

LITTLE CRAKE.

Zapornia pusilla, Steph.

Poule d'eau Poussin.

WE have preserved the term *Little*, given to this species by Montagu, although the bird is somewhat larger than that named after M. Baillon, which has also occurred in this country even more frequently than the subject of the present article. Indeed, except the examples obtained by Montagu, that which belonged to Mr. Plasted of Chelsea—also noticed by Montagu in the Supplement to his Ornithological Dictionary,—and a specimen taken alive in a drain in Ardwick meadows, near Manchester, in the autumn of 1807, by Mr. James Hall, as recorded in Loudon's Magazine of Natural History, vol. 2. p. 275, we are not aware of any other instances of this species having been obtained in this country. This Little Crake is, however, by no means so rare on the European Continent: it is even common in the eastern countries of Europe, in Italy and in Germany; more rare in the northern parts of France, and only occasionally taken in Holland. It principally frequents marshes, but is sometimes seen on the higher and more cultivated soils. The habits of the smaller species of Gallinules, says Montagu, are their principal security: they are not only capable of diving and concealing their bodies under water, with only the beak above the surface to secure respiration, but run with celerity, and conceal themselves amongst the rushes and flags of swampy places, and are with difficulty roused even with the assistance of dogs, depending more on concealment in thick cover than upon their wings to avoid danger. Insects, slugs, the softer aquatic vegetables and seeds are the principal food of this species. It constructs a nest among reeds, upon the broken stems of rushes and water plants, and lays seven or eight oval-shaped eggs, of a yellowish brown colour, spotted with elongated marks of darker olive brown. In the adult male, the eyebrows, cheeks, front and sides of the neck, breast and belly are of uniform slate grey, without any spots; abdomen and flanks mixed and barred with brown and white; the top of the head and all the upper parts generally olive brown, the feathers on the middle of the back much darker in colour, almost black, and varied with a few white marks, but without any white on the wings or wing-coverts; the tertials dark in the centre, olive brown at the edge; the primaries uniform dusky; under tail-coverts dark lead colour, almost black, but barred with white; beak olive green; the base orange yellow; irides reddish hazel; legs and toes olive green; length seven inches and a half.

Notwithstanding some slight differences, we believe the Olivaceous Gallinule of Montagu to be identical with the adult male bird here described; and we also consider his little Gallinule to be a young bird of this same species, which may be thus described; eyebrows and sides of the head light ash colour; throat whitish; chest and belly brownish buff, thighs and flanks ash coloured, barred with brown and white; under tail-coverts tipped with white; upper parts reddish brown; the dark space on the middle of the back varied with a few white spots; wing-coverts olive; beak olive without the orange base; eyes dark hazel; legs and feet olive. Whole length seven inches and a half. Young birds are still lighter in their general colouring; the whole of the throat and neck is whitish; the white marks on the back are very few in number, or scarcely perceptible; and the feathers on the flanks are brown, with white bars, without the ash colour.

We have figured an adult male and young bird of the natural size.