

BAILLON'S CRAKE.

Zapornia Baillonii, Leach.

Poule-d'eau Baillon.

THE very prettily marked bird figured in our Plate is the smallest of the European Crakes, and although long known on the Continent, it is only since the days of Montagu that this species has been added to our British catalogue; it being considered as established—from the opportunities of examining both the specimens that formerly belonged to our indefatigable English ornithologist, and which are now in the British Museum, as well as the specimen which belonged to Mr. Plasted of Chelsea, also referred to in the Supplement to Montagu's Ornithological Dictionary,—that neither of those birds belong to the species now under consideration, which latter appears to have been obtained in this country more frequently than *Z. pusilla*, and of which we have examined a variety of specimens, continental as well as British, in different states of plumage. We may here mention as a particular mark of distinction, to which we have as yet seen no exception, that, when adult, *pusilla* exhibits on the upper surface but a few indistinct white marks, and those confined to a small space on the centre of the back only; in *Baillonii*, on the contrary, these white marks are very numerous, occupying several distinct situations, namely, the central line of the back, and the scapulars, wing-coverts, and tertial feathers on both sides. These white marks, placed on a black ground, forming the centre of each feather, are so conspicuous and brilliant as to have led M. Temminck originally to select the term *stellaris* for this species; but he subsequently proposed to change *stellaris* for *Baillonii*, as a compliment due to the celebrated naturalist of Abbeville; and this latter name has been received and adopted.

Baillon's Crake inhabits the southern and south-eastern portions of Europe, is rather common in Italy, and found in several provinces of France. In England it can be considered but as an occasional visitor, and has only been obtained in the south-eastern part. The most usual places of resort with this species are the banks of rivers, large lakes, ponds and marshes, where aquatic vegetation is in luxuriance. In such situations its timid nature finds a secure retreat, and passing its small and delicate form through the thick herbage with great ease, it can rarely be made to take wing. It is said to be able to swim and dive very readily, and makes its nest near the water's edge, in which it deposits seven or eight eggs, not unlike a large olive in form, size, and ground-colour, but spotted with darker greenish brown. Its food consists of worms, slugs and insects, with portions of vegetables and seeds. A specimen in the collection of the Rev. Dr. Thackeray, Provost of King's College, Cambridge, was taken during a cold and frosty January on some ice near Melbourn, about nine miles south of Cambridge. To this spot, originally fen land, the poor bird had resorted in an inclement season to obtain a meal, but having wandered far from its native and more congenial latitude, was so exhausted by want of food or the low temperature of the season, or the combined effects of both, as to allow itself to be taken alive by the hand.

In adult males the forehead, eyebrows, sides of the neck, and the whole of the under surface are of a dark-blue grey, almost approaching to black on the belly and flanks, which are barred with white; the top of the head, back of the neck, and all the feathers on the upper surface of the body, of a rich olive brown, the centre of each feather more or less pervaded with black; those of the middle of the back, scapulars, wing-coverts, and tertials splashed with pure white; the primaries are dark brown, and extend only to the middle of the tail-feathers, which are also dark like the primaries, but edged with olive brown, the marginal markings becoming narrower as the bird increases in age. Beak green; irides hazel; legs flesh colour, but darkest in adult birds. Several examples averaged seven inches in length, from the point of the beak to the end of the tail.

Adult females differ but little from the males, except that their general colours are less vivid. Young birds have the chin and throat white, the neck, breast and belly mottled with reddish brown, dusky black and dull white; abdomen and flanks less distinctly marked by black and white, the alternate bars not so well defined, and the two colours much less decided.

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