

ORTOLAN BUNTING.

Emberiza hortulana, *Linn.*

L'Ortolan.

THIS bird has long been celebrated as one of the greatest delicacies of the table throughout the countries of France and Italy, for which purpose numbers are annually caught and artificially fattened. The South of Europe and the northern portions of Africa appear to be its natural habitat; it is nevertheless generally spread throughout continental Europe, even as far as Holland, Sweden and Russia. The British Isles are only occasionally visited; one of the examples, a male, now in the museum of the Natural History Society at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, having been taken on the Yorkshire coast. It is not improbable, however, that we should find this bird more frequent than it is believed to be, were it not overlooked from its similarity to the Yellow Bunting (*Emberiza citrinella*, Linn.).

Dr. Latham informs us that it is strictly migratory in its habits and is frequently taken in the spring and autumn at Gibraltar, whence we may suppose that the greater number pass over to Africa and make that continent their winter residence. It is during these migrations, when vast numbers are assembled together, that they are caught in traps, principally in Italy and the South of France, and are then kept by being placed in a dark room, and there fed with plenty of oats and millet-seed, upon which they quickly fatten. From the accounts of various authors, it would appear that they offer several variations of plumage, caused by peculiar diet and other circumstances: these varieties, being purely accidental, are not to be considered in the same light as the variations of plumage which occur in many other birds.

The nest of the Ortolan is constructed of fibres and leaves, and placed in the most convenient situation the locality may afford, most commonly in low bushes and hedges, but sometimes on the ground among corn. The eggs are five in number, of a reddish grey marked with streaks of brown.

The plumage of the male is much more lively than that of the female. The top of the head is greenish olive; an edging of white feathers forms the margin of the eyelid; ear-coverts brown; the throat, the sides of the face, below the eye, and the chest, are of a delicate yellow; the upper surface reddish brown, the feathers of the back and wings being dashed in their centre with black; the under surface pale tawny; beak and legs flesh-coloured.

In the female, the whole of the upper surface is greyish brown, with a number of small black lines on the head, the feathers of the back having their centres black also; the throat is pale yellow, and is bounded by a range of brown spots; the rest of the under surface is pale brownish red; the eyelid is edged with white as in the male.

The Plate represents an adult male and female of the natural size.