

Genus MACHETES, *Cuv.*

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* straight, rather slender, as long as the head, with the tip dilated and smooth. *Nostrils* basal, lateral, linear, placed in the commencement of the groove. *Wings* long and sharp-pointed; first and second quill-feathers equal and longest. *Legs* long and slender. *Tibiae* naked for a considerable space above the tarsal joint. *Feet* four-toed; three before, and one behind; the outer toe united to the middle one by a membrane as far as the first joint; hind toe short.

The head and neck of the male, during the breeding-season, are adorned with long plumose feathers, springing from the occiput and throat, which, when raised, form a large ruff around the head; and the face of the male bird, during the same period, is covered with small fleshy warts or papillæ.

RUFF.

Machetes pugnax, Cuv.

Le Bécasseau combattant.

THE species of the great family of Sandpipers, from which this remarkable bird has been separated into a distinct genus, are well known to undergo a striking periodical change of plumage immediately preceding the season of reproduction; but it is in the present bird alone that we find so great a diversity of colour in the plumage during this period, as to render it scarcely possible to discover two individuals exactly according with each other either in tints or markings. In one, for example, we find the frill of a beautiful buff, with elegant bars of black; in another, white, grey, or chestnut, with longitudinal markings of shining black with violet reflections. Others, again, have the frill of a uniform white, black, or brown, with auricular feathers of a different colour. The remainder of the plumage (and it is even the same with the colouring of the legs and bill) undergoes a considerable change, though not to so remarkable a degree as do the feathers of the neck. With the accession of these ornamental plumes, the ruff also acquires a multitude of small warty tubercles, thickly disposed over the front part of the head. To figure the whole of these spring changes common to the male is of course impossible; we have therefore selected for our Plate an example the colour of which could be most faithfully represented. This remarkable change, by which the Ruff is so much distinguished, commences and is completed during the month of April. In this, which we may call its most perfect state of plumage, it continues about a month, when the plumes are gradually thrown off, and by the end of June it assumes its more common appearance, which it retains during the remainder of the year, no difference being then to be perceived between the individual whose frill had been white, and the one in which it had been black. The females, or Reeves, are much smaller than the male, are never adorned with the elongated feathers of the neck, and vary but little in their plumage throughout the year, which is very similar to that of the male in his winter dress.

In England the Ruff is not so abundant as it was formerly: its chief resorts now are the fens of Cambridge-shire, Lincolnshire, and Norfolk, although some few are occasionally found in other places. In Holland and the low and marshy districts of France and Germany it is in the greatest abundance. From these countries it spreads northwards to very high latitudes during the summer, as it is known to breed in Lapland, Sweden, and Russia.

The Ruff may be considered a strictly migratory species, retiring to southern latitudes in winter, and arriving in our own in the early part of spring, the males making their appearance several days previous to their expected mates. Unlike the *Tringæ* in general, the Ruff is polygamous in its habits, each male claiming to himself a certain district, the limits of which he defends with the utmost obstinacy. On the arrival of the females, the males pay their attentions by various displays of their plumage, which is now in full perfection; and as many lay claim to the same female, sharp contests ensue for the possession of her, and she becomes the prize of the conqueror.

On account of the great delicacy of its flesh, the Ruff is highly esteemed for the table; hence various means are resorted to for the purpose of securing them alive, in order that they may be fattened in confinement. They soon become extremely tame and familiar; are fed with bread and milk, boiled wheat and other farinaceous seeds, which they eat with great avidity; and speedily become very fat. In a state of nature their food consists of worms, aquatic insects, and their larvæ.

As the description of one male in his summer dress will not be applicable to any other individual, we shall content ourselves with giving that of the male in winter, which is the same in every example.

The whole of the upper surface brown, each feather having its centre of a deeper tint, and its margin of a light reddish grey; the whole of the under surface is white; feet and bill light brown.

The female, or Reeve, is full a third less than the male, and closely accords with him in his winter dress, except that the throat, fore part of the neck, and breast are light brown, mingled with darker blotches.

The Plate represents a male in summer and winter plumage, and an adult female, all of the natural size.