RUSSET WHEATEAR.

Saxicola stapazina, Temm.

Le Traquet stapazin.

In making the Saxicola stapazina a different species from the S. aurita, we rely not so much on our own observation as on the opinion of M. Temminck, who assured us personally that he had every reason for considering them as distinct species; and in his "Manuel d'Ornithologie" he remarks, that the European habitat of the S. stapazina is more limited than that of S. aurita, being restricted solely to the rocky borders of the Mediterranean, the South of Italy, Dalmatia and the Grecian Archipelago; that it is rarely seen in the North of Italy, and never in the central districts of Europe. It is to be regretted, that in consequence of the peculiar localities in which alone this bird is found, our opportunities for studying it during its various changes are very limited: we have, however, exerted ourselves to obtain as many specimens as possible, and we now possess a series of examples, killed at different seasons of the year, upon which we rely for our description. Unlike the Common Wheatear, which exhibits so marked a difference in the plumage of the sexes, the Russet Wheatear, in the adult stage, differs rather in the purity than in the decided contrast of colours which distinguishes the male and female; but, like the Saxicolæ in general, each sex, after the autumn moult, loses, by the gradual action of the air and light, as the spring approaches, the rich rufous tone of colouring by which the plumage is at first characterized, the tints becoming gradually paler and the black of the wings deeper, the brown tips of the feathers being worn off.

In habits and manners, the Saxicola stapazina is a true example of its genus, preferring, like the Wheatear, wide elevated downs, where it obtains its food, seldom perching upon trees, and never retiring to the woodlands for shelter. Of its nidification nothing positive is known.

In the adult plumage of spring, the male is thus distinguished. From the beak to the eye, and from thence over the ear-coverts, extends a band of black, of which colour are the throat, scapulars and quills; the top of the head, the rump and under parts are pure white; the back of the neck and back are light rufous; the tail white for three parts of its length and black at the tip, with the exception of the outer feathers, which are almost wholly black, and the two middle ones, which are quite so.

Immediately after the autumn moult, the top of the head and back of the neck have a shade of ash colour; the breast is reddish, gradually passing into white, and the black scapulars and quills are edged with rufous.

The young males of the year resemble the female, in which the tints are altogether of a redder hue; the dark feathers of the throat and region of the eyes being brownish black, the quills and coverts edged with reddish, and the breast reddish white.

The Plate represents an adult of the natural size just after the autumn moult, and a bird of the first year, killed at the same season, differing only in the rufous edging of the wing-feathers.

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