

GREAT SNIPE.

Scolopax major, Gmel.

La Grande ou Double Bécassine.

THE specific appellation given to this bird, as is the case in many other instances, shows the impropriety of such names as *major*, *minor*, *minuta*, &c. ; for although we admit that the present bird is the largest of the European true Snipes, still there are two others which exceed it in size from the hilly districts of India, and a third from Mexico, whose size is even superior to that of the Woodcock : the name of *major* as applied to our bird is therefore perfectly inappropriate.

The northern parts of Europe undoubtedly constitute the true habitat of the Great Snipe. Sir Humphry Davy killed several during one of his summer visits to Norway, &c. : these were afterwards transmitted to the Zoological Society of London, and on examination were ascertained to be strictly identical with those killed in England. We do not mean to affirm that Norway and the northern regions generally are its sole habitat, for we have received it in abundance from the temperate and southern portions of Europe and the borders of Asia. Although we have no direct evidence that it breeds in the British Islands, still it is far from being improbable that instances of the kind may occasionally take place, particularly as it appears to be more common than has been hitherto supposed.

The term *Solitary*, by which it is known in some parts of England, is not inappropriately applied to this Snipe, in as much as it is always found alone, and, as it were, isolated from the companionship of others of its species ; neither does it appear to congregate into bodies for the purpose of migration, each individual, or at most each pair, seeming to act independently for itself.

In its general appearance the Great Snipe closely resembles the Common Snipe (*Scolopax Gallinago*), but on minute examination the flanks will be found to be strongly barred with brown, the secondaries and lesser wing-coverts numerously spotted with white, and the outer tail-feathers totally destitute of any markings ; in addition to which it is much heavier, the weight of the Common Snipe being rarely more than four ounces, while the Great Snipe frequently weighs seven or eight. Its flight is less tortuous and rapid than that of the Common Snipe, being performed in a more steady and even line, and is not unlike that of the Woodcock.

Its food consists of insects, which it procures by thrusting its bill into the soft and oozy mud.

Like its congeners it is principally found in heaths, low marshy situations, morasses, &c.

Its habits, nidification, &c. are said to be precisely the same as those of the Common Snipe, and its flesh is equally esteemed as a delicacy for the table.

Crown of the head dark brown, interspersed with small markings of reddish brown, with the central streak of the same colour ; a streak of pale buff between the bill and the eye ; back dark brown varied by longitudinal markings of yellowish brown ; lesser wing-coverts tipped with white ; breast, sides, and flanks white with transverse triangular bars of deep brown ; tail of sixteen feathers, the two centre ones black for two thirds of their length ; the outer feathers quite white for nearly their whole length ; legs olive ; bill blackish brown.

The Plate represents an adult male of the natural size.