

LITTLE BUSTARD.

Otis tetrax, Linn.

L'Outarde canepetière.

ALTHOUGH the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*, Linn.) was at one time common in England, we are by no means so well assured that such was also the case with respect to the bird before us; indeed we should suspect, from the localities which it affects, that its visits to the British shores have ever been, as at the present day, accidental and of rare occurrence. Its habitat appears to be more exclusively confined to the southern portion of Europe, especially Spain, Italy and Turkey, as well as the northern coast of Africa; and although occurring in the central parts of France, it is by no means a common bird; nor is it at all found in the northern parts of the European Continent. If, however, we are not to consider the Little Bustard as one of the birds strictly indigenous to our island, still the circumstance of its having been often killed in England fully entitles it to a place in the Fauna of this country. Of the various British specimens taken, we may refer among others to one in the possession of His Grace the Duke of Northumberland, shot at Warkworth, in the autumn of 1821; another in the possession of Mr. Selby, shot in February 1823; and a third in the collection of Mr. Yarrell, which was taken near Harwich.

The specimens above enumerated, as well as all those of which any report has reached us, have been either invariably females or immature males, and in no instance an adult male, so conspicuous for the beautiful and singular markings which ornament the plumage of his neck and chest. We may here observe, that we have been unable satisfactorily to ascertain, either from our own observation or the information afforded by M. Temminck, whether these bold and decided markings constitute its summer plumage, being lost during winter, as in many species of the allied genus *Charadrius*; or if they are borne throughout the year, so as to constitute a permanent characteristic. In the specimen (in the author's collection) from which our figure was taken, this beautiful state of plumage is exhibited in a manner which the pencil is hardly adequate to convey.

The habits and manners of the *Otis tetrax* are strictly characteristic of the genus to which it belongs; and its general conformation and strength of limb render it well adapted for the station it occupies among those birds whose province is more peculiarly the ground, the surface of which affords them food and a place for nidification. The present species frequents open and extensive wilds or uncultivated districts, particularly uncovered arid plains, where, far removed from the habitation of man, it finds a secluded abode consonant to its reserved and timid disposition; and in these places, among the short herbage, it constructs an inartificial nest, and deposits from three to five eggs, of a uniform glossy olive-green.

In the male, the top of the head and occiput are light yellow, contrasted with numerous dots and lines of black and brown; the throat and cheeks slate-colour deepening, as it proceeds, to black, which continues in a line for some distance down the front of the neck, around which runs a necklace of pure white, commencing on each side of the occiput; the back of the neck (where the feathers are elongated into a short mane), and the sides, are of a deep jet black which meets across the lower part of the neck beneath the white necklace; over the breast extends a large crescent-shaped collar of white, below which is a narrower one of black; the whole of the back and sides of the chest light yellow with shades of reddish brown, thickly barred and dotted with elegant zigzag markings of black (which follow the outline of each feather,) interspersed, especially about the upper part, with large black spots and dashes; the edges of the greater wing and tail-coverts white; the quill-feathers blackish brown; tail yellowish with zigzag markings like those of the back, and crossed by indistinct bars, with indications of others; the middle of the chest and whole of the under surface pure white; bill olive-brown; irides orange; legs and tarsi yellowish grey.

Length eighteen inches; tarsi three inches; middle toe one inch and a quarter. From the joint of the tarsus to the feathery part of the thigh one inch; wing lengthened, and somewhat rounded.

The females and young males have the whole of the upper surface barred as in the male with dark brown zigzag markings on a fawn-coloured ground; the wing-coverts edged with white; the quill-feathers dark brown; the chin white; neck yellow, marked with longitudinal stripes, which as they proceed merge into transverse bars, becoming more and more decided on the chest, where the ground is still yellow; the under parts are pure white.

We have figured a male and female in their full plumage, two thirds of their natural size.