Genus PHŒNICURA.

Gen. Char. *Bill* rather slender, somewhat widened at the base; compressed towards the tip, which is deflected and emarginated. *Tomia* of the mandibles, before the nostrils, bending inwards. *Gape* slightly bearded. *Nostrils* basal, oval, lateral, pierced in a membrane, and partly concealed by the feathers of the forehead. *Wings* rather long, with the first quill very short; the second inferior to the third; the fourth the longest of all. *Tail* of mean length, slightly rounded or square; coloured more or less with reddish brown. *Legs* having the *tarsi* longer than the middle toe. *Toes* slender, the outer toe joined at its base to the middle one; the former and the inner toe short, nearly equal in length and each reaching only to the second joint of the middle one. *Claws* not much hooked; that of the hind toe the longest.

REDSTART.

Phœnicura ruticilla, *Swains.*

Le Bec-fin de Murailles.

The genus *Phœnicura*, as instituted by Mr. Swainson, though the term itself is somewhat exceptionable, forms a well-defined and natural group, of which the present species may be considered a typical example. All the individuals of the genus appear to be confined to the Old World, several of the species being restricted to Asia, and those which may be considered as European being all migratory, and retiring on the approach of winter to a warmer climate.

The *Phœnicura ruticilla* is distinguished by the beautiful contrasts and richness of its colouring, as also by the sprightliness and animation evinced in the vigilant pursuit of its prey, while every action is accompanied by a peculiar vibratory movement of the tail, repeated for a considerable time on its alighting.

Familiar with man, this interesting visiter frequents gardens and orchards, fearlessly building in situations as if expressly to court observation,—for example, between the branch of a fruit tree and the wall against which it is nailed, the gardener's tool-house, or the holes of an old building or out-house, or, indeed, in any convenient aperture. The eggs are five or six in number, of a beautiful greenish blue colour. During the time of incubation, the male, conspicuous by the band of white on his forehead and the deep red of the tail, may be observed assiduously engaged in the capture of the softer winged insects, which he seizes while flying, darting after them from one resting-place to another with great celerity; he does not, however, return after each sally to the same perch again, like the Flycatchers, but continues a system of irregular pursuit.

As a songster, the Redstart holds no inferior place, though its song is hurried, and the notes neither rich nor powerful; still it never fails to excite feelings of pleasure from its simple sweetness.

The male in the adult plumage has the head and upper part of the back fine blueish ash colour, a broad white band extending from eye to eye across the forehead; the throat black; the breast, rump and lateral tail-feathers of a brilliant rufous; the under surface whitish; the under tail-coverts light rufous; and the two middle tail-feathers brown.

The female is distinguished by the general greenish brown of her plumage; the upper surface being more tinged with reddish, the throat cinereous merging into reddish brown on the under parts, and the tail dull rufous.

The young birds, like those of the Redbreast, are brown mottled with white: by degrees, however, they lose this plumage, and before leaving us in autumn, the males begin to acquire traces of the distinguishing style of colouring, the head having a tint of grey and the throat showing indications of black, while the upper parts acquire an obscure grey colour, each feather having a reddish margin. At all stages the beak and tarsi are black.

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