

Genus HALIÆTUS.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* elongated, strong, straight at the base, curved in a regular arc in advance of the cere to the tip, and forming a deep hook; *culmen* broad, and rather flattened; *tomia* of the upper mandible slightly prominent behind the commencement of the hook. *Nostrils* large, placed transversely in the cere, and of a lunated shape. *Wings* ample, the fourth quill-feather the longest. *Legs* having the tarsi half feathered; the front of the naked part scutellated, and the sides and back reticulated. *Toes* divided to their origin; the outer one versatile. *Claws* strong, hooked, and grooved beneath; the claw of the hind toe larger than that of the inner toe, which, again, exceeds that of the middle and outer toes.

SEA EAGLE.

Haliæetus albicilla, Savigny.

L'Aigle pygargue.

SCIENCE is indebted to the observation of Mr. Selby for a knowledge of the fact that the Cinereous and Sea Eagles of the older writers are identical species, differing only in the respective stages of plumage, which depend solely upon age. The fact thus ascertained by experiment had been in some measure anticipated both by Cuvier and Temminck, but wanted that direct proof which rearing the birds from youth and preserving them to maturity could alone furnish.

It is the most common of the European Eagles, and perhaps the most widely dispersed. In the British Islands it frequently occurs along the rocky shores of England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland and the adjacent islands, and many pairs are known annually to breed in different parts of the three last-named countries. The appetite for fish which this noble bird possesses leads it to give the preference to the margin of the sea, the shores of rivers and large lakes. Aquatic birds, small mammalia, such as hares, lambs, fawns, &c., and, when pressed by hunger, even carrion also, may be reckoned among the articles forming its diet; but like all the rapacious birds, especially the Eagles, it is capable of sustaining life for a considerable period when food cannot be obtained. Although not so alert and sprightly as the Golden Eagle, it is nevertheless vigorous and resolute, its powers of flight enabling it to soar with great majesty and ease through the upper regions of the air, whence it often precipitates itself upon its prey, or any intruder near its nest, with great force and velocity. Its range over Europe, although extensive, is limited to the more northern portions, particularly the rocky coast of Norway and Sweden, as well as that of Russia, Germany, Holland, and France. In the absence of bold precipitous rocks, which form its favourite place of nidification, it accommodates itself to the circumstances of the locality, constructing its nest on the top of the largest tree of the forest, bordering inland seas and lakes. The eggs are white, and two in number.

Three or four years at least are required to complete the state of plumage represented by the bird in the foreground of our Plate, which is that of maturity, a period characterized by the white tail, and the bright straw yellow-coloured bill.

The sexes offer little or no difference in their plumage at the corresponding periods of their age.

The adults have the bill and cere bright straw yellow; irides reddish brown; the whole head and neck are of a pale ashy brown, the feathers being long and pointed; the rest of the plumage is of a dark greyish brown, more intense on the upper surface; the tail pure white; tarsi and toes yellow.

The young have the beak and tail blackish brown, and the general plumage of a deep brown, the feathers of the head and neck being somewhat lighter than the rest.

The Plate represents an adult and a young bird of the first year, about one third of the natural size.