

RUFFED BUSTARD.

Otis Houbara, *Linn.*

L'Outarde Houbara.

ALTHOUGH the present beautiful species of Bustard has been occasionally killed in Spain and other parts of Europe, its native habitat is undoubtedly Arabia and Northern Africa, where extensive sandy deserts afford it a situation congenial to its natural habits. Dr. Latham, in his "General History of Birds," informs us, that according to Bechstein the Houbara has been killed in Siberia; but we have now some reason to doubt this conclusion, as J. E. Gray, Esq., of the British Museum, has lately made known a species of Bustard from the elevated range of the Himalaya which extends itself into Siberia, and we therefore suspect Bechstein has confounded this bird with the *Otis Houbara*, as it is characterized by the same singular kind of ruff and general style of colouring; although it may be distinguished from it by its inferiority in size and other minor particulars. To his bird Mr. Gray has given the specific name of *Macqueenii*; and the circumstance of its discovery is the more interesting, as we have now two species of Bustards exhibiting this singular disposition of plumage, which at once distinguishes them from the other birds of that family.

Although so rarely met with in Europe, the Houbara abounds in Africa, where it is much prized for the excellence of its flesh, which is considered one of the greatest delicacies, and is said to be of exquisite flavour.

The history of this bird is at present but imperfectly known, European naturalists being unacquainted with its eggs or nidification: nor have the characters of the female been yet observed; so that we are unable to say whether or not she possesses that ornamental plumage which graces the male; most probably if the feathers of the ruff exist at all, they are much less perfectly developed; and indeed, as it regards the male, we have yet to learn whether he does more than possess these long feathers during the breeding season, and lose them subsequently, a change analogous to that which we know so frequently occurs in others of the feathered race.

The beak is lengthened and depressed at its base, and, together with the feet, is of an olive colour. The head is surmounted by a crest of long and slender filamentous feathers of a pure white; the top of the head, the cheeks, occiput, back, and forepart of the neck grey, with minute zigzag bars and spots of brown; from the sides of the neck spring two large tufts of flowing feathers, gradually increasing in length to the extent of seven or eight inches; the upper portion of which is black, the remainder white; the whole of the upper surface is light tawny, each feather being irregularly marked with transverse zigzag bars of brown; the primaries dark brown at the tip, and white at their base; the tail-feathers besides being spotted are ornamented with three bands of blueish grey; the breast and under parts pure white. Total length from twenty-five to twenty-eight inches.

Our figure is that of an adult bird, two thirds of its natural size.