

TURTLE DOVE.

Columba Turtur, Linn.

La Colombe Tourterelle.

AMONG the feathered harbingers of spring, whose voice gladdens our woodlands when "winter is over and gone," this charming bird has ever been celebrated as a universal favourite. The Turtle Dove, as if by common consent, in every age and in every clime, has been considered by the poet as an emblem of serenity and peace, to grace and soften his pictures of rural harmony. No one can listen with indifference to its notes among the budding foliage of the trees, blending with the songs of other birds, and harmonizing with the genial influence of reviving Nature.

The Turtle Dove appears among us in April; but, like other birds that arrive about the same period, its appearance is influenced by the congeniality and mildness of the season. On arriving, it takes up its abode in the thickly wooded districts of our island, more especially the midland and southern counties, commencing the process of incubation as soon as the foliage becomes sufficiently dense to afford it shelter, selecting with indifference any tree, but more frequently the fir and such others as have their stems covered with ivy, and thus afford a secure resting-place for their rude flat nest. Upon this frame-work, composed of a few straight sticks most inartificially crossed, and interwoven with little care or skill, the female deposits two eggs of the purest white, which may be seen through the apertures of the nest, so slightly and so rudely is it built.

The Turtles pair, as do the Doves in general. The male and female sit by turns, alternately relieving each other, dividing the task of incubation and mutually providing for the wants of their unfledged progeny. The young the first autumn have only the indication of white on the neck, and the feathers of their plumage emarginated with distinct and lighter brown. They as well as their parents depart, in September and October, to the opposite shores of the European Continent, whence they proceed southward to more congenial climes. The Turtle Dove, however, is abundant over Continental Europe, extending far northward, but is not found, we believe, within the region of the arctic circle. Its general habits appear to be migratory; and if we may hazard a conjecture, we should consider that the northern and particularly the more woody portions of the coast of Africa form its winter domicile, as we have reason to know is the case with so many of our summer visitants. Its food consists of grain and vegetables, in search of which it frequents fields of corn for pease and other vegetable seeds.

The sexes differ in so trifling a degree, that the description of one will serve for both. The head and neck are varied with ash-colour, becoming richer and brighter on the breast; the sides of the neck are distinguished by a patch of black feathers uniformly tipped with white, so arranged as to produce a series of alternate lines of black and white; the back dark brown; the wing-coverts reddish brown, each feather having a large dark central mark; tips of the shoulders lead-colour; quill-feathers brown; the lower part of the belly and tail-coverts white; tail rounded; the two middle tail-feathers brown; the rest tipped with white; the external feather on each side having its external edge also white; irides and feet red. Length eleven inches.

Our Plate represents an adult male.