

being covered with stiffish down and quite alert, accompany their mother to the water, where they swim and dive as expertly as if they had been born in it."

In autumn, winter, and spring the Mallard is clothed in the style of plumage represented in the front figure of the accompanying plate; but the latter season being passed and reproduction achieved, his finery is exchanged for a sombre dress of various shades of brown, the beautifully curled feathers on his rump are thrown off, and his appearance so closely resembles that of the female that they are scarcely distinguishable one from the other. This summer-plumage of the Drake is carried while the Duck hatches forth her young; so that father, mother, and chicks, on the latter assuming their first feathers, are all very much alike in appearance. A change, however, soon takes place in the plumage of the Drakes, who assume a characteristic dress, which, as before stated, is carried through the winter and spring.

The change in the plumage of the Mallard is thus characteristically described by the late Mr. Waterton from personal observation:—

"At the close of the breeding-season the drake undergoes a very remarkable change of plumage. On viewing it, all speculation on the part of the ornithologist is utterly confounded; for there is not the smallest clue afforded him by which he may be enabled to trace out the cause of this strange phenomenon. To Him, alone, who has ordered the Ostrich to remain on the earth, and allowed the Bat to range through the ethereal vault of heaven, is known why the Drake for a very short period of the year should be so completely clothed in the raiment of the female that it requires a keen and penetrating eye to distinguish the one from the other. About the 24th of May the breast and back of the drake exhibit the first appearance of a change of colour. In a few days after this the curled feathers above the tail drop out, and grey feathers begin to appear amongst the lovely green plumage which surrounds the eyes. Every succeeding day now brings marks of rapid change. By the 23rd of June scarcely one single green feather is to be seen on the head and neck of the bird. By the 6th of July every feather of the former brilliant plumage has disappeared, and the male has received a garb like that of the female, though of a somewhat darker tint. In the early part of August this new plumage begins to drop off gradually; and by the 10th of October the drake will appear again in all his rich magnificence of dress, than which scarcely any thing throughout the whole wide field of nature can be seen more lovely or better arranged to charm the eye of man. Thus we may say that once every year, for a very short period, the drake goes, as it were, into an eclipse, so that, from the early part of the month of July to about the first week of August, neither in the poultry-yards of civilized man nor through the vast expanse of nature's widest range can there be found a drake in that plumage which at all other seasons of the year is so remarkably splendid and diversified."

The situation of the nest is exceedingly varied, being sometimes placed among the reeds at the edge of the water the birds frequent; at others it is constructed far up on the heath or in the forest, and not unfrequently on the head of a pollard oak or willow, in a hollow of the bare ground, in the midst of a tussock of grass, under a stone, &c. The composition of the nest is as varied as its site, being in some instances a bulky mass rudely constructed of flags, sedges, grasses, &c., at others of grass intermixed and lined with feathers and down. The eggs are from six to ten in number, rather larger and longer than those of the common fowl, and of a dull light greenish stone-colour. The chicks immediately after their exclusion from the eggs are exceeding alert, have all their energies perfect, and readily seek for, and obtain, their insect food both on the land and on the water, and hide themselves, on the approach of a fancied enemy, with great facility among the herbage or any other object that may offer seclusion and safety; indeed, at this period of their existence their shyness is most remarkable, a disposition not readily effaced if an attempt be made towards their domestication, either when hatched by a tame Duck, or by their frequent foster-parent, the ordinary fowl.

The Mallard frequently interbreeds with the Pintail, the Muscovy Duck, and other species, the produce being sometimes twice the weight of those from which they spring: thus in December, 1862, the late Earl of Craven sent me two birds, the product of a cross between the Mallard and the Pintail, which weighed, the one 6 lbs. 3 oz., the other 6 lbs. Of course these enormously heavy Ducks were domesticated and not wild birds. The weights of two wild Mallards I killed at Somerleyton, in fair but not extraordinary condition, were respectively 2 lbs. 11 oz. and 2 lbs. 15 oz.

It is quite unnecessary for me to speak of the excellence of this bird as a viand for the table, or the usefulness of its feathers, since both are so generally known that they need not be commented upon; neither need I attempt to describe the various modes of capturing the bird on its arrival in this country by means of nets, decoys, &c.; those who desire information on these points will find them admirably described and illustrated in the Rev. Richard Lubbock's 'Observations on the Fauna of Norfolk.'

The figures are a trifle smaller than the natural size, with a flight of these birds in the distance.