

## TADORNA VULPANSER.

### Sheldrake.

*Anas tadorna*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 39.

— *cornuta*, S. G. Gmel. Reise, tom. ii. p. 185, tab. 19.

*Tadorna familiaris*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.

— *Bellonii*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 72, pl. 45.

— *vulpanser*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 122.

— *gibbera*, *littoralis*, et *maritima*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 856, 857, 858, tab. 42. fig. 1.

*Vulpanser tadorna*, Keys. et Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 84.

It must, I think, be admitted that the Sheldrake is one of the most attractive and ornamental of the *Anatidæ* indigenous to the British Islands—the breadth of its markings, the purity of the white portions of its plumage, and the rich red of its bill and legs, all combining to render it a creature of great beauty. Besides these features to recommend it to our notice, its actions and manners are at once pleasing and graceful: it walks over the grass with ease, swims buoyantly, and ever deports itself with sprightliness; its flight, too, is in accordance with its other qualifications; for when rising in the air, and displaying its colouring to the greatest advantage, it flies off to the sea or to wherever its attention may be directed, in a style which must be characterized as elegant and vigorous. What part in the economy of nature is this princely species of Duck destined to perform—the useful, or the ornamental? The former it cannot be; for its flesh is strong, musky, and unsavoury, and consequently scarcely fit for human food; we must therefore regard it in the latter sense; and in this respect no bird plays its part more to our satisfaction; for, although by nature it is a strictly maritime species, whose places of resort are the most sterile of our sandy dunes and arid sea-coasts, if pinioned it readily becomes domesticated, and soon makes itself at home on any lake, pond, or sheet of water on which it may be placed; and hence it has become a general favourite with all who take an interest in water-fowl. Another reason for this favouritism may be assigned—namely, that while the Pintail, the Teal, the Mallard, and other members of the Duck tribe which are subject to periodical changes of plumage throw off their gay attire at Midsummer, and become of the dull brown hue of their females, the Sheldrakes of both sexes, having once acquired their beautiful adult garb, always retain it.

Much has been written respecting the breeding of the Sheldrake in the interior of the country, some authors affirming that salt marshes, if not salt water, are essential to its existence; but I am prepared to state that this is not the case; for, among many other persons whom I might mention, no one has been more successful in rearing it than Mr. John Noble, of Berry Hill, near Taplow, in Buckinghamshire, on whose beautiful artificial lake several of these fine birds annually breed when the season of incubation arrives, and may be seen busily disporting themselves from year's end to year's end. It is also said that water is injurious to the young brood, and that they should be kept from it for some time after they are hatched; this in the main may probably be worth attending to, but broods are successfully reared at Berry Hill without any precaution of the kind. A clutch of young Sheldrakes were hatched under a hen of the common Fowl from eggs laid the second week in June; on the 21st of August they were nearly as large as the adults, and at this time had the bill of a purplish flesh-colour; the eyes dark brown; the feet clouded purplish yellow; face white; back of the head and neck black; all the under surface white; no band of chestnut on the breast; tertiary mark brown; and no appearance of the knob on the bill. By the 8th of October in the same year the chestnut band had become almost perfect, and the plumage in every respect assimilating to that of the adult, so that in a month later the one could scarcely be told from the other.

With regard to the parts of the British Islands in which the Sheldrake is to be seen in a state of nature, the difficulty is to say not where it may, but where it may not be met with; for it is to be found more or less in every county bordering the sea, from Cornwall to the Hebrides; wherever there are any low sandy districts in the neighbourhood of the sea and its great inlets, denes and dunes of any extent, and warrens in the vicinity of the ocean, there it may be seen. In Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Lincolnshire, on the east, and the flat shores of Lancashire, on the west, this bird does now, or did a few years ago, bring forth its young. On the continent of Europe the Sheldrake inhabits all the maritime coasts, from the Mediterranean to the Baltic, and is equally numerous in North Africa, Asia Minor, in India, and all along the sea-shores and the borders of the great rivers of China and Japan. In America it is not found; neither did I meet with it in Australia; and I believe, but am not certain, that it does not occur in South Africa.

“The Sheldrake,” says Mr. Selby, “continues in its native haunts through the whole year, and when once paired seems to live with the same mate till accident or death dissolves the connexion. Montagu