

Genus GRUS.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* longer than the head, straight, strong, compressed, pointed. *Nostrils* placed horizontally in the anterior part of a furrow, large, concave, pervious, posteriorly closed by a membrane. *Legs* long, strong, naked above the joint; three toes in front; middle toe united to the outer one by a membrane; hind toe articulated high up on the tarsus. *Wings* moderate, rounded; first quill-feather shorter than the second; the third the longest.

COMMON CRANE.

Grus cinerea, Bechst.

La Grue cendrée.

THAT the Crane was once common in England is a fact learned from the accounts of all the writers on Falconry, who enumerate it among the noblest game, which the Jer and Peregrine Falcons could alone encounter. The gradual cultivation of the country, the draining of marshes, and the inclosure of wild tracts since those days, have almost wholly banished this elegant bird from our island; still, however, it pays occasional visits, and few seasons pass without a specimen being killed within the precincts of England. As in the present day, it must then have been a bird of passage, appearing only in autumn and winter; since its native climate appears to be the higher northern latitudes, both of Europe and the adjoining parts of Asia, whence they pass southwards, being forced to abandon their solitary realms upon the approach of winter, and gladly returning when spring opens the frozen regions, and again offers a friendly asylum.

Flocks of these birds are seen at stated times in France and Germany, passing northwards and southwards as the season may be, in marshalled order, high in the air, their sonorous voices distinctly sounding even from their elevated course. Occasionally they descend, attracted by new-sown fields, or the prospect of finding food in marshes, the borders of rivers, or even the shores of the sea; but generally they continue their flight unchecked towards their destined resting-place.

The food of the Crane is of a more mixed nature than is usual among the great class of Waders, grains and plants, especially such as grow in morasses and moist lands, being added to worms, frogs and fresh-water shells.

The nest is usually placed among reeds, thick osier beds, and the matted foliage which borders lakes and morasses; but sometimes also on the tops of old ruins and similar buildings, where solitude invites to the great task of incubation. The eggs are two in number, of a dull greenish hue with dashes of brown.

The young of the year, besides having the plumes of the wings little developed, are distinguishable by the want of the bare space on the top of the head, or at least in its being but barely indicated, while the black of the front of the neck and occiput is not yet apparent, or indicated only by a few dark streaks.

The adult birds, male and female, are similar in colour, the plumes being less elongated and graceful in the female.

The whole of the body is of a delicate grey, the throat, the fore part of the neck, and the occiput, being of a deep greyish black; the forehead and space between the eye and the beak garnished with black hairs; the top of the head is naked and red; the secondaries form a beautiful flowing pendent plume, each feather being long and decomposed, consisting of loose unconnected barbs hanging half way to the ground; the beak greenish black, passing into horn colour at the tip, but reddish at its base; tarsi black; irides reddish brown. Length, from beak to tail, three feet ten inches.

The aged birds have a white space passing from behind the eye over the cheeks, and along the side of the neck for a considerable distance.

Our Plate represents an adult male nearly one half of the natural size.