

DAFILA ACUTA.

Pintailed Duck.

Anas acuta, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 44.

— *caudacuta*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 38.

Dafila caudacuta, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 127, pl. 49.

— *acuta*, Eyton, Hist. of Rarer Brit. Birds, p. 60.

Anas longicauda (Briss.), Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 868.

— *caudata*, Brehm, *ibid.*, p. 896.

Trachelonetta acuta, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 115.

Querquedula acuta, Selb. Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. ii. p. 311.

— *caudacuta*, Macgill. Man. of Nat. Hist. Orn., vol. ii. p. 170.

Phasianurus acutus, Wagl. Isis, 1832, p. 1235.

AMONG the British members of the *Anatidæ*, or family of Ducks, there are three species which have especial claims to our notice : these are the Mallard, the Teal, and the Pintail. From the first have sprung all our domestic varieties, the excellence of whose flesh need not be dwelt upon ; neither is it necessary to speak in praise of the delicate flavour of that of the little Teal ; equal, if not superior, to both, is the flesh of the Pintail, a bird which is characterized by a greater elegance of form, and a more pleasing contour, than either of its congeners—one, moreover, which sits on the water with especial grace, and swims with unusual speed. All three species assimilate in the readiness with which they become partially domesticated, imparting life to our lakes and ornamental waters, in their wide and almost general distribution over the globe, and in the total change of costume which takes place at opposite seasons of the year. The plumage of the Pintail, though not so gay and contrasted as that of the Mallard or the Teal, is very pleasing, from its chaste and harmonious colouring ; in form the bird is slender and elegant, its neck being considerably lengthened, and its two central tail-feathers prolonged to such an extent as to have obtained for it the name of Sea-Pheasant. How great is the contrast between the long central tail-feathers of this species, and the short curled ones of the Mallard !

In the British Islands the Pintail is very local ; and although our eastern decoys supply the markets of London with a goodly number about a month before and after Christmas-time, few are either taken or shot at other seasons. Montagu states that it is most abundant in the north of England and Scotland, and especially in the Orkney Islands. "This assertion, however," says Mr. Selby, "I must in part contradict, as the result of long observation tells me it is of *rare occurrence* in the *northern counties* of England ; and the same may be said of the southern districts of Scotland." Montagu's assertion, however, with regard to the Orkneys, is confirmed by the late Robert Dunn, who states that it is tolerably plentiful there, particularly in the island of Sanda, where it frequents the inland lakes more than the sea-shore, and leaves early in spring ; he never met with it in the neighbouring Shetlands. In Cornwall, Mr. Rodd tells us that it is common at the Land's End in severe weather.

"A winter visitant to this country," says Yarrell, "it remains here till the spring, and is obtained by wild-fowl shooters on the coast as well as by fenmen on the rivers and lakes of the interior. It is one of the first species taken when the decoys begin to be worked in October." In Ireland it is a regular winter visitant in small numbers, and, as in England, is locally distributed. With regard to its distribution over other parts of the world, I may mention that it is tolerably common in North Africa, in the Grecian Islands, and thence throughout Europe, from the Mediterranean to the extreme north of Lapland, in Palestine, Asia Minor, throughout India, the Amoorland, China, Formosa, and Japan ; in America it is found from the fur-countries to Honduras, and, doubtless, in all those parts of Mexico that are suitable to its habits. In confirmation of this vast extent of range, I may quote the following authorities.

Mr. E. C. Taylor, Dr. Leith Adams, and Mr. S. S. Allen, all enumerate it among the birds of Egypt ; Captain Loche states that it inhabits the three provinces of Algeria ; the Rev. Mr. Tristram mentions that specimens were shot near the brook Kedron, in Palestine ; Mr. Jerdon says it is one of the most numerous winter visitants to India, frequenting large tanks and jheels, often in immense flocks ; Mr. Swinhoe includes it in the lists of birds seen by him at Amoy, and between Takoo and Peking, in China, and in the island of Formosa ; Captain Blakiston and Mr. H. Whitely in the birds of Japan ; Von Schrenck in those of Amoorland ; Dr. Walker obtained specimens, during the voyage of the 'Fox,' at Godhaven, in Greenland ; Captain Blakiston in British North America ; Mr. Brown includes it in his 'Synopsis of the Birds of Vancouver's Island ;' Dr. Baird states that it is found over the whole of North America ; and Mr. Salvin saw it at Belize, and observed it to be common on the Lake of Dueñas during winter.