

## Genus PYRRHOCORAX.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* shorter than the head, conical, and somewhat bent towards the tip, with a slight notch at the point. *Nostrils* basal, lateral, and conical, with fine hairs directed forwards. *Tarsi* and *toes* strong and robust. *Nails* strong and hooked. *Wings* long, the fourth and fifth quill-feathers the longest.

## ALPINE CHOUGH.

*Pyrrhocolax Pyrrhocolax.*

Le Choquard des Alpes.

IN all large families like that of the *Corvidæ*, we seldom fail to meet with various anomalous and isolated forms, which appear to stand out from the general group, amalgamating with none of the principal or more numerous filled sections into which the family is divided, but appearing like links of a chain connecting the family with others widely aberrant from it. Though we cannot in every instance trace a due succession of these links, the continuity of the chain being often interrupted, these forms seem like radiations from a given centre, branching out in lines tending in some instances towards even opposite points. The Nutcracker, for example, which belongs to the family of *Corvidæ*, indicates in its form, habits, and manners, an approximation to the *Picidæ* too strong to be overlooked by the discerning naturalist: the Red-legged Chough is by many regarded as tending towards the *Promeropidæ*, while the present bird claims an affinity with some of the *Merulidæ*. In the instances we have here adduced, we may observe that each example is the type and sole known representative of their respective genera with the exception of the Nutcracker, the genus to which it is assigned containing two species.

The natural situations which the Alpine Chough inhabits are the high rude and precipitous elevations of the Alpine districts of central Europe. During the summer it seldom descends far below the line of perpetual snow, but in severe winters it is sometimes driven from its inaccessible heights to the lower mountain ranges, more perhaps in order to obtain food than to avoid the severity of the cold.

Berries, grains, insects, worms, &c., constitute the food of the Alpine Chough; it is, indeed, almost omnivorous in its appetite.

Its nest is usually made in a cleft or fissure of the rock, and sometimes in the chinks of the walls of old buildings among the Alpine heights. The eggs are from three to five in number, of a dull white blotched with yellowish brown.

When adult, the plumage of this bird is of a uniform black; the beak orange; the tarsi and toes vermilion, the under sides of the latter being black; irides dark brown.

Both sexes are alike. In the young of the year the black is less pure; the beak is blackish, the base of the under mandible being yellow; and the tarsi are black. After the first moult the beak becomes yellowish, and the tarsi pass by shades of brown to red, their colour in the female being more obscure.

We have figured an adult of the natural size.