

Genus PICUS.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* long, straight, pyramidal; and cutting towards the point. *Nostrils* basal, oval, inclosed by membrane; covered with hairs, directed forwards. *Tongue* long, taper, capable of protrusion, armed with a horny tip. *Toes* four; in pairs; antagonizing; the front pair united at their base. *Tail*, twelve feathers; graduated short; shafts stiff and elastic. *Wings*, third and fourth *quill-feather* longest.

GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER.

Picus Martius, Linn.

Le Pic noir.

THE Woodpeckers form a family more numerous perhaps than any other in the whole range of Ornithology; and, if we except Australia and the South Sea Islands, are equally extended over the old and new portions of the globe. Abundant, however, as the species may be, they are so united by a pervading similarity of habits, food, manners, and even colouring, as to constitute a group pre-eminently natural and well defined;—hence the description of one species is to a great extent applicable to all: still, however, as is the case in all natural families, differences sufficiently characteristic exist to warrant a subdivision into groups more or less typical.

Among the true or typical Woodpeckers, may be placed the *Picus Martius*; at once exhibiting the generic characters in their highest degree of developement, it exceeds in size all its congeners of the Old World, and indeed is inferior only to the Ivory-billed Woodpecker of the United States of America.

However plentiful it might have been when our Island was less cultivated than at present, and covered with extensive forests, certain it is that this bird is now so seldom to be met with, if at all, as scarcely to come under the designation of a British species. According to M. Temminck it is rare even in France and Germany, and must be sought for in the more northern regions of Europe, as Norway, Sweden, Poland, Russia, and also Siberia, to which in the present day its habitat is almost entirely confined.

At the head of a family of true Climbers, the habits of the Great Black Woodpecker are in conformity with its wants and its means of supplying them. We need hardly say that it is on the bark of trees more exclusively that the Woodpecker finds its food, and to this end are its powers and organs adapted. If we examine the toes of the present species, which are to be taken as illustrative of form in the whole of the family, (with the exception of a single limited group,) we find them long and powerful, furnished with strong claws, admirably adapted for grasping or clinging to the rough inequalities of the bark: besides this, they are placed in pairs, so as in some measure to antagonize; but not, as generally stated, two before and two behind, for one pair is lateral, and diverges from the other at an acute angle, so as to be applied to the convexity of the tree, and thus render the grasp close and firm. The tail is composed of stiff feathers, the shafts of which taper gradually from the base to the extremities, which curving inward when pressed against a tree, not only form a fulcrum for the support of the body, but by their elasticity tend to propel it forwards. This provision, the more needed from the posterior situation of the legs, is admirably calculated for ascending; and having explored the bark by a spiral course, the Woodpecker flies off to the next tree, to repeat the same process.

The flight of the present species is undulating, seldom protracted to any extent, but limited to a transit from tree to tree in the seclusion of its native woods.

Its food consists of the larvæ of wasps, bees, and other insects: in addition, however, it devours fruits, berries, and nuts with avidity.

The female selects the hollows of old trees, in which she deposits two or three eggs of an ivory whiteness.

The two sexes differ but little in plumage,—the crimson crown distinguishing the male, that colour being in the female confined to the occiput; the rest of the plumage is a deep jet-black; the irides yellowish-white; the naked circle round the eye and the feet black; the bill horn-colour, black at the tip.

The young males are characterized by the irides being of a light ash colour; the crown of the head is marked with alternate spots of red and black, which give place gradually to the bright uniform crimson of maturity.

The length of an adult bird is about fifteen inches; and our Plate represents a male and female of their natural size.