

Genus CIRCUS, *Briss.*

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* bending from the base, weak, much compressed, and forming a narrow rounded culmen; tomia of the upper mandible exhibiting a very small sinuation near the middle of the bill; under mandible shallow and rounded at the point. *Nostrils* rather large; broadly oval; nearly concealed by the reflected and upward curving hairs of the lores. *Head* surrounded by a ruff of stiffish tiled feathers. *Wings* long, the fourth feather barely exceeding the third, but being the longest in the wing; first four having their inner webs notched; the third, fourth, and fifth having the outer webs sinuated. *Tail* long, slightly rounded. *Tarsi* long, slender, feathered in front for a short distance below the joints, the naked part scutellated. *Toes* of mean length, rather slender, middle toe the longest, outer toe rather exceeding the inner, and joined at the base to the middle one by a membrane, third toe shortest. *Claws* moderately incurved and very short, those of the inner and hind toes the largest.

MARSH HARRIER.

Circus rufus, Briss.

Le Busard Harpaye ou de Marais.

THE size of this bird renders it so conspicuous that it cannot fail to attract attention wherever it appears; it is consequently most probable that the greater number of those which are seen in our island are not native-bred specimens, but have wandered from the adjacent continent; and we are confirmed in this opinion by the circumstance of most of the birds which have been shot being in the youthful or immature state of plumage: we know also that young birds are in the habit of wandering greater distances from their birthplace than adults. So great, indeed, are the chances against their attaining a state of mature plumage in our island, that we do not recollect a single instance of a specimen in the plumage of the bird figured in our Plate, having been killed here: that it is many years in attaining this plumage is very evident, and it is equally certain that it breeds while yet in the deep chocolate-coloured plumage by which it is distinguished during the first and several succeeding years. It will be seen that when it has attained the perfect livery, the wings and tail have assumed that delicate grey so characteristic of the Harriers in general, while the feathers of the remaining parts of the body are not only of a different tint, but are also of a different form, being more or less lanceolate instead of round. Although we are not able to state it as a fact, yet we are inclined to believe that it is the male only which possesses the beautiful grey colouring alluded to above. Even in its youthful state the young of this bird exhibit considerable differences of colouring, some being of a uniform chocolate brown, while others have the crown of the head, cheeks, and shoulders of a rich buff.

The Marsh Harrier appears to enjoy a wide extent of habitat, being found in the low marshy districts of Europe, Africa, and a great portion of Asia; as is proved by our having received it in collections from the Himalaya mountains. Like the rest of the Harriers its flight is buoyant and sweeping, but generally at a low elevation: it traverses over the moors and marshes in search of its prey, which consists of frogs, lizards, mice, insects, and even fish.

The nest is placed on the ground among low bushes or reeds, generally near the edge of the water: the eggs are four in number, white and rounded.

We take our description of the adult bird from the "Manuel" of M. Temminck.

Head, neck, and breast of a yellowish white, with numerous longitudinal dashes of brown occupying the centre of each feather; scapularies and wing-feathers reddish brown; quills white at the base, and black for the remainder of their length; secondaries and tail-feathers of an ashy grey; whole of the under surface light rufous marked with yellowish blotches; beak black; cere greenish yellow; irides reddish yellow; tarsi yellow.

The young of the year has the plumage of a very strong chocolate brown; the wing-coverts, the quills, and the tail-feathers tipped with brownish yellow; the top of the head, occiput, and throat more or less pale; irides blackish brown.

The Plate represents an adult and a young bird about three fourths of the natural size.