

## Genus GALLINULA.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* shorter than the head, compressed, conical, higher than broad at the base, the ridge advancing on the forehead, and dilating itself in some species into a naked plate; *mandibles* of equal length, the points of both compressed, the upper slightly curved; the *nasal grooves* very large, communicating. *Nostrils* lateral, longitudinal in the middle of beak, partly closed by membrane. *Legs* long, naked above the knee. *Toes*, three before, and one behind. *Wings* moderate, and slightly rounded.

## LAND RAIL.

Gallinula crex, *Lath.*

Le Rale de Gennet.

THE Land Rail appears to be extensively spread over the whole continent of Europe; it is very abundant in Holland, and not uncommon in France and Germany. It is a migratory species, arriving with us about the latter end of April or the beginning of May, when it scatters itself in pairs over the whole of the British Isles. Its habits are extremely shy and retiring, selecting for its places of abode grassy meadows, fields of young corn, ozier-beds, and marshy grounds, seldom allowing itself to be seen; and were it not for the peculiar note of the male, which consists of a singular grating *monotone*,—sometimes sounding as if beneath one's feet, and again appearing as if uttered at a distance,—its presence would not be betrayed. In these its favourite places of resort and concealment it carries on the process of incubation, constructing its nest on the ground, and occasionally on small hillocks; the nest being composed of slender flags or grasses; the female laying from eight to twelve eggs, rather less than those of the Moor-hen, to which in the markings they bear some resemblance, of a yellowish-white, covered with dull rust-coloured spots. The young when hatched are covered with a black down, and are soon able to follow the parent birds, attaining by the commencement of the shooting season nearly the adult size and plumage, when they are often killed by the sportsman, and much sought after by the epicure, being esteemed a great delicacy.

It is with difficulty forced to take wing, but runs with great rapidity before the pursuer, whom in general it readily eludes.

Its flight is very short and embarrassed, with the legs hanging down; and it evidently trusts for safety more to its activity on the ground, and to the seclusion afforded by the herbage beneath which it crouches.

In autumn, when the fields and meadows no longer afford cover for its concealment, it retires to brakes and thickets, and its note is seldom heard. In the latter part of October they commence their migration southwards, passing over to the Continent; leaving occasionally a few feeble or wounded birds behind, which remain with us during the winter.

The male and female are alike in plumage: their food consists of insects and their larvæ, such as grasshoppers, &c., as also worms, snails, vegetables, seeds, and grain.

The bill and legs are flesh-coloured; irides hazel; over the eye a large ash-coloured mark, which extends towards the occiput; the top of the head and the whole of the upper surface of the body of a rufous brown, the feathers of the back having a black mark in the centre; the shoulders and quill-feathers of a light chestnut; the sides light brown, marked with darker transverse bars; breast ash-colour, inclining to a lighter tinge on the under parts.

Length nine inches and a half; weight seven or eight ounces.

The figure in our Plate is that of an adult in its spring plumage.