WHINCHAT.

Saxicola rubetra, *Bechst.*

Le Grand Traquet.

Among the smaller migratory birds which visit us on the return of spring, the Whinchat is one of the most pleasing and elegant; it seldom, however, favours us with its presence before the middle of April, frequenting, in pairs, the pasture lands and commons of every part of England, but is more scarce in Devonshire and Cornwall, especially the western portions of those counties. Though not a distinguished songster, its simple and hurried notes are by no means unpleasing, and well accord with its active and sprightly manners. In some of its habits it is not unlike the Fly-catchers, perching on a stem of grass or dock, darting at the insects as they pass by, and returning again to its station. But its length of tarsi indicates the bare and open ground of meadows and commons to be its peculiar province; hence it is not found to frequent woods or thick coppices, as is the case with our songsters in general: shy and timid, it seldom allows itself to be approached, but with a quick and lively action flits forward to the next bush or elevation of earth, incessantly watching the intruder; and, if again disturbed, repeating the same short flight; still, however, keeping within the neighbourhood of its residence for the season, and where, on her sheltered nest, the female is carrying on the process of incubation. During this period the male bird displays great restlessness and apprehension if the nest be approached, flitting from spray to spray, jerking its tail repeatedly, and uttering its querulous note, which may be represented by the two syllables *u—tick*, the latter of which is frequently reiterated, and the whole note is sounded so distinct and clear as to be heard at a considerable distance. It builds its nest on or near the ground, and forms it principally of coarse grasses lined with finer fibres: the eggs are in general five or six in number, of a greenish blue, minutely speckled with light reddish brown at the large end.

The Whinchat seems to be universally spread over the northern portion of the European continent, its favourite localities being the same as in England, viz. mountainous heaths and extensive pasture lands.

Although a general similarity exists between the plumage of the sexes, the males may always be distinguished by their brighter and more strongly contrasted colours, and by the conspicuous white stripe over the eye and on the wing.

As the autumn advances and insects become scarce, the Whinchat dissappears, passing over to the more southern countries, and not improbably to the Levant, Syria, and the northern coast of Africa, where its supplies of insect food are still abundant.

In the male, the bill is black, furnished at its base with a few bristles; a broad black streak beginning at the bill passes through the eyes and covers the ear-feathers, above which extends another line of white; crown of the head, back, and wing-coverts of a dark brown, the edges of each feather being of a light ferruginous colour; chin white; throat and breast orange-brown; belly, vent and thighs pale buff; tail short, the bases of the outer feathers white, the rest black.

In the female, the streak over the eye is much less conspicuous; the cheeks instead of being black are of the same colour as the rest of the head; the general plumage is duller, the marks less distinct, and the white mark on the wing totally wanting; legs and toes black. Total length about five inches.

Our Plate represents a male and female.