

Genus COLUMBA.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* of mean strength, straight at the base, with the tip or horny point compressed and deflected. Base of the upper mandible covered with a soft, protuberant, cartilaginous substance in which the *nostrils* are lodged towards the middle of the bill, forming a longitudinal cleft. *Feet* with three toes before, entirely divided, and with one hind toe articulated on the heel. *Claws* short, strong and blunt. *Wings* of moderate length and acuminate ; the first quill rather shorter than the second, which is the longest.

WOOD PIGEON.

Columba palumbus, *Linn.*

La Colombe ramier.

THE Wood Pigeon, or Ring-dove, is, in Europe, the largest species of the genus to which it belongs, and is sufficiently common over the whole of the European continent to be exceedingly well known, but is considerably more abundant as well as more stationary in the southern parts. It lives principally in woods and forests, and feeds upon all kinds of grain, the leaves of some plants, corn, beech-nuts and acorns. In the British Islands the Wood Pigeon is a constant resident in the large tracts of wooded and inclosed districts, feeding during summer and autumn on the leaves of young clover, green corn, peas, beans, &c., and resorting in flocks during the severer weather of winter to turnip-fields, and to the woods for berries and the harder produce of oaks and other trees.

Early in the spring these birds begin to pair ; they make a flat thin nest of small sticks loosely put together, a fir tree in a grove or plantation being a favourite receptacle, on one of the horizontal branches of which the nest is placed, generally twelve or sixteen feet from the ground. The eggs are two in number, oval and white ; the young birds are fed from the softened contents of the parent's crop, and two or three pair of young birds, generally a male and a female in each pair, are produced in the season. Ornithologists agree that this species of Pigeon has never been induced to breed in confinement. Montagu says, "We have been at considerable pains to endeavour to domesticate this bird ; and though we have tamed them within doors so as to be exceedingly troublesome, yet we never could produce a breed, either by themselves or with the tame Pigeon. Two were bred up together with a male Pigeon, and were so tame as to eat out of the hand, but as they showed no signs of prolificacy in the spring, were suffered to take their liberty in the month of June, by opening the window of the room in which they were confined, thinking the Pigeon might induce them to return to their usual place of abode, either for food or to roost ; but they instantly took to their natural habits, and we saw no more of them, although the Pigeon continued to return."

For the information and encouragement of those who may have the inclination as well as the opportunity of making further trials, with the view to endeavour to domesticate so large and valuable a species, we are enabled to state, that a pair of these birds in the dove-house at the Gardens of the Zoological Society in the Regent's Park, built a nest and produced two eggs, but unfortunately during the period of incubation, in which the male assists, the eggs were broken by some of the numerous other birds, most of them of the same genus, with which they were confined.

The head, coverts of the wings and scapulars are of a deep blueish ash colour ; the neck in front and the breast vinaceous, beautifully glossed with green and copper colour, changeable in different lights ; on each side of the neck is a large patch of glossy white ; back and tail ash colour, the latter black at the end ; vent and thighs white, tinged with ash colour ; the bastard wing almost black, near which a few of the coverts are white, forming a line down to the greater quills, which are dusky, edged with white ; beak pale flesh colour, the tip reddish orange ; legs and feet red.

Like most of the genus, the Wood Pigeon has great powers of flight. There is little or no distinction in the plumage of the sexes ; but the male is the larger bird of the two.

Young birds before their first moult have neither the white space on the sides of the neck, nor the brilliant and glossy appearance of the plumage of adult birds : the whole of their colours also are less pure and decided.

We have figured an old and a young bird of the natural size.