

SABINE'S SNIFE.

Scolopax Sabini, Vigors.

THE occasional occurrence of this rare and singular species of Snipe in our island, teaches us that we have yet much to learn respecting the native localities of many of the feathered tribes, for we know of no instance of its having been killed in any other part of the globe than the British Islands; still it is very evident that these islands are not its native home, and that those that have been killed here are merely stragglers from some unknown region. The first example of this bird was killed in Queen's County, Ireland, in August 1822, and was sent to Mr. Vigors the same day; it was described by him under the above title in the 14th vol. of the Transactions of the Linnean Society, and is now contained in the Museum of the Zoological Society, to which institution it was presented by Mr. Vigors with the whole of his fine collection. A second example was shot on the banks of the Medway, near Rochester, in October, 1824. Besides these, Mr. Selby informs us that he has "received a fresh specimen of this rare Snipe from Morpeth, possessing all the characteristics of Mr. Vigors's bird;" and we ourselves know of another example having been killed in Ireland.

As we are indebted to Mr. Vigors for our knowledge of this species, we deem it but just to quote his own words in pointing out its distinctive characters. "It is at once distinguished from every other European species of *Scolopax* by the total absence of white from its plumage, or any of those lighter tints of ferruginous yellow which extend more or less in stripes along the head and back of them all. In this respect it exhibits a strong resemblance to *Scolopax saturata* of Dr. Horsfield, from which, however, it sufficiently differs in its general proportions; and I find no description of any other extra-European species of true *Scolopax* which at all approaches it in this character of its plumage. In the number of its tail-feathers, again, which amount to twelve, it differs from *Scolopax major*, which has sixteen, and *Scolopax Gallinago*, which has fourteen; it agrees, however, in this point with *Scolopax Gallinula*, which also has but twelve; but it can never be confounded with that bird from the great disproportion between the essential characters of both, the bill alone of *Scolopax Sabini* exceeding that of the latter species by one third of its length. In the relative length and strength of the tarsi it equally differs from all. These members, although stouter than those of *Scolopax Gallinago*, fall short of them by $\frac{3}{16}$ ths of an inch; they are much weaker, on the other hand, than those of *Scolopax major*, although they nearly equal them in length." Of its habits, mode of nidification, &c., we know nothing; but in these respects it doubtless bears a close resemblance to the other members of the genus.

Top of the head and back black, the latter being transversely barred with chestnut; whole of the under surface dusky black, thickly barred with dull chestnut; quills blackish brown; tail of twelve feathers, black at the base, chestnut at the tip barred with narrow lines of black; bill dusky black, the base of the upper mandible pale chestnut; legs dark olive green.

COMMON SNIFE.

Scolopax Gallinago, Linn.

Le Bécassine ordinaire.

ALTHOUGH the contrary has been long recorded by naturalists, we conceive that the natural range of the Common Snipe is comparatively limited, and that the Snipes from India, Africa, and North America, that have been regarded as identical with our bird, will be found, on examination, to be specifically distinct; in the character of their plumage they are indeed somewhat similar, but they nearly all present a different form in the feathers of the tail, and also a difference of number.

The Common Snipe is strictly indigenous in our islands, although the great mass retire northwards to breed, leaving a few scattered over our extensive moors and marshy districts, where they perform the task of incubation: these few have their numbers augmented in autumn by the return of those which had retired to northern latitudes, whence they are now driven with their young by the severity of the climate and the impossibility of acquiring food. On the Continent it inhabits the same situations as in Great Britain and is equally abundant. Its habits, manners, mode of life, and flight are so universally known that a detailed account of them is perfectly unnecessary, neither need we say anything about the excellency of its flesh as an article of food. The nest is usually formed by lining some small depression of the ground, under a tuft of grass, heath, or rushes, with dried grasses and similar materials; the eggs are four in number, long and pointed, of an olive green blotched with different shades of reddish brown. The young quit the nest almost immediately after their exclusion from the shell, and run nimbly about after their parents while yet covered with a particoloured dress of brown and buff. The sexes offer so little difference in the markings of their plumage, that it is impossible to distinguish them by this means.

In the adult bird the top of the head is brown, divided by a longitudinal central stripe of yellowish white; a similar stripe of yellowish white runs from the base of the beak above the eye, followed by a stripe of brown from the base of the beak to the eye; chin white; sides of the neck and chest tawny yellowish white, numerously spotted with dark brown; back and scapularies fine black barred with brown, and with longitudinal stripes of rich buff yellow on the outer edges of the feathers; wings dark brown, each feather being spotted and edged near the tip with yellow; primaries dark brown, the outer web of the outer quill being white; under surface white, barred on the flanks with brown; tail consisting of fourteen feathers which are black for two thirds of their length from the base, the rest reddish brown with a bar of black and tipped with reddish brown; legs and feet greyish olive; beak yellowish brown becoming redder at the base and darker at the tip.

We have figured a male of both species of the natural size.