

COMMON CROSSBILL.

Loxia curvirostra, Linn.

La Bec croisé commun, ou des Pines.

ALTHOUGH the Common Crossbill frequently visits our island in large numbers at opposite seasons of the year, it can scarcely be considered as a permanent resident; a few isolated instances, it is true, are on record of its having bred with us, but its natural habitat is undoubtedly the high northern regions of the old continent. Mr. Selby informs us that in the year 1821 immense flocks visited this kingdom and scattered themselves among the woods and plantations, particularly where fir-trees were abundant. "Their first appearance was early in June, and the greater part of the flocks seemed to consist of females and the young of the year (the males possessing the red plumage assumed from the first moult to the end of that year). Many of the females I killed showed plainly, from the denuded state of their breasts, that they had been engaged in incubation some time previous to their arrival; which circumstance agrees with the account given of the early period at which they breed in the higher latitudes. Since this period Crossbills have repeatedly visited us, but never in such numbers as in 1821."

We may here observe that in the minds of many naturalists some doubts still exist, and until lately in our own, as to whether the rich rosy red colouring assumed by this bird is characteristic of the breeding-season or the permanent livery of the adult male. During our recent visit to Vienna, we had an opportunity of observing both sexes in every stage, an examination of which afforded us abundant proofs that the red plumage is acquired during the first autumn, for we saw many lately fledged that had their plumage thickly spotted; others, that had partially lost their spotted appearance, and had partly assumed the red colouring; and others that had their feathers entirely tinted of this colour: while the adults were, as most ornithologists have stated, characterized by a plumage of olive green, which appears to be permanent. In the bird-market of Vienna multitudes of Crossbills are exposed for sale, with Swallows, Martins, and many others of the smaller birds, for the purposes of the table: of these the Crossbill appeared to be especially in request, doubtless from its superiority of size, and from the nature of its food rendering its flesh both sweet and well tasted, to the truth of which we ourselves can bear testimony.

The nest of the Crossbill is placed in the fork of the topmost branches of the fir and other trees, and is composed of moss and lichens, generally lined with feathers: the eggs are four or five in number, of a greyish white marked at the larger end with irregular patches of bright blood red, the remainder minutely speckled with the same colour. Its note is a kind of twitter, uttered while occupied in extracting the seed from the fir cone which constitutes its principal food, and for obtaining which its bill is expressly adapted. The fruit of the orchard is sometimes attacked by this bird, when they commit considerable devastation among the apples and pears by splitting them asunder for the sake of the seeds within. Among the branches it is extremely active and agile, clinging in every possible direction by means of its bill and claws, like the members of the genus *Psittacus*.

Of all the small birds, the Crossbill seems to be the least distrustful of man, and when flocks arrive in our island it is well known that numbers are taken by means of a birdlimed twig, attached to the end of a fishing-rod placed across their back.

The green plumage referred to above resembles so closely that of the adult Parrot Crossbill, that any lengthened description will be unnecessary; nor, after what has been said above, do we consider it requisite to give any further account of the young.

Our Plate represents an adult and a young bird of the year, of the natural size.