit. At the same time, as we can personally attest, the bullfinch will strip off and reject the buds of trees—we speak now of the cherry and other orchard or garden fruit-trees—without any apparent motive, save that of mischief. We have many times watched the bullfinch thus energetically busy in inflicting this wnton injury, and have been surprised at the devastation committed in the space of a few minutes. Beautiful birds are all the tits; they breed about the farmstead, in the fissures of old walls, in ivy, and in the holes of decaying fruit-trees. We allude more particularly to the great titmouse (*Parus major*), and its relative the blue species (*Parus caeruleus*). We once, while walking down one of the remoter pathways of a large garden, accidentally turned over a rather small ordinary red earthenware garden-pot, when, lo and behold! we exposed a nest of young tits, nearly full feathered. No access could be gained by the parent birds to the nest except through the drainage hole of the reverted pot. Deceptive is the deep, full, downy plumage of the tits, making them appear larger than they are in reality.

The two species of tit, whose actions we stop for a moment to contemplate, are now displaying their characteristic restlessness, vivacity, and posés plastiques in rosebush and fruit-tree, and upon the decaying disc of the sunflower, where a few oleaginous seeds yet remain. Gilbert White observes that these birds pull out the straws of old thatch in order to obtain a supply of hibernating insects, spiders, &c.; they are, however, not very delicate in their diet. The hog-trough and the hog-tub offer many a nice picking—for they delight in luscious fat—and will not only pick a castaway marrowbone, but, as we have seen, roost in it during the night. Small flocks of greenfinches now assemble. During the latter part of autumn and the ensuing winter months they are sure to be seen wherever a bed of sunflowers is loaded with full seed-discs. A few years since we were surprised by the numerous daily visits which these birds paid to such a plantation in a large garden, bounded by fields and hedgerows. The plantation was made for the sake of the poultry; but, had measures not been taken, little would have fallen to their share. Most graceful and easy were their actions. Hovering on the wing, they picked out the seeds of the deflected disc, ever and anon lightly darting away and as lightly returning.

We are not writing methodically. Ours is the humble duty of recording a few observations called forth by the phases of the circling months. We aim at no order; we may therefore be pardoned for introducing three little birds, whose visits to our island appear to be very irregular.

First, the goldcrest. This elegant bird, the smallest of our British species, is indigenous in our island. Most exquisitely constructed is its nest, often over-canopied by the tassels of the larch, or suspended from a thickly-clothed fir-branch. In many of its actions it reminds us of the tit. At uncertain intervals vast flights of these birds are drifted over from the pine forests of Norway and Sweden, and arrive exhausted on our northern coasts. Mr. Selby narrates a remarkable instance, in point:—

“On the 24th and 25th of October, 1822, after a very severe gale, with thick fog from the north-east (but veering towards its conclusion to the east and south of east), thousands of these birds were seen to arrive upon the seashore and the sandbanks of the Northumbrian coast, many of them so fatigued by the length of their flight, or perhaps by the unfavourable shift of wind, as to be unable to rise again from the ground; and great numbers were, in consequence, caught or destroyed. This flight must have been immense in quantity, as its extent was traced through the whole length of the coasts of Northumberland and Durham. There appears little doubt of this having been a migration from the more northern provinces of Europe (probably furnished by the pine forests of Norway and Sweden), from the circumstance of its arrival being simultaneous with that of large flights of the woodcock, fieldfare, and redwing.”

Similar influxes of the goldcrest are elsewhere on record. But what excites our wonder is that a little, puny bird, with feeble powers of flight, should, amidst storms and drifting winds, arrive upon a distant shore. Who can tell the extent of loss during the troublous journey? Secondly, the siskin, or aberdivine. This finch—although there is every reason to believe that it breeds in the pine-woods of the northern portions of our island, is at uncertain intervals drifted in immense flocks over the northern sea. Every year, no doubt, there is a certain influx of visitors, but occasionally there is an overflow. It is then that small flocks distribute themselves over every part of the country, and great numbers are captured by the ruthless bird-catcher. We have kept this species in captivity. There was nothing in its manners to recommend it; its appetite was voracious in the extreme, and it died suddenly, overloaded with fat. Thirdly—The lesser redpole. This pretty finch, allied to our well-known linnet, though an indigenous species, is a winter visitant also. No winter passes without an influx from the north of Germany, Denmark, and Norway, to our island; but sometimes the flights are multitudinous. Very remarkable is its tameness, even from the moment of its capture. Simple and confiding, it perches on the finger, flits about the room, and seems to be content even within the narrow limits of the wire cage in which it is confined. The lesser redpole is found breeding in the northern districts of England, extending into Scotland and Ireland. From these districts a southern migratory movement brings it into warmer localities, where it is joined by its foreign-bred relatives.

We might here dilate upon the habits of the snow-bunting (*Emberiza nivalis*) and of the mountain finch (*Prinilla montfringilla*), but discretion checks us. We are not writing a history of birds; ours is a superficial review. While commenting upon our ornithology, as month succeeds to month, it would be unpardonable to omit an express reference to the great works of Mr. Gould on the birds of Europe and Asia. On these splendid works we will not attempt to dilate;—no noble monuments are they of perseverance and genius. More we need not say.

December is on the wane. Flocks of fieldfares and redwings from Norway and Sweden are busy feeding upon the ruddy berries of the brake and hedgerows; fresh flights of woodcocks have established themselves in their covert haunts, as shown in our Illustration. Our wildfowl have returned from the regions of the Arctic circle, here for awhile

To sport among their fellows,

The year ends where it began—the circle is complete. Hail to the New Year!