

Genus PICA.

Gen. Char. Head strong, compressed laterally, slightly arched and hooked at the tip. Nostrils basal, open, protected by a covering of bristly feathers directed forwards. Vex with three toes before, and one behind, entirely divided. Wings longer than the middle toe. Wings rounded. Tail very short; the fourth the longest. Tail long and graduated. The two middle feathers proceeding beyond the rest.

MAGPIE.

Pica canadensis, Vieill.

La Vie.

The celebrated naturalist, Ray, appears to have chiefly represented the generic character of this bird, which he considered sufficiently distinct to warrant his separating it from the genus *Corvus*, to which it belongs, and the authorities of his school have since followed it. He, however, agrees with him in considering the difference it exhibits in manners, habits, and general appearance, sufficient to entitle it to be ranked under a separate genus.

The Magpie is one of the most remarkable birds which grace our country; the elegance of its shape, and the glossy black of its plumage, ever varying with iridescent tints, contrasted with the purity of the white, render it altogether the most conspicuous bird in our parks and woodlands—bold and spirited, full of life and animation, ever noisy, prying, and impatient; the first to show signs of the approach of the fox or hawk, and the first to lead the chasing crowd which collects to witness the impending encounter. Evidently distinguished by a keen dark eye, an air of cunning, intelligence, and familiar boldness, he has ever been an amusing favourite in captivity; but his propensity for thieving has tarnished his good name. An unsuspicious rascal where game is preserved, no bird can be of greater annoyance to gamekeepers; one of his favourite objects of search being the eggs of other birds; nor are the unguarded young safe from his attacks. His rapacity however is not confined to the park or the preserve alone, but he is also disposed to venture within the immediate precincts of man, for the purpose of committing depredations on the young broods of domestic poultry. (Innocuous to a great extent, his usual food consists of the larvae of insects, grubs, snails, and worms; but he does not refuse carrion, grain, or fruit.)

This bird is common, not only throughout Europe and the temperate parts of Asia, but also in the United States and the northern regions of America; generally dwelling in flocks throughout the greater part of the year, but congregating in considerable numbers as the breeding season approaches, when they are extremely and animated, displaying a variety of motions and actions, indicating their excitement, and well calculated to show off their plumage and form.

The only difference between the sexes appears to be the rather smaller size of the female. There is a peculiar circumstance respecting the incubation of the Magpie, which has led to a supposition among some naturalists that there are in reality two distinct kinds. The fact to which we allude is the alternate and indeed opposite situation which, without any apparent cause, these birds select for their nests;—in some cases a hedge-row, in others the topmost branches of a lofty tree; but as in their general manner and plumage we can trace no dissimilarity, this circumstance alone, unsupported by others, does not warrant us in making any such distinction.

The desire of not displaying by this bird in the construction of its nest has been noticed by the observers of nature in all ages: it is, indeed, framed and contrived with every attention to security and concealment; not that it is in reality concealed, for its site and situation render it singularly conspicuous.

The nest is externally constructed of sticks and twigs interwoven with great labour, becoming more compact as the building proceeds; within these twigs is disposed an internal coating of mud, and that again is neatly lined with fine grasses. The body of the nest is surmounted by a dome of witherwork, having an aperture just large enough to admit the parent bird, who generally sits with her head to the hole, ready to quit the nest on the slightest alarm.

The female lays six or seven eggs, mottled all over with red-brown on a ground of greenish white. The young soon assume the plumage of the adult, and follow the parent birds till the end of autumn. Our Plate represents an adult male. The head, throat, neck, upper part of the chest, and back, of a deep black; wing-feathers as the inner webs white, on the outer, bluish green; tail-feathers graduated, of a greenish-black, with brown reflections; scapulars, breast and belly, pure white; beak, irides, legs and feet, black.