

## COMMON PTARMIGAN.

*Lagopus mutus*, *Leach*.

Le Tetras Ptarmigan.

THE great care which Nature takes of her subjects is beautifully exemplified in the mountain Ptarmigans, whose habits and manners lead them to dwell in situations where they experience the greatest extremes of temperature, but against the effects of which they are most amply provided, not only by the assumption of a thick under-covering on the approach of winter, but by a total change in the colour of the plumage, which assimilates to the surface around them, and doubly tends to their safety and preservation, and renders them much less conspicuous to their enemies.

As might be supposed, the mountain Ptarmigans are less wary and shy in their disposition than the other Grouse, doubtless in consequence of being less disturbed by man, against whom the elevated regions they inhabit present an obstacle of too formidable a nature to be often encountered. The common Ptarmigan appears to enjoy an extensive range throughout the whole of the alpine districts of the middle of Europe, as well as in the northern part of the American continent; it is also found, but in less abundance, in Norway, Sweden, and Russia, countries in which the *Lagopus saliceti* is more especially diffused. In the British Islands it is found in all the mountain districts of Scotland, and it is reported to have inhabited Wales at a former period.

Our Plate will convey better than any description we can give, the great difference which exists between the plumage of summer and winter; a change, we may observe, which takes place by the process of a gradual moult.

The Ptarmigan's food consists, in summer, of the berries of alpine plants, and the young shoots of heath in the winter: when the mountains are covered with snow, it burrows beneath it in search of food, as well as for protection against the severities of the season. It incubates early in spring: the eggs, which are from twelve to fifteen in number, have a white ground colour mottled all over with reddish purple brown, and are placed, without any nest, on the bare ground. In the colour of their plumage, the young resemble the female in summer, and gradually change to white with the approach of winter.

The sexes are only to be distinguished by the somewhat larger size of the male, and the more intense black streak between the bill and the eyes.

In summer, the whole of the upper surface is minutely barred with black and deep ochreous yellow; the feathers of the breast and flanks are also of the same colour; the outer feathers of the tail are black; the under surface is greyish white; the primaries white; the shafts black, and these feathers are only moulted once during the year.

In winter, the whole of the plumage is pure white, except the outer tail-feathers, and the spot between the bill and the eyes, which are black.

The Plate represents an adult in the summer plumage, and one in the snowy livery of winter.