

LESSER KESTREL.

Falco Tinnunculoïdes, *Natter*.

La Cresserellette.

THIS elegant little Falcon, although closely allied to the Common Kestrel, is to be distinguished from that species by its smaller size, its greater length of wing, the white colour of the nails, and the entire absence of markings on the back:—the female, however, agrees so closely in plumage with the female of *Falco Tinnunculus*, that we have not considered it necessary to introduce a figure of her into our Plate, which represents the adult male. Notwithstanding, she still retains the characteristics of the species: viz. inferiority of size, length of wing, and white nails; circumstances by which she may at once be identified. As far as we have been able to ascertain, this bird has not been discovered in the British Islands, but is common in the southern parts of continental Europe, especially Spain, Italy, and the South of France, frequenting rocky and mountainous districts as well as lofty spires, church steeples, and ruins, selecting such situations for its breeding places;—the female (which rather exceeds the male in size) generally laying four eggs, very much resembling those of the Kestrel.

Although we cannot doubt that small mammalia and birds form part of the food of this species, still we have reason to know that it subsists in a great measure on the larger coleopterous and hymenopterous insects, which it takes on the wing, darting at them with great quickness and precision of aim.

In some of its characters, and especially its lengthened wing, which reaches the extremity of the tail, the *Falco Tinnunculoïdes* approaches the typical form of the genus more nearly than our Kestrel; yet in both species we perceive a departure from those strongly marked features which pre-eminently distinguish the more noble of the group;—i. e. a less muscular form of body, a beak the tooth of which is more rounded and less acute, tarsi less robust, talons less curved and weaker, in union with a disposition more timid and an appetite less blood-thirsty; characters which proclaim a grade below that of their more daring congeners.

It is not the intention of the Author of this work to enter into an analysis of existing genera, or to establish new ones; nevertheless, he may be allowed to suggest an inquiry to those who are more particularly engaged in systematic arrangements;—viz. whether there be not room for a further removal of this bird, and those in evident relationship to it, from the more typical species which compose the Genus *Falco*; naturalists having availed themselves of less prominent characters in the formation of genera, (*Astur* and *Accipiter*, for instance,) between which there is the closest affinity. On the contrary, there is between the group which we now refer to, and the Falcons *par excellence*, a well-marked distinction in habits, disposition, style of colouring, and food,—sufficient, we think, to constitute a clear ground of separation. This proposed group would contain at least three well-marked species of the Old Continent; viz. the present bird, the Common Kestrel, and the *Falco rupicolus*; to which may be added the *Falco sparverius* of Latham, and several other species of America and its adjacent islands.

In size the *F. Tinnunculoïdes* is inferior to the Kestrel, the total length of the male being eleven inches.

The wings reach to the extreme tip of the tail, which is rounded; the top of the head, occiput, and sides of the neck are of a fine uniform ash-colour; the whole of the upper surface, with the exception of some of the larger wing-coverts, the secondaries, quills and rump of a brownish red without any markings, the latter being of a blueish ash-colour, as is the tail also, which is crossed with a black band, and at its extremity tipped with white. The inferior surface is of a clear brown red, thinly sprinkled with small black dashes and longitudinal marks.

Beak blueish; cere and space round the eyes yellow; feet yellow; nails white.

Young males of the year differ little from the adult female.