

ROCK DOVE.

Columba livia, *Linn.*

Le Colombe biset.

It is now almost universally conceded that this small and elegant species of Pigeon is the origin of the numerous domestic varieties which tenant our dovecotes and pigeonlofts. We are aware that the Stock Dove (*Columba ænas*, Linn.) has been reputed as the parent stock from whence they have sprung ; but taking the habits and manners of the two species into consideration, we cannot fail to perceive on which side the probability lies, the *Columba ænas* being altogether woodland in its habits and strictly migratory, while the present species is an inhabitant of precipitous rocks, towers, and steeples, never perching on trees, and generally remaining with us throughout the year. To this we may also add, that the white rump which distinguishes the Rock Dove is retained by its descendants in captivity, or if it disappear for a few generations in obedience to the art of the pigeon-fancier, whose skill consists in producing monstrosities in nature, it uniformly returns, or at least shows so strong a tendency so to do that still further crosses are required to prevent the white feathers from predominating. As regards the difference in size and form which our domestic Pigeons exhibit, we have only to observe that they show the same results of the influence of man upon the animals subject to his controul as do the dog, the sheep, and the ox. One thing is certain, as experience has well taught us, that domestication has a decided tendency to produce both an increase of size and a variation of form and colours.

The habitat of the Rock Dove appears to be extended throughout Europe and the greater portion of Africa, particularly its northern regions, everywhere frequenting the rocks which border the ocean, islands, precipices, and ruined buildings adjacent to the coast. Along the shores of the Mediterranean and in the island of Teneriffe it abounds in great multitudes, and in our own islands it is nowhere more plentiful than in the Orkneys and along the coasts of Wales ; it is, however, also to be met with wherever abrupt rocks near the sea afford it a congenial asylum.

Like the rest of its genus, it lays two white eggs, on the shelves of the rocks, and is said to breed twice or thrice in the season.

Its food consists of grain and various seeds, to which, according to Montagu, are added the inhabitants of various land shells, particularly that of the *Helix virgata*.

The colouring, which is the same in both male and female, is as follows :

The head, face, and throat deep blueish grey ; neck and chest beautiful green and purple, changing in every light ; upper and under surface delicate blueish grey, with the exception of the rump, which is white ; two distinct bars of black pass across the wings ; quills and tail dark grey, the latter tipped with black ; bill brown ; legs and irides red.

The figure represents the bird of the natural size.