

RED GROUSE.

Lagopus Scoticus, *Lath.*

Le Tetras rouge.

THE Red Grouse, so renowned for the delicious flavour of its flesh, and so highly prized by the sportsman for the amusement it affords him while in pursuit of his favourite occupation, is so exclusively a native of the British Isles that it has never been discovered either on the adjacent continent or upon that of America. It is not a little surprising that a bird so widely spread over all the heathy districts of our islands, especially those of Scotland, Yorkshire, Westmoreland, Cumberland, Derbyshire, Wales, and many parts of Ireland, should be so strictly confined in its habitat as to be unknown in any other part of the globe, more especially as the Black Cock and Ptarmigan, neither of which possesses greater powers of flight, are dispersed over a large portion of its more northern latitudes. Wide and open moors and heaths, particularly such as are characterized by swelling hills and undulations, are the situations to which the Red Grouse gives preference. It pairs and commences the task of incubation very early in the spring, the female laying in March or April. The young keep in the company of their parents until the autumn, when the various broods assemble together and form large flocks, called *packs* by the sportsman, which continue associated till the spring, when, in obedience to the great law of nature, each selects its mate, and they then disperse over the moorlands to commence the work of reproduction.

Its food consists of the tender tops of the heath, and the fruit of the bilberry, cranberry, and various plants of the genus *Arbutus*; they also readily eat oats and other grain, hence those farmers whose lands adjoin heathy districts often suffer very considerably from their visits. Their flight is rapid, and is often sustained for a considerable distance, particularly after being harassed during the early part of the shooting season, which commences with these fine birds on the first of August.

They construct little or no nest, the eggs, which are from eight to twelve in number, of a reddish white blotched all over with dark brown, being deposited in a shallow cavity lined with a few loose grasses, generally placed in a tuft of heath.

The sexes may be distinguished by the male being darker in colour and by his having the red naked skin over the eye larger and of a more intense colour than in the female.

The whole of the plumage is of a rich chestnut brown marked with fine undulating bars of black, and often irregularly blotched with white; the belly and vent-feathers white; tail black, with the exception of the four middle feathers, which are ash brown barred with black; tarsi and toes clothed with greyish white downy feathers; naked skin over the eye red; irides hazel; bill and nails black.

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