

Genus CUCULUS, *Linn.*

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* rather compressed, slightly curved, of mean length; gape wide; lower mandible following the curve of the upper. *Nostrils* basal, round, margined by a naked and prominent membrane. *Wings* of mean length, acuminate; the first quill-feather short, the third the longest. *Tail* more or less wedge-shaped. *Tarsi* very short, feathered a little below the knee. *Feet* with two toes before, and two behind, the outer hind toe partly reversible; the anterior toe joined at the base, the posterior ones entirely divided.

COMMON CUCKOO.

Cuculus canorus, *Linn.*

Le Coucou gris.

In stating that the Cuckoo is a migratory bird, we add nothing to what is already well known; it is in fact the most celebrated harbinger of returning vivification, and its familiar call is always hailed with pleasure as the token of returning spring and the fresh awakening of Nature from her winter's sleep.

As is the case with most of our summer visitants, the food of the Cuckoo consists principally of insects, especially of caterpillars, larvæ, &c., a proof that its winter sojourn is in climates where this kind of diet is ever to be obtained; hence Africa, a place of winter residence for so many of our migratory birds, affords to this species, among the rest, a welcome retreat. Its range extends over nearly all parts of Europe, and a great portion of Africa and Asia; specimens received from the Himalaya mountains and other parts of India, being strictly similar to those taken in our own island. The Cuckoo does not construct a nest for the reception of its eggs, but deposits them in those of other birds of a much smaller size and of insectivorous appetites: the species most commonly chosen as the foster parents of its offspring are the Titlark, Hedge Sparrow, &c. In the nest of these birds it deposits a single egg; but whether it lays only one or more, is a point at present not ascertained, but it is most probable that it lays several, and deposits them in as many different nests. Shortly after the young Cuckoo is excluded from the shell, with the offspring of its foster parent, it attains to so much strength as to be able to eject them from the nest, itself remaining the sole occupant; and in fact, from its large size and ravenous appetite, it is as much as these substituted parents can do to supply it with food. Mr. J. E. Gray, of the British Museum, from observations made by himself, asserts that the Cuckoo does not uniformly desert her offspring to the extent that has been supposed, but, on the contrary, that she continues in the precincts where the eggs are deposited, and in all probability takes the young under her protection when they are sufficiently fledged to leave the nest. They retire in August, at least the adults, which in their migration always precede the young. The birds of the year quit this country in September.

The sexes may at all times be distinguished by the male being the largest and most robust, and by having the whole of the neck and chest of a fine grey, while the female has the sides of the chest obscurely rayed with markings of brown.

On dissecting this bird in the early months of spring, we cannot fail to observe a great dilatation of the throat, the membrane covering which internally is of a fine rich orange: the cause of this we have not been able to determine satisfactorily; it may be connected with the organs of voice. The circumstance of the stomach of the Cuckoo containing a lining of numerous hairs, was for a long period a matter of great curiosity to naturalists; but these are now considered to be a deposition of the hairs from the larger caterpillars upon which it feeds, and which it swallows whole.

The young birds differ much from the adults, having at first the upper surface of deep brown margined and spotted with reddish brown, the feathers on the forehead margined with white, and a patch of the same colour at the back of the head, the throat and under surface yellowish white transversely barred with black, the irides brown, and the legs pale yellow. Young females are more reddish brown, and have only a faint indication of the white patch at the back of the head.

The adults have the head, neck, breast, and upper surface bluish grey, which is deepest on the wing-coverts; the under surface, thighs, and under tail-coverts white transversely barred with black; the inner webs of the quill-feathers marked with oval white spots; the tail black with small oblong white spots along the shafts, and the tips white; the bill blackish brown at the tip and yellowish at the base; the gape and eyelids rich orange; the irides gamboge yellow, and the legs and feet lemon yellow.

We have figured an adult, and the young bird in its first autumn, of the natural size.