## Genus ALCEDO.

Gen. Char. Beak long, straight, quadrangular, and acute. Nostrils placed at the base of the beak, oblique, and nearly closed by a naked membrane. Feet small; tarsi short, naked. Toes three before, of which the external toe is united to the middle one as far as the second articulation, and the middle toe to the inner one as far as the first; hind toe large at its junction with the tarsus. Third quill-feather the longest.

## KINGSFISHER.

Alcedo ispida, Linn.

Martin pêcheur.

When we behold the brilliant colours of this bird as it darts by us like a meteor, displaying the metallic lustre of its plumage, we cannot help fancying for the moment that we behold some erratic native of a tropical clime.

The appetite of the Kingsfisher is voracious, and his manners shy and retiring: dwelling near lonely and sequestered brooks and rivers, he sits for hours together motionless and solitary on some branch overhanging the stream, patiently watching the motions of the smaller fishes which constitute his food; waiting for a favourable moment to dart with the velocity of an arrow upon the first that is near enough the surface or within the reach of his aim, seldom failing in the attempt. He then returns to his former station on some large stone or branch, where he commences the destruction of his captive, which is effected by shifting its position in his bill, so as to grasp it firmly near the tail, and then striking its head smartly against the object on which he rests: he now reverses its position, and swallows it head foremost; the indigestible parts are afterwards ejected in a manner analogous to that of the Owls and birds of prey.

The Kingsfisher, however, does not confine himself entirely to this mode of watching in motionless solitude; but should the stream be broad, or no favourable station for espionage present itself, he may be seen poising himself over it at an altitude of ten or fifteen feet, scrutinizing the element below for his food,—plunging upon it with a velocity which often carries him considerably below the surface. For these habits his muscular wedge-shaped body, increasing gradually from a long pointed bill, aided by the sleek metal-like surface of the plumage, which at the same time freely passes through and throws off the water, seems expressly to adapt him.

The wing of the Kingsfisher is short but powerful; hence its flight is smooth, even, and exceedingly rapid. Silent except during the pairing and breeding season, (when he occasionally utters a sharp piercing cry, indicative perhaps of attachment,) and equally solitary and unsocial in his habits, the Kingsfisher dwells alone, seldom consorting with others, or even with his mate, except in the period of incubation and during the rearing of the young, when their joint labours are necessary, and both unite with great assiduity in the office of procuring the requisite supplies of food. The places selected for this purpose are steep and secluded banks overhanging ponds or rivers, where in a hole, generally at a considerable distance above the surface of the water, and extending to the depth of two or three feet into the bank, the female, without making a nest, lays five or six eggs of a beautiful pinky white. As soon as the young are hatched, the parent birds may be seen incessantly passing to and from the hole with food, the ejected exuviæ of which in a short time form around the unfledged brood a putrid and offensive mass.

The young do not leave the hole until fully fledged and capable of flight; when, seated on some neighbouring branch, they may be known by their clamorous twittering, greeting their parents as they pass, from whom they impatiently expect their supplies. In a short time, however, they commence plundering for themselves, assuming at that early age nearly the adult plumage. The *Alcedo ispida* is the only species of the genus found in Europe, the western parts of which, including the British Isles, seem to be its proper habitat. The young appear to possess habits of partial migration, at least in our British Islands, wandering from the interior parts along the courses of rivers to the coast, frequenting, in the autumnal and winter months, the mouths of small rivulets and dykes near the sea; but more particularly those along the line of the southern coast and the shores of adjacent inlets.

The annexed Plate represents a male, between which and the female there is no distinguishing difference of plumage. The bill is black; irides dark; the crown of the head, cheeks, and wing-coverts, of a deep shining green, each feather tipt with a lighter metallic hue; the rest of the upper surface, a brilliant azure; the ear-feathers rufous, behind which a white spot extends to the nape of the neck. The throat white, the under surface fine rufous; the legs bright orange.

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Length seven inches; weight from two ounces to two and a half.