

BLACK GROUSE.

Tetrao Tetrix, *Linn.*

Le Tétrás Birkhan.

THE European portion of the globe may be truly considered the exclusive habitat of this noble bird ; if however any exception is to be made to this rule it will probably be in favour of Siberia, but of its existence there we have no certain information. On the Continent it occurs commonly in Russia, Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, and some parts of Holland. From Norway and Sweden great numbers are annually brought to the London markets, and, together with the Capercaillie and Willow Ptarmigan, forms no trifling article of commerce. At the same time it is far from being uncommon in many parts of England, and in Scotland it is very abundant. Mr. Selby, who is at once a naturalist and a sportsman, has so well described the manners and habits of the Black Grouse, that we trust we shall be pardoned for transcribing the observations of this gentleman, whose splendid work on British Ornithology is too well known to need any eulogium from our pen.

“ The present species is now confined, in the southern parts of England, to a few of the wildest uncultivated tracts, such as the New Forest in Hampshire, Dartmoor, and Sedgemoor in Devonshire and the heaths of Somersetshire. It is also sparingly met with in Staffordshire and in parts of North Wales, where it is under strict preservation. In Northumberland it is very abundant, and has been rapidly increasing for some years past, which may be partly attributed to the numerous plantations that within that period have acquired considerable growth in the higher parts of the county, as supplying it both with food and protection. It abounds throughout the Highlands of Scotland, and is also found in some of the Hebrides. The bases of the hills in heathy and mountainous districts which are covered with a natural growth of birch, alder and willow, and intersected by morasses, clothed with long and coarse herbage, as well as the deep and wooded glens so frequently occurring in such extensive wastes, are the situations best suited to the habits of these birds, and most favourable to their increase. During the months of autumn and winter the males associate and live in flocks, but separate in March or April ; and, being polygamous, each individual chooses some particular station, from whence he drives all intruders, and for the possession of which, when they are numerous, desperate conflicts often take place. At this station he continues early every morning, and in the evening during the pairing-season, repeating his call of invitation to the other sex, and displaying a variety of attitudes, not unlike those of a Turkey Cock, accompanied by a crowing note, and by another similar to the noise made by the whetting of a scythe. At this season his plumage exhibits the richest glosses, and the red skin of his eyebrows assumes a superior intensity of colour. With the cause that urged their temporary separation, their animosity ceases, and the male birds again associate, and live harmoniously together.

“ The female deposits her eggs in May ; they are from six to ten in number, of a yellowish grey colour blotched with reddish brown. The nest is of most artless construction, being composed of a few dried stems of grass placed on the ground, under the shelter of a tall tuft or low bush, and generally in marshy spots, where long and coarse grasses abound. The young of both sexes at first resemble each other, and their plumage is that of the hen, with whom they continue till the autumn moult takes place ; at this time the males acquire the garb of the adult bird, and quitting their female parent, join the societies of their own sex. The food of the Black Grouse during the summer, chiefly consists of the seeds of some species of *Juncus*, the tender shoots of heath, and insects. In autumn, the crawberry or crawcrook (*Empetrum nigrum*), the cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*), the wortleberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*), and the trailing arbutus (*Arbutus uva-ursi*), afford it a plentiful subsistence. In winter and during severe and snowy weather, it eats the tops and buds of the birch and elder, as well as the embryo shoots of the fir tribe, which it is well enabled to obtain, as it is capable of perching upon trees without any difficulty. At this season of the year, in situations where arable land is interspersed with the wild tracts it inhabits, descending into the stubble-grounds, it feeds upon grain.

“ In the adult state the Black Grouse displays great shyness of character, and after the autumnal moult, is not easily approached within gunshot. Frequent attempts have been made to domesticate this bird, but without success ; and through all the trials that have taken place, it has never been known to breed in confinement.”

The flesh of this species is in such general request as a delicacy for the table, that we need make no remark on its excellence as an article of food.

The male has the head, neck, breast, back, and rump black with purple and blue reflections ; abdomen, wing-coverts, and tail deep black ; secondaries tipped with white, forming with the adjoining coverts a band across the wing ; under tail-coverts pure white ; feathers of the legs blackish grey ; bill black ; feet brown.

The female has the head, neck, all the upper surface and tail orange brown blotched and rayed with black ; breast and under surface pale brown barred with black and brown ; under tail-coverts white, rayed with black ; bill and feet as in the male.

We have figured an adult male and female, rather less than the natural size.