

Genus OTIS.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* moderate, straight, depressed at the base, and having the point of the upper mandible curved. *Nostrils* removed from the base, lateral, oval, and open. *Legs* long, naked above the knee. *Tarsi* reticulated. *Toes* three, all forward, short, united at the base, and bordered with membranes. *Wings* of mean length, the third quill-feather the longest.

GREAT BUSTARD.

Otis tarda, Linn.

L'Outarde barbue.

As man extends his dominion over the globe, many races of animals, and among them the present family, will gradually disappear from the haunts where they now abound, and linger only in localities which hold out no inducements to the exertions of human enterprise. Africa then, we may venture to predict, will afford on its extensive plains the last asylum in which the Bustard may find security, till at length, like the Dodo, many species of this stately family will become extinct, leaving only their remains for our investigation.

So nearly has the Great Bustard become annihilated in the British Islands that it is even doubtful whether any males still exist to accompany the few old females which remain on some of the extensive inclosures and large fields of turnips in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. On the Continent, as might be supposed, with the exception of Holland, the Great Bustard is tolerably numerous; a circumstance to be accounted for by the comparative thinness of the population and by the wide and extended plains which there exist. From the sandy deserts of Spain and Italy, which afford a congenial nursery wherein it may dwell and rear its young in safety, its range extends as far north as Siberia and Kamtschatka, but no example of this genus has ever been seen in America.

The eggs are two in number, of an olive green colour with slight darker variations; they are rather larger than those of the Turkey, and are deposited on the bare ground among the herbage, frequently in clover, trefoil, and corn. The young are hatched in a month, and from the day on which they are excluded from the shell they follow their parents over the plain until the following spring. The Great Bustard rarely takes wing unless so hard pressed as to have no other chance of escape, but runs with great strength and swiftness for the distance of several miles.

As an article of food the flesh of the Bustard is highly esteemed, and on the Continent the bird is frequently to be seen exposed in the markets for sale.

The food of this bird consists of various kinds of grain, to which are added the tender leaves and shoots of trefoil and other vegetables; nor does it disregard snails, insects, mice, &c.

The male has a large and membranous stomach, and possesses a lengthened gular pouch, extending down the fore part of the neck, the entrance of which is situated beneath the tongue; although the purpose of this pouch is not yet clearly ascertained, it is supposed by some to be formed for holding water, with which it might supply itself, the female, or young during the period of incubation; "yet," says Mr. Selby, "this supposition does not carry with it much probability, as the male is never seen in close company with the female except previous to the time of laying;" thus leaving us still in doubt what precise purpose this singular organ is designed to perform.

The general weight of the male when in good condition is from twenty-eight to thirty pounds, and when fully adult, which is not until it is at least five or six years old, may be distinguished from the female not only by its larger size, but also by the lengthened wiry feathers which spring from the sides of the face and extend backwards for several inches, and by the rich band of dark grey which crosses on the chest from side to side.

The head, nape, and fore part of the neck and chest fine ashy grey; a streak of brown passes from the top of the head to the occiput; chin, throat, and mustaches white; lower part of the neck and sides of the chest rich chestnut brown inclining to reddish orange, strongly barred, variegated with black and grey; secondaries and greater coverts grey; quills black; tail-feathers white at their base and tip, the intermediate space being barred with black and reddish brown; belly and vent white; legs brownish black; beak bluish grey.

The female resembles the male in the colour of her plumage, but differs from him in wanting altogether the mustaches and in being only about half his size.

The Plate represents an adult male and female rather less than half the natural size.