

GOLDEN EAGLE.

Aquila chrysaëta, Briss.

L'Aigle Royal.

OF the two large Eagles which make the British Isles a permanent residence, the present noble species, although rather inferior in point of size, is more rapacious and sanguinary in its habits, feeding more exclusively on prey acquired by its own exertions, fawns, lambs, hares, rabbits and large birds being its usual victims : the Sea Eagle, on the contrary, feeds chiefly upon fish, large sea birds, and, not unfrequently, putrid carcases ; its habitat is consequently the mountains and craggy rocks along the sea shore, while the Golden Eagle frequents in preference the inland parts of the country, resorting to large forests and secluded situations.

The Golden Eagle appears formerly to have been by no means an uncommon bird in the British Isles ; but the increase of population and the cultivation of the land have driven it to the remoter portions of the kingdom, and it is now only to be found, and that but sparingly, among the highlands of the North, the wilder parts of Ireland, and occasionally in Wales : and although the romantic lakes and hills of Westmoreland and Cumberland, the rocky parts of Derbyshire, and the barren districts of Cornwall, were not long since among the number of its breeding-places, it is now seldom, if ever, to be found there, a bird of its size and habits not only exciting the attention, but the hostility also of the inhabitants of the surrounding districts. On the Continent it is more abundant, particularly in the northern and hilly countries, as Norway, Sweden and some parts of Russia : it is also found, but in less abundance, in Germany and France, and still less frequently in Italy or further southwards.

In the cleft of some inaccessible rock, or, as M. Temminck states, on the tops of the tallest trees of the forest, the Golden Eagle constructs its eyrie, and brings up its young, feeding them with the yet quivering flesh of the prey, whose remains are found scattered in abundance around. The eggs are two in number, sometimes three, of a dull white stained with dull red.

The young and adult of this noble bird exhibit marked differences of plumage, a circumstance which led the older writers on Ornithology to make in this instance, as in some others, two species out of one, an error which has been but lately corrected ; and we have yet much to learn respecting the laws which regulate these changes, so remarkable in this ferocious tribe.

The Ring-tailed Eagle, then, is but the immature stage of the Golden Eagle, nor is the full plumage attained but by slow degrees, two or three years being required for bringing the markings to their stationary character. When in full plumage, the feathers on the head and occiput are lancet-shaped, and of a rich gilded brown ; the rest of the body is of a dull brown approaching to chocolate brown, the feathers of the inner side of the thighs and tarsi being lighter ; tail greyish brown with transverse bands of blackish brown, with which colour it is tipped ; beak horn colour ; irides brown ; and tarsi yellow. Length three feet, the female being from four to six inches longer.

The immature birds, till the commencement of the third year, have the whole of the plumage of a reddish brown, with the under tail-coverts, inner side of the thighs and tarsi nearly white ; the tail white for three parts of its length, (whence the synonym of Ring-tailed Eagle,) the tip being brown. In proportion as the young bird advances, the colours become richer and deeper, the white of the tail contracts, and bars begin to appear. The third year is that of the assumption of perfect plumage.

The figures are a young and an adult, about one third of their natural size.