

## Genus HÆMATOPUS.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* longer than the head, straight, strong, the point much compressed, forming a wedge; culmen of the anterior part slightly convex; upper mandible with a broad lateral groove extending one half the length of the bill; mandibles nearly equal and having their tips truncated. *Nostrils* basal, lateral, linear, pierced in the membrane of the mandibular groove. *Legs* of mean length, naked for a short space above the tarsal joint. *Tarsi* strong. *Feet* three-toed; all the toes directed forward, and united at their base by a membrane. *Nails* strong, broad, slightly falcate, and semi-acute. *Wings* of mean length, with the first quill-feather the longest.

## OYSTER-CATCHER.

*Hæmatopus ostralegus*, Linn.

La Huiterier pie.

THE only species of this widely diffused but restricted genus which can claim to be considered as European is the bird before us, and we have every reason to regard it as indigenous, not only in the British Isles, but throughout the whole of the Continent. The localities to which it gives preference are the low muddy shores bordering the sea, salt marshes, and inland saline lakes. The whole of its actions are characterized by considerable liveliness and spirit: it runs along the level sands with great swiftness, nor is it less distinguished for its sweeping velocity when on the wing; in addition to which it swims with ease and address, although it does not habitually take to the water: indeed, it is only when wading far from the shore, and finding itself out of its depth, that it resorts to the expedient of swimming to effect its return. Its robust and powerful frame admirably adapts it for the efficient use of its strong hard bill in obtaining its prey, such as limpets (which require considerable force to detach them from the stones), bivalves, crustacea, and marine worms. As its name implies, it is said to be extremely dexterous in opening the shells of oysters in order to obtain the animal within, which is known to be a favourite article of its food.

In winter the Oyster-catcher is gregarious, assembling together in considerable flocks, which separate on the approach of spring, when each pair retires to its peculiar breeding-station.

It is very common in Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and all parts of our coast where a marshy stripe of land borders a long sandy beach, among the shingles of which it deposits its eggs, which are four in number, of a light olive colour blotched and otherwise marked with black. While the female is engaged in the task of incubation, the male keeps assiduous watch, and gives notice of the approach of danger by a sharp and peculiar kind of whistling cry. The young quit the nest on the day of their exclusion from the egg, and are assiduously attended by the parents, which continually sweep round any intruder, and assail him with loud cries. The young attain at an early age the adult livery, without undergoing any intermediate gradations of plumage.

The sexes are alike in their outward appearance, and the only difference in their summer and winter dress consists in the presence of a white crescent-shaped mark half round the throat during the latter season.

The bill is reddish orange at the base, becoming lighter at the tip; the legs orange red; irides crimson; the whole of the plumage is black, with the exception of the rump, a band across the base of the quills, and the under surface, which are pure white.

The Plate represents an adult male in the summer plumage, of the natural size.