

WILLOW PTARMIGAN.

Lagopus Saliceti, Swains.

Le Tétrás des Saules.

THE characteristic features which distinguish the Willow Ptarmigan from the *Lagopus mutus* consist in its superior size, in the rufous colouring of its summer plumage, and the total absence at all times of the black mark between the bill and the eye. Although not an inhabitant of the British Islands, the Willow Ptarmigan is perhaps more widely dispersed than any other species, being abundant over the whole of the arctic circle. It is the most plentiful kind of Grouse found in Norway, Sweden, and Lapland; and extends its range over the whole of Russia and Siberia. These elevated and dreary regions afford it situations most congenial to its habits and mode of life, in consequence of which its numbers are much diminished as it approaches more temperate climes; hence in the midland countries of Europe it is much less frequently seen, and south of these latitudes it is never found.

In its habits, manners, and general economy it strictly resembles the common species, feeding during summer on the tender shoots and buds of heath, together with berries of alpine plants: in winter, when the face of the country is covered with snow, it burrows beneath the surface, and feeds on the scanty herbage, the buds of the dwarf willow, and whatever green vegetable food it can obtain.

Its nest is placed on the ground among tufts of herbage and brushwood: the eggs are from six to ten in number, larger than those of the Common Ptarmigan, but much resembling them in colour.

There is perhaps a greater contrast between the summer and winter plumage of this bird than in any other of the Ptarmigans. The purity of the white in winter being contrasted by the rich colouring of summer, which in some individuals we have seen is of a pure uniform chestnut, with scarcely any trace of the zigzag bars of black.

Our Plate exhibits two birds, one in the pure white livery of winter, the other in an intermediate stage, namely, that of spring, the white having to a great extent given place, by a partial moult, to the coloured feathers of summer.

The sexes offer little difference at either season of the year. The first plumage of the young is coloured, which at the autumn moult is exchanged for white.

In summer the head, neck, back, scapularies, middle tail-feathers and coverts are of a pure chestnut more or less deep, and more or less blotched, with zigzag lines of black; breast, vent, centre of the wings, and quill-feathers pure white; lateral tail-feathers black; beak and nails horn colour; irides greyish white.

In winter the whole of the plumage is pure white.

The Plate represents two adult birds, in different stages of plumage, of the natural size.