

Genus MILVUS.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* of moderate strength, nearly straight at the base, rapidly incurved in front of the cere to the tip, which forms an acute hook; *cere* short. *Nostrils* oval, rather obliquely placed in the cere. *Wings* very long; the first feather short; the fourth the longest; the first five having their inner webs notched. *Tail* long and forked. *Legs* with the tarsi very short, feathered below the joint; the naked frontal part scutellated. *Toes* rather short, the outer united at its base to the middle one. *Claws* long and strong, moderately incurved, with the inner edge of the middle one thin and dilated.

KITE.

Milvus vulgaris, *Flem.*

Le Milan royal.

THIS elegant species, although generally diffused over the British Islands, is much less common than formerly; indeed the destroying hand of the gamekeeper has completely extirpated it in many of the inland counties, particularly such as are but thinly wooded. The only retreats wherein the Kite now finds an asylum are larger woods and forests of denser growth, in whose impervious recesses itself and its brood are effectually shrouded from observation. The districts where the Kite may be most frequently observed at the present period, are the more uncultivated portions of Wales and the adjoining counties, as well as the wild tracts of rocky moorlands in both the northern and southern parts of the island. Throughout the continent of Europe it appears to have a wider range,—except in Holland, in consequence of a scarcity of large woods and uninhabited wilds. While on the wing performing its aerial evolutions, nothing can excel the ease and grace with which the Kite sails along surveying the earth below, its flight generally consisting of widely extended circles, during the performance of which the wings appear to be entirely motionless, the tail acting as a rudder to guide its course; in this manner it oftentimes soars to so great a height as to be almost imperceptible. Its prey, which consists of mice, rats, leverets, young gallinaceous birds, ducks, reptiles, fishes, and insects, is sought for while it is soaring in the air at a moderate distance from the ground, and is taken by a whoop so noiseless and rapid, that little or no warning is given of its approach; in this way it sometimes commits great havoc among the young broods of poultry, pheasants, partridges, &c.

In general form and colouring of plumage the sexes bear a close resemblance, nor do the young birds undergo any very decided change from youth to maturity.

The process of incubation is commenced early in the spring. The nest is constructed of sticks lined with wool and hair; and is situated in the thickest part of the forest: the eggs are generally three or four in number, of a greyish white, more or less distinctly speckled with reddish brown.

The head and neck are clothed with narrow pointed feathers of greyish white, each having a central dash of dark brown; the whole of the upper surface is bright ferruginous brown, each feather having its centre blackish brown; tail and thighs rich rufous brown; under surface brownish white, with dark longitudinal blotches; bill dark brown; cere and tarsi bright yellow; irides straw yellow.

The Plate represents an adult in full plumage about three fourths of the natural size.