

Genus CHARADRIUS.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* slender, straight, compressed, shorter than the head; *nasal furrow* prolonged more than two thirds; *mandibles* enlarged towards the tip. *Nostrils* basal, jagged, cleft longitudinally in the middle of a large membrane which covers the nasal fossa. *Legs* moderate, or long and slender. *Toes* three, directed forwards, the external united to the middle one by a short membrane; the inner toe free. *Tail* square, or slightly rounded. *Wings* moderate; first *quill-feather* the longest.

GOLDEN PLOVER.

Charadrius pluvialis, *Linn.*

Le Pluvier doré.

THE Golden Plover is extensively spread over the whole of the northern portions of Europe, and is by no means uncommon in our Islands, inhabiting heaths, downs, and swampy moors during the summer, but congregating near the coast and about the marshy inlets of the sea in autumn and winter. Its breeding place, however, will generally be found upon the heath-covered hills of our northern counties, and the Highlands of Scotland, the female depositing her eggs on the ground, four in number, of a large size, exceeding those of the Lapwing, of a dull olive-coloured ground blotched with black.

The habits of the Golden Plover, as well as those of the rest of its congeners, may be denominated exclusively terrestrial; for although distinguished by a rapid and sweeping flight, its characters, structure and powers, are such as to qualify it in an especial manner for running on the bare turf and among the heath of the mountains, which it does with great quickness and agility; and as nature perfects those endowments the earliest, on which depend the means of maintaining existence or avoiding foes, so we see the young, just excluded from the egg, covered with dusky brown, crouching or running with great celerity, and yet incapable of flight,—a power which they do not possess until after a considerable period.

The difference that exists in the plumage of the Golden Plover at particular seasons of the year is sufficient, without a knowledge of the change, to produce a deception as to the identity of the species. In winter, the general colour of the upper surface is dusky with numerous spots of yellow, lighter beneath; but in March, a few black feathers appear on the breast and under parts, which are augmented in number during the succeeding month; and in May a broad expanse of jet black, beginning above the beak, and passing over the cheeks and sides of the neck, covers the throat, breast, and under parts of the body. The margins of this black close abruptly on a line of white, which continues its course from the forehead along the neck and sides, gradually blending with the rest of the plumage. As soon as the season of incubation is over, the black feathers disappear, as well as the white marginal line, the dusky plumage of the winter returning.

The cause of this change in plumage is not clearly understood; it is, however, produced by a partial moult which takes place in the spring and autumn; so that the black colour is not superinduced upon the old feathers, but is the original colour of the new ones; nor does this tint fade in these feathers so as to become grey, but the feathers themselves gradually fall off in the autumn, the grey ones succeeding. The whole plumage, with the exception of the primaries, which are moulted but once in the year, is subjected to a similar law:—we do not here mean to say that in all birds which undergo periodical changes in the colour of their plumage this double moult takes place; but in the present instance we have ascertained such to be the case. The young of the year differ but little from the adult in winter, with the exception of a yellower tint pervading the whole body.

The bill is dusky; eyes dark hazel; head and all the superior parts of the body dark brown, beautifully spangled with golden yellow; legs and feet olive-brown. Length ten inches: weight seven or eight ounces.

Its flesh is extremely delicate, and is much sought after for the table; hence there are multitudes annually brought to the London markets for sale.

We have represented the adult bird in its summer and winter dress, the black breast being the characteristic of the former:—the sexes are not distinguishable by their plumage.