

Genus PYRGITA, Cuv.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* strong, conical, longer than deep; upper mandible slightly curved; tip emarginate; culmen slightly raised; lower mandible compressed and smaller than the upper. *Nostrils* lateral, immediately behind the bulging base of the upper mandible, round, and nearly concealed by small plumes. *Wings*: the second quill-feather rather the longest. *Tarsi* nearly as long as the middle toe. *Toes* three before and one behind, those in front divided: claws sharp and curved, that of the hind toe rather larger than that of the middle. *Tail* square or very slightly forked.

COMMON SPARROW.

Pyrgita domestica, Cuv.

Le Gros-bec Moineau.

OF the four species of this group indigenous to Europe, no one is more extensively spread or more generally known than the Common Sparrow, a bird with which we are all so well acquainted that to enter into the details of its history seems almost superfluous. We are informed that in Italy and Spain its place is supplied by two species peculiar to those countries, viz. *Pyrg. Cisalpina* and *Pyrg. Hispaniolensis*, but with this exception it is undoubtedly spread over the whole of Central Europe; it also occurs in Northern Africa and in the hilly districts of India. In England it is stationary throughout the year, congregating in flocks in autumn and winter, but in summer dwelling and breeding either in small companies or in pairs. Accommodating itself to all situations, it breeds indifferently among the branches or in the holes of trees and under the eaves of houses, not unfrequently usurping the nest of the Common Martin (*Hirundo urbica*); but never far from the habitation of man, to whose presence it appears perfectly indifferent, hence we see it as abundant in the largest cities as in the smallest villages. The nest when placed in a tree is of a domed form, carelessly constructed of straw, grass, and any materials at hand, but always lined with feathers: the eggs are five or six in number, of a greyish white spotted with brown. The food of the Common Sparrow consists, during a great part of the year, principally of seeds and grain of different kinds, which in summer are in a great measure exchanged for insects and their larvæ, with which it invariably feeds its young. This bird is destroyed in vast numbers in many agricultural districts, on account of the supposed injury it inflicts upon the farmer by the destruction of his corn; but we much question whether this practice can be fairly justified, for we conceive that the injury it may inflict is more than counterbalanced by the benefit accruing from the havoc it commits among the insect tribes, which are in fact the real enemies of the farmer, the fruit-grower, and every cultivator of the land; and we ourselves incline to think that it would be better to protect the grain or even to sacrifice some portion of it, than utterly to exterminate a creature which has, no doubt, been wisely appointed to fill its place in the great scheme of creation.

The male Sparrow is really a pretty bird when seen undisguised by the smoke and dirt which disfigure its plumage in our larger towns and cities: the crown of the head is bluish grey, back of the neck and stripe from the eye rich chestnut; cheeks and sides of the neck greyish white; throat and chest black; upper surface rich brown dashed with black; a white bar across the shoulders; under surface greyish white; feet and bill black in summer and brown in winter.

The female has the upper surface dull brown; the under surface greyish brown; and the feet and bill brown at all seasons.

TREE SPARROW.

Pyrgita montana, Cuv.

Le Gros-bec Friquet.

UNLIKE the preceding species, which loves to dwell in the streets of our towns, this affects the open country, where every field and wood affords it food and a congenial habitat. In the British Islands it is extremely local in its range, being scarcely known in some counties, while in others, Essex, Cambridgeshire, &c., it is tolerably abundant. It is found in most parts of central and southern Europe, and we have also received it from the Himalaya mountains and from China. The food consists of seeds, grains, and insects. Like all the other members of this restricted genus it is devoid of song. The nest is constructed in the holes of stunted trees and pollards, and very closely resembles that of the Common Sparrow, as do the eggs also, except that they are smaller. The sexes offer no difference in the colouring of the plumage. The Tree Sparrow may be distinguished from the male of the common species by its being much smaller in size, and by its having the top of the head rich chestnut brown; a patch of black on the ear-coverts, and two narrow bars of yellowish white across the shoulders.

The Plate represents a male and female of the Common Sparrow, and an adult male of the Tree Sparrow.