

GREAT EGRET.

Ardea alba, Linn.

Le Heron Aigrette.

THIS beautiful species of Heron is an inhabitant of the eastern and southern parts of Europe, and the adjacent portions of Africa and Asia. It is said to be found in abundance on the shores of the Black and Caspian Seas, the southern portions of Russia, and in the whole of Turkey, its numbers gradually diminishing as we proceed westward from those parts. In Germany, France, and Holland its appearance is quite accidental, and at indefinite and uncertain periods; its occurrence in the British Islands is still more seldom; indeed, the accounts of its capture here are so unsatisfactory, that we almost doubt the propriety of retaining it in our Fauna.

In its habits, manners, and general economy it closely resembles the Common Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), being an inhabitant of the marshes, and feeding upon frogs, lizards, fishes, and various aquatic insects.

It builds in trees, and lays from four to six eggs, of a bluish white.

It is now generally admitted, that notwithstanding the slight difference which exists between the present bird and its representative in America, they are really distinct. "By many of the later writers," says Mr. Selby, "*Ardea alba* has been confounded with *Ardea Egretta*, an American species, and apparently its representative in the New World. Even Temminck, whose character as a descriptive ornithologist stands deservedly in the highest estimation, has failed in pointing out the distinctive characters of the two species, and considers them in his Manual as identical, in which he has been followed by Stephens and others. Wagler, however, whose skill in detecting and accuracy in delineating specific distinctions merit the highest praise, has marked with much precision the characters of each; and Wilson, who describes the *Ardea Egretta* in his admirable Ornithology of North America, states his conviction, from a comparison of the characters of each, that the European must be a distinct species from that which he describes."

During the spring and a greater part of the summer, the adult bird is adorned with a number of beautiful, long, divided, hair-like feathers springing from the back and extending considerably beyond the tail, and which may be elevated and depressed at will. These plumes are, we believe, wholly cast off at the commencement of autumn; this peculiarity, together with its slighter form and the immaculate whiteness of its plumage, has by some naturalists been considered of sufficient importance to warrant its separation into a new genus, and although we have here retained the old name of *Ardea*, we fully concur in the propriety of this subdivision.

The whole of the plumage is of a perfectly pure white; the bill deep brown tinged with yellow about the nostrils; the space between the eyes and the orbits greyish green; irides orange; legs and feet yellowish brown.

The young are destitute of the long plumes, have the bill blackish green tinged with yellow, and the legs greenish black.

We have figured an adult male rather more than half the natural size.