

## DOTTRELL.

*Charadrius morinellus*, Linn.

Le Pluvier guignard.

THE natural history of this species is less perfectly known than that of many others which are much more rare. It is seen in several parts of England, and in considerable numbers, but only at two periods during each year, in its passage to and from that country in which it breeds; yet where that very important part of its economy is accomplished to any extent, has been but partially proved.

These birds make their first appearance every year in the month of May, sometimes as early as April, and are then in their finest plumage. The female frequently weighs upwards of four ounces, and measures almost ten inches in length; the male weighs only three ounces and a half, and measures but nine inches and a half. The plumage of the sexes is not very dissimilar; and it has happened to us, that the largest in size, as well as the finest in plumage we have ever been able to procure, have invariably, on internal examination, proved to be females. The beak is dusky; irides hazel; the forehead speckled with brown and white; crown of the head much darker, the middle of each feather being nearly black and edged with light brown; from the beak, and passing over the eye on each side, is a broad band of white, which extending backwards almost unite at the nape of the neck; chin and throat white, with small elongated brown spots; the whole of the neck below ash-grey; back and wing-coverts light yellowish brown, each feather edged with pale fawn-colour; lower part of the neck white, occasionally bounded above with a narrow line of black; breast rich orange; abdomen black; region of the vent and under tail-coverts greyish white; quill-feathers dusky brown; the tail-feathers olive brown,—both margined with pale ferruginous; legs dingy yellow brown; toes darker. Young birds of the year have the crown of the head mottled with brown and white, the white mark over the eye less conspicuous, the colours on the upper parts more dull, with the whole under surface of the body pale ferruginous and dusky.

It is stated of these birds, that they are more abundant in Asia than in Europe; rather common during winter in the Grecian Archipelago and the Levant; are seen, on their passage, in Germany and France, but very rarely in Holland. They visit Sweden, Dalecarlia, and the Lapland Alps, and breed in the northern parts of Russia and Siberia.

In our own country they frequent the downs of Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire and Cambridgeshire, resorting to the open fallow-grounds in their vicinity for food, which consists principally of insects and worms. They first appear about May, in small flocks, or *trips* as they are called, of from four or five to ten birds each, on their passage northwards, and return at the end of August recruited in numbers by the addition of their offspring, and we have at that season seen twenty and sometimes thirty together. We have learned also from old shepherds on the Royston and Cambridge hills, that these birds were formerly much more numerous there than they are at present. They are also seen in Lincolnshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire. They appear in the neighbourhood of Carlisle in May, remaining ten days or a fortnight, and then depart for Skiddaw and the adjoining mountains, where they are said to breed annually. On Skiddaw in particular, a few of these birds have been seen and shot in the month of June, and their nests and eggs taken.

Montague, and also Colonel Thornton, saw an occasional pair of Dottrell in Scotland, at a season which warranted them in concluding that some of these birds produced their young in that country. We do not remember any record of their having been seen in the Hebrides, nor does Mr. Low include them in his Fauna of Orkney and Shetland.

Dr. Latham, in his General History of Birds, informs us, that in the district of Aberdeenshire, called Braemor, (being the most elevated part of the country,) these birds hatch their young on dry mossy ground near to, and on the very summits of, the highest parts; sometimes in the little tufts of short heather, or moss, which are to be found in those elevated grounds: even in so exposed a situation they take so little trouble to form their nest, that were it not by the eggs, no person could suppose there was one. The hen sits three weeks, and the young birds make their appearance about the middle of July: they rarely lay above three eggs, and generally bring forward as many young.

The eggs of these birds are so difficult to obtain, that we only know one collector who possesses them. They are one inch eight lines long, by one inch two lines and a half in breadth, light olive brown, blotched and spotted with black:—these specimens were procured from the Grampian Hills.

About the periods of their passage to and from their breeding-ground, as before referred to, a few of the Dottrell are to be seen occasionally in the London markets, and always command a considerable price for so small a bird, usually selling readily at six shillings per couple. A young bird in good condition is said to be of exquisite flavour.