

Genus STURNUS, *Linn.*

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* straight, depressed, rather obtuse, and slightly subulated. *Nostrils* basal, lateral, and partly closed by a prominent rim. *Wings* long, the first feather very short, the second and third the longest and equal. *Feet* with three toes before and one behind; the middle toe united to the outer one as far as the first joint.

STARLING.

Sturnus vulgaris, Linn.

L'Etourneau vulgaire.

THE species formerly arranged under the old Linnean genus *Sturnus* have been separated into several distinct genera, bearing their appropriate characters, and which now form an interesting family, the members of which are very generally dispersed over the globe. The value of such separations is obvious to the Ornithologist, as by a knowledge of the characters of each genus he is at once enabled to ascertain its true situation.

The number of species contained in the genus *Sturnus*, as now restricted, is very limited, and are strictly confined to the Old World; two of these species are natives of Europe.

The Starling is a social and familiar bird, and were it less common would be highly esteemed, its habits and manners, and the variety of its plumage at certain ages and seasons being very interesting. Its range is extensive, being dispersed in considerable abundance over Europe; it is also found at the Cape of Good Hope, and from its being so numerous on the northern coast of Africa, we doubt not that they traverse the whole of that continent. We have received it from the Himalaya Mountains, and have ascertained that it is found as far east as China. It is a bold and spirited little bird, but soon becomes reconciled to confinement, where it not only sings sweetly, but may be taught to articulate words and even sentences. In a state of nature it is very harmless, and renders great service to the farmer, by clearing his pastures and fields from grubs, worms, and various other insects, on which it almost exclusively subsists. When in search of food, it runs along the ground with great celerity, prying and peeping with a cunning eye under every loose sod and tuft of grass.

The Starling congregates in large flocks during autumn and winter, and may be often observed in the company of rooks, daws, and fieldfares. On the approach of evening many of these flocks unite, and before going to roost this immense body may be seen traversing with undulating sweeps and evolutions the immediate neighbourhood of their resting-place. They prefer for this purpose secluded and warm situations, such as thickly set reed-beds, coppices, or plantations of fir. They pair early in the spring, and then spread themselves over the face of the country in search of a convenient breeding-place, some selecting the holes of trees, others old towers and ruins, and others the deserted nests of rooks, &c. They lay four or five eggs of a delicate pale blue. The young during the first autumn are characterized by the stage of plumage represented in the upper bird of our Plate; they begin to change in October, which is effected by a moult, and in the course of a week or two after are adorned with feathers, the whole of which, with the exception of the primaries and tail, are terminated with a large white or reddish white spot; the rest of the feathers being of a rich green with bronze reflections, as in the lower bird of the Plate. From this their spotted plumage they gradually change to that of the centre bird, having a fine yellow bill, and spotless lanceolate feathers upon the breast and underparts,—a state of plumage which is certainly not attained till the third year; and between these two latter stages, birds may be found in the same flock which exhibit plumage in every intermediate state. It may be observed, that as the feathers become elongated the white spot at the tip becomes less and less, till in the old bird it is lost. The males and females at the same age offer but little difference in plumage; the male, however, is generally the most brilliant in his markings.

We consider that these birds breed at a year old, although their plumage, as above stated, afterwards undergoes a considerable change.

The plumage of the old male in spring is peculiarly beautiful, not so much from its variety of colours as from the glossy metallic hues with which it seems burnished, exhibiting ever-changing reflections of purple and golden green; the upper wing-coverts marked with small triangular whitish spots; the lower coverts and the tail slightly edged with white; beak yellow; feet reddish flesh-colour:—the centre figure in our Plate exhibits the bird in this stage.