

## MERGUS CUCULLATUS, Linn.

### Hooded Merganser.

*Mergus cucullatus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 207.

*Merganser Virginianus cristatus*, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 258.

*cucullatus*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 168.

SEVERAL instances are on record of the occurrence of this ornamental species of *Mergus* in England and on the continent of Europe; but its true home is America, over the northern portion of which, from the United States to the Fur-countries, it is very numerous distributed, and where, like the other members of the genus, its movements are influenced by the season; that is to say, in the summer months it lives in the north, where it breeds, and migrates southward as far as the Gulf of Mexico in autumn and winter.

Mr. Selby has the honour of having made known its first occurrence in Britain, through the medium of the first volume of the 'Transactions of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne,' p. 292. The specimen referred to was killed near Yarmouth during the winter of 1829. "Since that period," says Mr. Yarrell, "T. C. Eyton, Esq., has obtained a specimen, which was killed in the Menai Straits, near Bangor, in the winter of 1830-31. Mr. Hoy, of Stoke Nayland, in Suffolk, obtained an adult male, as recorded in the 'Naturalist'; and I have heard of another that was shot at Benton Park, the estate of Anthony Ralph Biddulph, Esq."

Mr. W. Christy Horsfall, of Horsforth Low Hall, informs me that he has a pair in his collection which were killed in the neighbourhood of Leeds. With such evidence of the occurrence of the bird in our islands, I must necessarily give it a place in the 'Birds of Great Britain.' The spring dress of the Hooded Merganser, like that of the other species of the genus, is by no means devoid of ornament, the beautiful hood of the male, which is capable of being raised and depressed at the will of the bird, adding much to the grace of its appearance. That this hood or crest is merely a seasonal decoration, I think there can be no doubt; for I have seen male specimens killed at the season when the female necessarily has her entire attention devoted to her progeny, which were so much like females in outward appearance as to convince me that at that time both sexes are similarly attired. These forlorn males now proceed southward and rove about until the autumn, when nature again prompts them to associate with the females; they gradually assume their courting-dress, once more become beaux, and when spring arrives pair and proceed north to their breeding-quarters. This, however, only occurs in America; for I question if any of those that have been found in Europe have been known to breed therein: this being the case, I shall be excused for giving a lengthy extract from Audubon's 'Ornithological Biography,' descriptive of the habits of the bird as seen in America:—

"Excepting the Smew or White Nun, the Hooded Merganser is the handsomest of its family. Its broad and rounded crest of pure white, with an edging of jetty black, renders the male conspicuous on the waters to which it resorts, as the activity of its motions and the rapidity of its flight contribute to render it a pleasing object. It seems to prefer fresh water, and is by no means frequent along the sea-coast. Long, narrow, and moderately deep creeks, or small ponds, are more frequented by it than large rivers or lakes. On the waters of the Western and Southern States, these Mergansers are seen to arrive from the north early in October. At the approach of night, a person standing still on the banks of such a river as the Ohio, first hears the sound of wings whistling through the air, and presently a different noise, like that produced by an Eagle stooping on his prey, when, gliding downwards with the rapidity of an arrow, he dimly perceives Hooded Mergansers sweeping past. Five or six, perhaps ten, with quick beats of their pinions, fly low over the waters in wide circles, and, having spied the entrance of a creek, shoot into it; and in a few seconds is heard the rushing noise they make as they alight on the bosom of the still pool. Up the creek the Mergansers proceed, washing their bodies by short plunges, and splashing up the water about them. Then they plume themselves, and anoint their feathers, now and then uttering a low grunting note, apparently of pleasure. Now they dive in search of minnows, which they find in abundance, and which no doubt prove delicious food to the hungry travellers. Having satisfied their appetite, they rise on wing, fly low over the creek with almost incredible velocity, return to the broad stream, and rove along its margin until they meet with a clear sand-beach, where, secure from danger, they repose until the return of day.

"This bird ranges throughout the United States during winter, content with the food it meets with in the bays and estuaries of the eastern coast and in the inland streams. The dam of the Pennsylvania miller is as agreeable to it as that of the Carolina rice-planter; and I have found them as full of life and gaiety on