OTIS MACQUEENI, Hardw. and Gray.

MacQueen's Bustard.

Otis Macqueeni, Hardw. and Gray's Ill. Ind. Zool., vol. ii. pl. 47.—Gould in Proc. York Phil. Soc., vol. i. p. 94. Houbara Macqueenii, List of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., Part III. p. 57.—Hutton, Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. xvi. p. 786.—Blyth, Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 258. Eupodotis Macqueenii, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 533, Eupodotis, sp. 20. Otis tetrax, Rob. in Zoologist, vol. vi. p. 1969. — Houbara, Rob. in Ib., vol. vi. p. 2065.

Every ornithologist is acquainted with the Otis Houbara, while few collections are adorned with examples of the species forming the subject of the present memoir; the great strongholds of which are the western parts of Asia, particularly the countries of Beloochistan and Cabul, whence its range extends northwards over the Plains of Tartary and westwards over those of Persia and Arabia, in which latter country it inosculates with the true Otis Houbara, both species being there found. The interest which attaches to this bird is greatly enhanced, by its being now added both to the list of European species, and to the Fauna of our own island; a fine specimen, in the Museum of the Philosophical Society at York, having been shot by Mr. G. Hansley in a stubble-field on Kirton Cliff, Kirton Lindsey, Lincolnshire, on the 7th of October 1847, and another example killed on the 13th of December 1845, on the plain between Woluwe St. Etienne and Dieghem, a league from Brussels. This latter specimen, a fine adult male, is now in the Museum of Natural History at Brussels. The Vicomte DuBus, who furnished me with this information, also informed me that he ate part of the body, and that it equaled in every respect the character given by Latham and others of the flesh of the Houbara, which they say is of the highest flavour.

Captain Hutton states that the Otis Macqueeni is common and remains all the year on the bare stony plains of Afghanistaun, where it is sometimes to be seen in small packs of five or six together. It flies heavily and for short distances, soon alighting and running. Mr. Blyth says, that according to a writer in the Bengal Sporting Magazine, it frequents dry sandy plains where there is a little grass, and is also found in grain and wheat fields. Its flesh, which is exceedingly tender, is so covered with fat that the skins are with difficulty dried and preserved. Capt. Boys, during the many years he had collected in the upper provinces, never obtained more than one specimen, which was procured at Hansi in December; but in Scinde it is tolerably numerous.

The specific distinctions of the Otis Macqueeni as compared with O. Houbara are slight, but the fine blacktipped crest-feathers, grey neck, lighter colouring of the upper surface, which is also much less strongly marked with brown, together with its smaller size, are characters by which it may at all times be distinguished from the latter species. The specimen killed in Lincolnshire appears to be a female in the postnuptial dress; its craw was filled with caterpillars of the Common Yellow Underwing Moth, small shelled snails, beetles, &c.

Forehead, sides of the head, upper part of the back of the neck, buff penciled with black; crest-feathers white at the base and black for the remainder of their length; nape and base of the neck whitish; on the sides of the neck a series of plumes gradually increasing in length, the upper two-thirds of which are black; of the remainder some are white, others black, and others white at the base, and black for their apical half; upper surface isabella-brown or sandy buff, minutely penciled with black, the pencilings increasing in breadth and intensity here and there so as to form irregular bars across the feathers, these darker markings becoming larger and more conspicuous as they proceed posteriorly; rump without these darker pencilings; upper tail-coverts and tail similarly marked and crossed by bands of grey, which increase in size towards the tip; the tail is moreover washed with rufous and terminated with buffy white; wing-coverts buffy white, penciled with black; first five primaries white at the base, and black for the remainder of their length, the remainder of the primaries and secondaries black, with a transverse mark of white at the tip; throat white; neck and breast light grey; under surface of the wing and abdomen white; lower part of the flanks and under tail-coverts white, penciled and barred with blackish brown; irides yellow; bill blackish horny, except at the base, which is yellowish; legs greenish yellow.

The figures are about two-thirds of the natural size, representing the nuptial and post-nuptial dress.

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