

## SISKIN, OR ABERDEVINE.

*Carduelis spinus*, Steph.

Le Gros-bec tarin.

THE mild and docile disposition which this lovely little bird evinces while in captivity, in unison with its tame and harmless manners in a state of nature, secure for it a more than usual degree of friendship and interest. It is not in the cheerful month of May, when all nature is alive to the harmonies of our newly arrived summer visitors, and when the freshly emerged foliage of our woods and gardens presents a universal nosegay, that the little emigrant before us is to be observed; for at that time it has bidden us farewell, to visit more northern climes, whither it has retired for the purpose of breeding and rearing its young. Its native habitat appears to be the higher regions of the European continent, and it is only in its most northern portions that it has, with any degree of certainty, been known to incubate. M. Temminck states that it is found in Sweden, but not in Siberia, and that it passes periodically into France and Holland. At the close of autumn, in the month of November, when the groves are deserted by our southern visitors, who no longer find their wonted sustenance of fruits and insects, the Siskin migrates from its summer retreat again to visit its favourite localities till the following spring.

Most authors have enumerated the Siskin among the rarities of our native birds; on the contrary, there are few more common and few more universally dispersed, particularly where birch and alder abound. It seems to evince a great partiality for these trees, which generally grow by the sides of small streams and in low marshy lands: in such situations the Siskin may be observed in considerable flocks, often in the company of the Lesser Redpole, which it greatly resembles in its actions, feeding on the tender buds and seeds of the alder, and clinging to the outermost branches, much in the manner of the Tits, although compared with them it is much less expert and lively. We have never seen the Siskin feeding on the seeds of the thistle, dandelion, or other plants which form the principal sustenance of its nearly allied congener the Goldfinch, nor is its bill so perfectly adapted for procuring food of this peculiar nature, this organ being more abbreviated and less conical: the bird has also a much shorter tarsus.

Although we do not admit the propriety of separating the present, with one or two other nearly allied European species, and also several from other parts of the globe, from the Goldfinch, the type of the genus *Carduelis*, nevertheless we may mention, that the slight variation of form alluded to has a great influence over their natural habits and economy.

So much is the Siskin esteemed for its mild and docile disposition and pleasing song, that it is highly valued for the aviary, and indeed is yearly captured in considerable numbers, and sold in London, either for the purpose of pairing with Canaries or Goldfinches, or to be shut in a solitary prison to serenade the ears of some tenant of the garret.

The plumage of the sexes differs considerably. The male has his markings and colouring more contrasted and bright during summer: the black then becomes more pure and distinct, and the sides and under parts more vivid.

Much contradiction exists respecting the places the Siskin chooses for nidification. M. Temminck states that it constructs its nest on the highest branches of the pine, and in such a situation were nests seen by Sir W. Jardine and Mr. Selby near Killin: it is now ascertained to breed in some of the pine forests of the Highlands of Scotland. The eggs are four or five in number, of a pale blueish white, speckled with purplish red.

The male has the top of the head and throat black; over each eye runs a broad stripe of yellow; the back of the neck, back and shoulders of a yellowish olive, with longitudinal patches of brown; the lower part of the throat, chest and belly yellow; the thighs and vent grey, with elongated stripes of brown; a band of yellow across the wings, which are black; the outer edge of the quill-feathers slightly margined with yellow; the tail-feathers yellow at the base, and black at the extremities; bill light brown.

The female differs from the male in the absence of the black on the head and throat, and the fine yellow which pervades the breast, that part being grey, with longitudinal stripes of dark brown; in the whole of the upper surface being darker, and in the fine yellow at the base of the tail being almost wanting.

The Plate represents a male and female of the natural size.