

## LITTLE SANDPIPER.

*Tringa minuta*, *Leisler*.

Le Becasseau echasses.

THIS beautiful species, which we have figured in various states of plumage, is, with one exception only, the smallest of the British Sandpipers, and although it is nowhere numerous, is yet occasionally obtained on various parts of our coast, where it feeds and flies in company with small flocks of the Purre and the Sanderling, but sometimes occurring alone.

It is not uncommon about the margins of large fresh-water lakes on the continent of Europe generally; and specimens received from India have proved, on comparison, to be identical with those of Germany, France and Holland.

As this little bird constantly assumes at the breeding season a plumage peculiar to that period, distinct in colour from that which it bears during winter, and has besides been confounded by several authors with one European, and one extra-European species, we shall endeavour to supply descriptions of *Tringa minuta* under its various appearances, which, with the figures, will enable our readers to distinguish it at any season.

The whole length of the bird is about six inches, females being larger than males; beak straight, rather shorter than the head, black; all the upper parts of the body ash-colour, with a dusky brown streak in the line of the shaft of each feather; sides of the chest ash-colour, tinged with reddish brown; a brown line from the eye to the beak; front of the neck, throat, middle of the breast and all the under parts pure white; quill-primaries dusky black; lateral tail-feathers ash brown, the two middle ones darker brown, these last and the outer ones on each side longer than the others, giving to the tail the appearance of being doubly forked; legs and feet black, *tarsi* measuring ten lines in length, bare portion above the *tarsi* short. This is the appearance of the plumage in winter.

In the breeding season the top of the head is spotted with black and bright red; cheeks, sides of the neck and breast rufous, marked with small angular brown spots; under parts white as in winter; feathers of the back, the scapulars, wing-coverts, tertials, rump and two middle tail-feathers deep black in the centre, but nearly all have a broad border of bright red; some few feathers about the wings retain through the summer the ash colour peculiar to winter, remaining unchanged; lateral tail-feathers ash brown; legs and feet black.

Young birds of the year have the feathers on the top of the head spotted with black, and edged with reddish buff; those on the upper surface of the body and wings margined with pale buff-coloured white; the feathers on the sides of the neck, the scapulars and tertials bordered with yellowish red; in other respects like the parent birds.

We have figured these small Sandpipers of their natural size; the representation on the right side of our Plate is in the plumage of winter; that in the middle is in the perfect plumage of summer; the figure on the left is that of a young bird of the year.

Their food consists of small worms, aquatic insects, and minute crustacea.

But little is known of the nidification of this interesting little *Tringa*, but we have it in our power to add a description of its egg. This in its colour and markings is very like the egg of *Tringa hypoleucos*, but much smaller, measuring one inch one line in length and nine lines in breadth, the ground colour reddish white, spotted and specked with dark red brown.