

## SKY LARK.

*Alauda arvensis*, *Linn.*

L'Alouette des champs.

THIS well-known bird, with whose brilliant and varied song we are all so intimately acquainted, is not only common in our own island, but is equally abundant over the greater portion of Europe and the adjacent parts of Asia and Africa. In spring and summer it lives in pairs, but is gregarious during winter, associating towards the close of autumn in vast flocks, which are joined by migratory visitants from more northern districts, and if the winter be severe they all progress to the warmer latitudes of Europe and of Africa.

The Sky Lark pairs early in the spring, and during the season of incubation the song of the male, almost always uttered in the air, often at a considerable elevation, is peculiarly fine and melodious; and when, as is sometimes the case, several are heard in concert, the effect of their mingled tones is exceedingly gratifying, and the more so as they are an earnest of a reviving spring, which one might almost fancy they are welcoming with songs of rejoicing. While her mate is thus engaged the female is occupied on the ground, either preparing her nest or listening to his strains of adulation. In the early part of the season, while the pairing takes place, the males may be observed chasing each other, and exhibiting considerable pugnacity of disposition. As soon as the young are hatched the most assiduous attention is paid to them by their parents, and so deeply are they engrossed in this duty, that the song of the male is less frequently heard, and all the actions of both parents are far less sprightly and animated.

The flight of the Sky Lark is vigorous, and the bird is capable both of sweeping along with immense rapidity, or of sustaining itself in the air at almost any height for a considerable length of time; in the latter case, and while pouring forth its song, the wings have a peculiar vibratory motion.

Its food consists of grain, trefoil, and insects.

The only external difference in the sexes is, that the female is less brilliant in her markings, and has a shorter crest; she is moreover somewhat less in size, and the hind claw is shorter.

The young previously to the first moult are distinguished by all the feathers being edged with light yellowish grey.

The adult male has the bill brownish black; the general plumage yellowish brown, each feather with a darker central mark; a pale streak of yellowish white over the eye; the neck and breast pale brown spotted with brown of a darker tint; the tail brown, the outer feathers having the tip and the exterior web white, and the next with the outer web only white; the centre of the belly white, and the feet and claws light brown.

We have figured an adult male and a young bird of the natural size.