

Genus PLATALEA, Linn.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* elongated, strong, compressed, the point dilated and rounded, spoon-shaped, the upper *mandible* channeled round the margin, furrowed transversely at the base. *Nostrils* approaching, oblong, open and edged by membrane. *Face, head* and *chin* more or less naked. *Tarsi* long, and of considerable strength. *Toes* united by a membrane, deeply cleft, and terminating as high as the second articulation; hind-toe long, and applied entirely to the ground. *Wings*, second and third *quill-feathers* nearly equal and longest, the first rather shorter.

SPOONBILL.

Platalea leucorodia, Linn.

La Spatule blanche.

NATURE in her exhaustless resources exhibits great variety of means adapted to the same end, which she apparently delights to display, as if to convince us of the unlimited extent of her empire, and the powers under her command. The truth of this observation is plainly exemplified in the species under consideration. Allied to the Stork, Heron and Crane, and subsisting in a great degree on the same kind of food, still the essential modification in the structure and form of that apparatus by which it is obtained has induced naturalists to assign the Spoonbill a station as the type of a separate genus. In the Crane, the Stork and the Heron, we find the bill conical and pointed; but in the Spoonbill this organ is modelled differently; and although, as already stated, the food of the present bird nearly resembles that of the species above mentioned,—viz. mollusca, newts, frogs and their ova, together with small fishes,—it appears, if we may hazard a conjecture, a plan of construction still better adapted to its particular purpose.

Although the Spoonbill in its general manners is closely allied to the Stork, it is by no means so familiar with man, but affects localities more remote and unfrequented. In captivity, however, it acquires confidence and loses that distrust which characterizes it in freedom; and from its gentleness and inoffensive disposition, as well as from the purity of the colour of its plumage, its graceful crest, and the ease and elegance of its attitudes, adds beauty and interest to the aviary.

The genus *Platalea* thus separated is very limited, containing, as far as our researches have yet enabled us to ascertain, not more than five or six species, of which the present alone, we believe, is a native of the European portion of the globe. The British Islands, it is true, no longer afford a secure retreat for the Spoonbill, owing to the draining of our more extensive marshes and inland waters; nevertheless it still occasionally visits this country, and the author for several years past has ascertained the fact of the Spoonbill annually appearing on the coast of Norfolk, at that period of the year in which they wander in search of uninterrupted asylums; and we doubt not that this species and many others, if unmolested, would still breed with us as heretofore.

The Spoonbill is spread over Europe generally; but Holland appears to be the principal place of summer rendezvous, whence it migrates, on the approach of winter, to more southern regions, where it remains till the return of spring,—it then again retraces its course. It generally selects the tops of lofty trees for the site of its nest; sometimes, however, it chooses less elevated situations, building among rushes or reeds, and laying two or three large white eggs marked with obscure spots of red; varieties, however, are often found completely white.

The plumage of the adult bird is white, with the exception of a pale reddish-yellow band which encircles the lower part of the neck, about three inches in width on the under part, whence it gradually contracts as it extends upwards; and the crest (both of which it acquires only during the breeding season,) is of the same colour, though of a paler tint. A flesh-coloured space entirely devoid of feathers extends from the base of the lower mandible to the eye, and is continued about two inches down the throat, where it assumes a deeper yellow; beak black with a yellow tip; the irides red; the legs and feet black. Total length, two feet six inches; length of the beak varying from seven to nine inches.

The female differs from the male only in being rather smaller. The young when they leave the nest bear a general resemblance to the parent birds, with the exception however of the following particulars; viz.—the beak is not so large, softer in texture, and of a lighter colour; the shafts as well as the tips of the quill-feathers are black; the irides ash-coloured; the naked parts about the head are paler, and there is no indication of that elongated crest which ornaments the adult birds, both male and female, in the breeding season.

Our Plate represents a male in the spring plumage.