

Genus NYCTICORAX.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* very strong, rather longer than the head, compressed; upper mandible curved towards the point; maxilla sulcated for three fourths of its length and emarginated; culmen rounded; tomia of both mandibles straight and sharp, that of the under mandible entering within the upper one. *Nostrils* basal, longitudinal, placed in the furrow of the maxilla, and covered above by a naked membrane; lores and orbits naked. *Legs* of mean length, slender. *Toes* three before and one behind; middle toe shorter than the tarsus, exterior toe connected by a membrane to the middle one as far as the first joint. *Claws* short, falcated, that of the middle toe pectinated. *Tibiae* naked for a short space above the tarsal joint.

COMMON NIGHT HERON.

Nycticorax Europæus, Steph.

Le Bihoreau à Manteau noir.

No bird, we conceive, can better show the necessity of minor subdivisions of large families than the Common Night Heron. The genus *Nycticorax* is now, we believe, universally acknowledged: seven species at least are known to us, most of which are inhabitants of remote and distant regions; one being found at Terra del Fuego, another in New South Wales, and a new one having been lately discovered in Manilla.

The Common Night Heron is the only species found in Europe, over the whole of which it is dispersed, as also over the whole of Asia, and the northern regions of Africa; and if not identical, the Night Heron of North America bears so great a resemblance to the European bird, as to require an experienced eye to detect the difference: the American birds are, however, we believe, larger in all their proportions.

Both the adults and young have been frequently killed within the British Islands, and particular instances are recorded in the works of Mr. Selby and others. It is especially abundant in Holland, France, and Germany, where it gives preference to low swampy and marshy situations, in the neighbourhood of trees and high woods. In its form the Night Heron is intermediate between the true Herons, *Ardea*, and the Bitterns, *Botaurus*, and, as may be supposed, partakes of the habits and manners of both, for although it affects more reedy and secluded situations, it nevertheless frequently resorts during the day to high trees and woods, where it may be seen perched on the topmost branches, the truth of which we can ourselves attest, having received a fine adult specimen immediately after it had been shot from a high tree in the gardens of Frogmore near Windsor: this individual evinced no fear at being approached, which enabled the keeper to make an easy prize of this rare visitor.

On the approach of evening, the Night Heron retires to the marsh or river-side, which never fails to afford it a plentiful supply of food: when fish cannot be obtained it feeds upon frogs, insects, and mice. It breeds in society much after the manner of the Common Heron; and constructs a nest, composed entirely of sticks, on the topmost branches of trees, or, when no suitable woods are near its accustomed haunts, among the reeds: the eggs are four in number, of a pale greenish blue.

Bill black inclining to yellow at the base; crown of the head, back of the neck, upper part of the back, and scapulars black with green reflections; sides of the neck, lower part of the back, rump, wings, and tail pearly grey; forehead, throat, and under parts white; from the back of the head spring three long, narrow white feathers, which are concave beneath, and lying one over the other, appear like a single plume: they can be erected at pleasure; legs and toes pale yellowish green; claws black, short, and hooked; that of the inner toe pectinated on the inner side; irides deep reddish orange; bare space round the eyes greenish blue.

The young bird during its first or nestling plumage is destitute of the plumes at the back of the head, has the culmen and point of the bill blackish brown, with the base and lower mandible yellowish green; the head and back of the neck brown, with the centre of each feather yellowish white; the front of the neck and the feathers of the breast and under surface yellowish white deeply margined with dull yellowish brown; the back and lesser wing-coverts deep brown, the centre of each feather streaked with yellowish white; greater coverts and quills deep brown, tipped with triangular spots of white; the tail brown, the legs yellowish green, and the irides bright orange. Between this state, when it is known by the name of the *Gardenian Heron*, and maturity, it acquires at each successive moulting a plumage approaching nearer to that of the adult, and in each of these stages has been described as a different species.

The Plate represents an adult and a young bird of the natural size.