

BLUE TIT.

Parus cœruleus, Linn.

La Mesange bleue.

FEW birds can be more familiar to our readers than the Blue Tit, the habits and manners of which every one must have repeatedly noticed, since of all the species it is the most common in our gardens and around the precincts of our habitations, and it is exceeded by none in its sprightly actions and in the address and activity with which it searches the extremities and shoots of trees in quest of its insect food. The mischief it does to the tender buds of trees, in stripping off their envelopes, has rendered it very obnoxious to the gardener, although doubtless the benefit it confers by the destruction of insects more than compensates for the injury. Like the rest of the British Tits, it is a permanent resident in our island, braving the severity of our hardest winters, against which it is peculiarly defended by the full downy plumage which invests the whole of the body. On the approach of spring its simple note may be heard in our woods and gardens, which is a true sign that its pairing-season has already commenced, and that the mated birds are preparing for the task of incubation. The situation chosen for the nest varies according to circumstances ; most frequently it is in the hole of a tree, the chinks of a wall, and even the interstices of old posts or palings ; it is generally constructed of moss lined with feathers and hair : the eggs are white, speckled with dark red.

The young assume the colouring of the adults at an early age, and quickly follow their parents in their assiduous search after insects and their larvæ. The family group keep united until autumn at least, when they all separate, going in winter in single pairs, or passing the colder months singly or in company with other small birds.

The sexes are so closely alike in colouring as to offer no decided difference ; the tints of a male are, perhaps, somewhat the brightest.

On the Continent they are widely distributed, and exhibit the same habits and manners that they are observed to do in the British Islands.

The top of the head is fine cœrulean blue ; the forehead, stripe over the eye, and cheeks white ; a black stripe passes from the bill, through the eye and surrounds the white of the cheeks ; the upper surface is delicate olive green ; the wings and tail blue, the secondaries being slightly tipped with white, and the primaries dark brown ; the whole of the under surface yellowish green ; tarsi and bill blueish lead colour.

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