

PINTAILED SAND-GROUSE.

Pterocles setarius, Temm.

Le Ganga Cata.

THE Pintailed Sand-Grouse is a native of the southern portion of Europe, the North of Africa, and the level and arid plains of Persia ; it is also particularly abundant in Spain, Sicily, and through the whole of the Levant, visiting at uncertain seasons, and in small numbers, the southern provinces of France. It is a bird of migratory habits, and, like its congeners, prefers wild and barren districts where the poverty of the soil affords but little inducement to the enterprise of man ; we are consequently unable to obtain any minute details respecting its habits and manners. Its food consists of seeds, insects, and the tender shoots of vegetables. Its nest, says M. Temminck, is constructed on the earth among loose stones and tufts of herbage, the female being said to lay four or five eggs, the colour of which is unknown. Nothing can be more beautiful, or evince more evident marks of design, than the peculiarities which the great Author of Nature has bestowed upon the birds that compose the great family *Tetraonidæ*, or Grouse, as regards form and colouring in connexion with their habits and mode of life. They are all more or less migratory ; but in those species which nature has placed in countries where a luxuriant vegetation supplies them with abundance of food, we find a rounded form of wing, and moderate power of flight, sufficient only to enable them to pass from one pasture or heath to another. It appears also bountifully provided by Providence, that various birds inhabiting countries where the seasons and surface of the earth in summer and winter present striking contrasts, should also undergo a corresponding and analogous change of plumage ;—thus, the different species of Ptarmigan of the northern parts of Europe change their brown livery of summer, which accords so well with the colour of the heathy hills they inhabit, to a pure white in winter, almost rivaling the spotless snow by which they are then for a time surrounded. Their plumage also at this inclement season becomes thicker, and invests the whole of the body even to the extremity of the toes.—If from this we turn to the bird before us, we find an equal provision for its wants and mode of life, varied according to the almost opposite circumstances in which it is placed. Not inhabiting moors or districts covered with verdure, but dwelling in extensive sandy plains, with here and there only a patch of scanty vegetation, and where the season and soil preserve an almost complete uniformity of temperature and appearance, greater powers of flight are required and bestowed ; the wings are elongated and pointed, to enable it to pass with facility over immense tracts in its search after food or water, or to change its situation from one district to another ; the colour of the plumage also remains unchanged throughout the year, that it may ever assimilate with the sandy and stony soil where nature has fixed its abode ; the nostrils remain unconcealed, and the tarsi (although exhibiting rudiments of down,) are naked in comparison with the fur-clad feet of its northern relatives. The connexion which such changes and such modifications of structure evince, in reference to the preservation and protection of the species, cannot fail to suggest themselves to the understanding, and need not be insisted on. The colours of the male and female of the Sand-Grouse differ considerably. In the male, the throat is black ; the cheeks light rufous ; across the breast extends a band nearly two inches broad, of a rufous colour, edged above and below with a narrow black line ; the head, neck, back and scapulars olive-green ; rump and tail-coverts barred with black and yellowish ; the small and middle wing-coverts obliquely marked with chestnut and edged with white ; greater coverts olive inclining to ash-colour, each feather being terminated by a black crescent ; the whole of the under surface of a pure white ; the tail-feathers tipped with white ; the outer one on each side edged with white also ; the two middle feathers are long, and pass gradually into slender filaments exceeding the rest by three inches : length between ten and eleven inches, exclusive of the elongated tail-feathers.

In the female, the throat is white ; below this a partial collar of black which reaches only to the sides of the neck, with the broad orange band and black lines common to the male ; the whole of the upper part barred with black, yellow, and ash-blue ; all the wing-coverts bluish ash ; the primaries have a band of red and terminate with black bars ; the two elongated tail-feathers only exceed the others two inches.

Young birds differ from both parents, in having the general plumage less varied.

We have figured a male and female of the natural size.