

Genus COTURNIX.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* short and somewhat feeble, the upper mandible curved towards the point. *Nostrils* basal, lateral, and half covered with a membrane. Orbits closely surrounded by feathers. *Wings* moderate, having the first and second quill-feathers the longest. *Tarsi* smooth, without spurs or tubercles. *Toes* four in number, three before and one behind. *Tail* short, rounded, and concealed by the tail-coverts.

QUAIL.

Coturnix dactylisonans, Meyer.

La Caille.

WITHOUT commenting upon the propriety of separating the Quails from the Partridges, a point on which we are fully decided, we shall at once enter upon a history of the bird before us. No individual of the Gallinaceous order enjoys so wide a range in the Old World as the Common Quail: it is abundant in North Africa, most parts of India, and, if we mistake not, China; while the whole of the southern portions of Siberia, and every country in Europe except those approximating to the polar circle, are visited by it annually, or adopted for a permanent abode. A considerable number are stationary in the southern portions of Europe, such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal, but their numbers are greatly increased in the spring by an accession of visitors, which emigrate from the parched plains of Africa, in search of more abundant supplies of food, and a congenial breeding-place. So vast and countless are the flocks which often pass over to the islands and European shores of the Mediterranean, that a mode of wholesale slaughter is usually put in practice against them, a circumstance which no doubt tends to limit their inordinate increase. They are polygamous in their habits; and in their migrations the males always precede the females, and are easily decoyed into nets by an artificial imitation of the voice of the latter. This mode of taking them is practised to a great extent in France and other parts of the Continent, which accounts for the vast majority of male birds yearly imported from thence into the London markets. In the British Islands the Quail is more sparingly dispersed, arriving in spring as soon as the tender corn is of a sufficient height to afford it shelter, and remaining with us till it has performed the duties of incubation, when it retires by gradual journeys towards the south; for although when flushed in our fields its flight is neither protracted nor elevated, it is enabled to perform its migrations with greater ease than the general contour of its body would lead us to expect.

The eggs are from eight to twelve in number, of a pale yellow brown blotched and dotted with darker brown and black, and are deposited on the ground with little or no nest.

The sexes may be distinguished by the male having a black mark on the throat, which part in the female is white. The young of the year so closely resemble the female that they are scarcely to be distinguished.

The general plumage of the upper surface is brown, beautifully variegated with dashes of black and yellow, and numerous fine zigzag transverse lines of black; the scapularies and the feathers on the flanks have each a lanceolate stripe of yellowish buff down their centres; the chin is dusky white bordered in the male with black; the breast and belly pale buff, the sides being streaked and mottled with reddish brown, black, and white; tarsi brownish flesh colour; bill brown.

The Plate represents a male and female of the natural size.