

QUERQUEDULA CRECCA.

Teal.

Anas Crecca, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 204.

Querquedula minor, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 436, pl. 40. fig. 1.

— *secunda*, Ray, Syn., p. 147, A 6.

— *crecca*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 146.

— *crecca*, *subcrecca*, et *creccoides*, Brehm, Handb. der Naturg. Vög. Deutschl., pp. 884, 885, 886.

THE Teal is the least of the Ducks inhabiting the British Islands, and is much valued for the beauty of its plumage, the elegance of its contour, and the delicate flavour of its flesh. The collector places his mounted specimen in the most conspicuous part of his museum, and the sportsman is often induced to leave his marked-down Woodcock for the chance of a shot, should a flight of Teal splash into the neighbouring rivulet, or circle over the moor.

Although not a cosmopolitan, this pretty little Duck enjoys a very wide range over the Old World, and, besides being generally dispersed in our islands, is equally numerous in similar latitudes in all the countries lying eastward of us, as far as China and Kamtschatka; northward it proceeds to the regions of the Arctic circle, and southward to the verge of the equator; in a word, it is found in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Asia Minor, Persia, and India, as well as in Europe. In all these countries its flesh is highly prized, and consequently much sought for as an article of food. It is plain, therefore, that if the Teal did not extend its range to thinly peopled countries, and select sites for the duty of incubation which are difficult of detection, it would soon become extirpated. The Rook and the Heron nidify in the most conspicuous places, and the cradles for their young are so prominently displayed that they may be seen from a great distance; the Teal on the contrary, resorts to the most secluded situations for this purpose; and hence it is the bird still continues so abundant, and that such large numbers are annually sent to our markets during the autumn and winter months. To what cause are we to assign the delicate flavour of the Teal? It is most probably due to the nature of the food upon which it subsists: this is neither fish nor any animal substances that can impart a strong or rancid flavour, as in the case of those species of the family whose lives are spent upon the seas—Scoters, Eiders, &c. No; the food of the Teal consists of the points of the finest grasses, the leaves of water-plants, seeds, grain, insects, small freshwater mollusks, and probably worms.

As autumn approaches, the rivers, rivulets, and the great ponds of the woodlands and open moors are all more or less resorted to by the Teal in small parties of eight or ten in number, or in flights of fifty or more. In these situations, the birds, if unmolested, remain during the entire day on the surface of the water, rising and falling with every ripple, or sitting on the banks; as evening approaches, they become more animated, and the whistling *crick* of the male is heard; and when night begins to throw a veil over the face of nature, they simultaneously rise, and quit the waters for the morass, the ploughed field, the oozy mud-bank, or wherever they may obtain a supply of food; at daylight they return to their usual sanctuary, where they preen their feathers, and the males swim round each other in circles before settling to rest for the day.

These latter remarks apply to the bird as seen with us in autumn and winter, when it has partially or wholly left the northern parts of our islands for the more temperate ones of the south. As spring approaches, most of those that have escaped the gunner and the devices of the decoy-man return again to the places of their former resort, and there incubate in all suitable situations. Some, however, stay and breed in many of the counties of England and Ireland. The site chosen is sometimes on the hill-side, in the neighbourhood of a river or loch, at others far away out on the heath or on the moor, even to the distance of many miles, the slight nest being placed in the midst of the heather, in a tussock of grass, or any other herbage that may effectually screen it from sight. A little rill of water may perchance be close at hand, or a wet sloppy morass or a pool not far off, to which the young, on their exclusion from the egg, are immediately conducted, and where they are most assiduously guarded by their parents from the attacks of harriers and any other animals by which their lives may be endangered; but the voracious pike, which often abides in such situations, not unfrequently lessens their number. At Scoulton Mere, in Norfolk (celebrated for one of the largest colonies of Black-headed Gulls in England), several pair breed annually, and the proprietor, Major Weyland, affords them strict protection. Their nests are usually placed in the shrubberies and plantations which surround the Mere.

"The Teal," says Mr. Lubbock, "is taken every year in great numbers in our decoys, in that at Winterton, in particular, where more than two hundred have been caught at once in a single pipe. Although it