## PHASIANUS VERSICOLOR, Vieill.

V.C. W. O. W

Japanese Pheasant.

In writing the history of a species of Pheasant, which, if I mistake not, is hereafter destined to become an object of interest and importance to the sporting communities both of this island and of the temperate portions of the continent of Europe, it will be well first to state the country of which it is a native, and the probable date of its discovery. Up to the present time then, 1857, we have no positive evidence that the bird is found elsewhere than in the Island of Japan; yet, from the information I have received from two different sources, it would seem that it also occurs in China. Professor Brandt, the celebrated naturalist of St. Petersburg, when in England a few months since, informed me that a similar Pheasant was certainly known to Pallas, who, as every one is aware, extended his travels to the confines of China; but I have never met with any record of it in the writings of that author; the circumstance of its being known to him must rest, therefore, on Professor Brandt's testimony. On showing a Japanese specimen to Mr. Webb, a gentleman who has long resided in China, he informed me that, to the best of his belief, it was a native of that country, and was quite certain that he had seen two kinds there—one having a white collar, the *Phasianus torquatus*; the other without such a distinguishing mark: if this ringless bird should prove to be a species at present unknown, I hope ere long to have the pleasure of giving a figure of it in the present work.

It would seem that when that Nestor of ornithologists, M. Temminck, published his "Histoire naturelle générale des Pigeons et des Gallinacés" in 1813, this bird was not known, as no account of it is to be found therein; figures of both sexes, however, were published in his subsequent and more valuable work, the "Planches Coloriées des Oiseaux," from specimens sent direct from Japan to Holland by Dr. Siebold; but Vieillot appears to have been the first author who assigned it a specific appellation, taking his description from an example in the Museum of the Jardin des Plantes, to which in all probability it had been sent either by Dr. Siebold or M. Temminck, to whom in fact all the collections in Europe are indebted for the specimens they contain of this fine bird.

About the year 1840 living examples were brought from Japan to Amsterdam, and of these a male and a female were purchased by the late Earl of Derby at a very high price; unfortunately the female died before reaching the menagerie at Knowsley, leaving the Noble Earl in possession of the male only. No other example having been brought to England, it is from this single male and a female of the common species that all the green Pheasants, now becoming so numerous in the British Islands, have sprung. The produce of the first cross was of course a half-breed; the old male being placed again with these half-breeds, the result was a three-quarter race; and these breeding again with the old bird, the produce became as nearly pure as possible.

On the dispersion of the late Earl of Derby's living collection, the old cock and the purest portion of his progeny were purchased by Prince Demidoff, and, with the exception of a pair left with Mr. Thompson, then superintendent of the Knowsley Menagerie, were sent to Italy. John Henry Gurney, Esq., of Norwich, and other gentlemen, became the possessors of the less pure stock. Some of Mr. Gurney's birds were turned out in the woods at Easton, and all the eggs which were laid in his aviary were also hatched in the preserves, thus giving rise to the Norfolk varieties.

Mr. Thompson's birds annually producing numerous eggs, he has been enabled to distribute living birds to various persons, both in this country and abroad. Although not without a taint of foreign blood in their veins, these birds and their offspring are so similar to examples killed in their native country that they are not distinguishable.

The *P. Colchicus*, the *P. torquatus*, and the *P. versicolor* readily breed with each other, and, contrary to the usual course of nature, the progeny of either two are capable of reproduction. The results which have arisen from this introduction of fresh blood among our old stock of semi-domesticated Pheasants is perfectly amazing; producing, as it has done, an increase in size and flavour, and marvellously beautiful variations in the colouring of the plumage, the principal hues of which correspond with those of that species, the blood of which predominates.

In form, habits, and disposition, the P. versicolor assimilates more nearly to the Common Pheasant of our