TETRAOGALLUS ALTAICUS.

Altaic Snow Partridge.

Perdix Altaica, Gebler, Bull. de l'Acad. Imp. de St. Pétersb., tom. i. p. 31 ; and tom. vi. p. 30.
Perdix (Megaloperdix) Altaica, Brandt, Bull. de l'Acad. Imp. de St. Pétersb., 1840, tom. viii. p. 190.
Tetraogallus Altaicus, G. R. Gray, Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part X. p. 103.—Ib. List of Spec. of Birds in Brit. Mus. Coll., part iii. p. 30.
Tetraogallus caucasica, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 503. pl. cxxix.
Perdix caucasica, Eversm. Addenda ad Pall. Zoogr., ii. p. 13.

All the examples of this species which grace the collections of central Europe have I believe been obtained by way of St. Petersburg, from the Russian possessions in the Altai Mountains. M. Brandt states in the Bulletin de l'Académie des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg, that he had seen ten specimens so much alike in colouring that they presented no important differences; and the three examples which have come under my own notice, one in the collection of H. E. Strickland, Esq., another in the British Museum, and a third in the Museum of the Jardin des Plantes at Paris, are all so nearly alike as to confirm M. Brandt's observation. The more decided grey colouring of the upper surface, the white flanks and the black hue of the lower part of the abdomen are the characters which at once distinguish this species from its congeners, and establish its specific value.

M. Gebler states that the Altaic Field Hen inhabits the mountains generally, but especially near the sources of the river Argut; that the length of the entire bird when fresh killed is twenty-six English inches; of the bill one inch and one line; of the head two inches and two lines; of the wings thirteen inches; of the middle toe and nail two inches and ten lines; and that the weight of a well-fed bird is six Russian pounds. From the assurances of the hunters there is but little difference in the colouring of the sexes. A strong dark grey, conical-pointed spur is found on the tarsi of the old male. Its food consists of the young shoots of alpine plants, seeds and insects. The stomachs of the specimens shot in winter, and examined by M. Gebler, contained small stones, roots, leaves, bits of sticks and buds of plants, besides which, in one instance, he found the remains of a cricket, proving that insects form part of their food.

Crown of the head dusky ash-grey; over the eye a stripe of white; sides of the head lighter ash-grey; throat white; neck ash-grey, pale in front, becoming gradually darker behind; upper surface, wing and tail-coverts dark brown, minutely freckled with pale buff; the feathers of the back, and especially of the wing-coverts, with a broad mark on the margin of the outer web and a smaller one near the tip of the inner web of buffy white; under wing-coverts very dark ash-grey; primaries white at the base, brownish grey for the remainder of their length; tail-feathers greyish, deepening into black towards the extremity, and slightly tipped with deep buff; feathers of the breast ash-grey, crossed near the tip by an irregular band of black, which extends down in a point to the end of the shaft, on each side of which is a large spot of white; these markings become larger, paler and less defined on the lower part of the breast; flanks and under tail-coverts white; centre of the abdomen mingled black and white, the black hue predominating on the lower part; thighs brownish black; bill blackish horn-colour; nostrils and eyelids pale flesh-colour; irides dark brown; tarsi and toes dusky orange; nails black.

The figure is about three-fourths of the natural size.