

PORZANA PYGMÆA.

Baillon's Crake.

- Crex pygmæa*, Naum. Naturg. der Vög. Deutschl., Theil ix. p. 566, pl. 239.
 — *Baillonii*, Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. i. p. 15.
Rallus Baillonii, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., 2nd edit. tom. xxviii. p. 548.
Gallinula Baillonii, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit. tom. ii. p. 692, tom. iv. p. 440.
 — *stellaris*, Temm.
 — *pygmæa*, Schinz, Eur. Faun., tom. i. p. 349.
 — *Foljambei*, Eyt.
Ortygometra Baillonii, Steph. Cont. Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 228, pl. 27.
 — *pygmæa*, Blas. List of Birds of Eur., English edit. p. 17.
Zapornia Baillonii, Gould, Birds of Eur., vol. iv. pl. 344.
 — *pygmæa*, Bonap. Compt. Rend. de l'Acad. Sci., tom. xliii. Sept. 15 et 22, 1856.

WHEN the mind of the naturalist is led to survey the "aspects of nature" in all their varied phases, he cannot fail to become deeply interested; for he will observe that alpine regions, notwithstanding their frosts and snow, furnish such forms as those of the Ibex and the Læmmergeyer; turf-clad downs, the Dotterel, the Wheatear, that finest among our native butterflies, the *Polyommatus Adonis*, and the curious Bee Orchis; extensive oak-districts, the "Purple Emperor" and the Chafer, so attractive to the Cherm Owl; whilst bogs and marshy lands supply plants, birds, and insects specially adapted in their economy for such places. It is in these latter situations, amidst fogs and miasmata, where the "ignis fatuus" shows its deceptive light, that the present pretty little bird takes up its abode and finds a congenial home.

In the British Islands the *Porzana pygmæa* must be regarded as an irregular visitor; for although many examples have been obtained in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and its nest and eggs sometimes taken, its discovery in our islands is attended with much uncertainty; this, however, is not the case on the Continent, for there it is a summer migrant. It is numerous in Italy, France, and many parts of Germany, and also in the low fluviatile districts of Greece, Bulgaria, and other eastern countries. Like its congeners it retires southward in autumn, and winters in North Africa and Persia. In India it is common, and very generally dispersed, as it probably is throughout the whole of central China. Temminck states that it also inhabits Japan. In Australia it is represented by a very closely allied species, the *Porzana palustris*.

When the shy and retiring habits of this bird and the character of the situations it inhabits are borne in mind, it is not to be wondered at that so few persons have seen it in a state of nature; indeed, its small size, the difficulty of making it take wing, and the secluded life it leads render this almost impossible.

The Rev. Richard Lubbock remarks, in his interesting 'Observations on the Fauna of Norfolk,' that Baillon's Crake has, to his "knowledge, been shot three times on Barton Fen; and it appears far more rare than it really is, as it creeps and skulks about, and scarcely any dog, however sagacious, can compel it to fly. This is also the case in those parts of the Continent where it is not uncommon: for you may pursue it for half an hour, and hardly catch a glimpse of it."

Other instances of its occurrence in Britain will be found in the 'Zoologist,' pp. 1877, 2923, 3035, and 5210; and Mr. Bond informs me that "examples of the bird and two nests were taken in 1858, one containing six eggs, by Mr. Partridge, a gamekeeper, on the 6th of June, at Streatham Ferry, near Ely. Three or four birds were killed shortly afterwards, only one of which was preserved. It is now in the collection of A. F. Sealy, Esq. The second nest, containing seven eggs, was taken at Roswell Pits, near Ely, in the first week of August; and a female bird was caught at the same time. The eggs passed into the possession of the late J. D. Salmon, and the bird into the collection of the Rev. Mr. Shepherd, of Trotterscliffe, Kent."

M. Bailly informs us that this species arrives in Savoy at the same time as the *Porzana minuta*, and, like that bird, departs again at the end of August or the beginning of September. Its habits, manners, and the kind of food upon which it subsists are precisely like those of its near ally. Equally as cunning and agile as that bird, it executes similar manœuvres to escape when hunted by dogs, and often induces them to make false points, during which it retires to a place of safety. It breeds in a similar manner among the long grass of the marshes and the borders of ponds. The female deposits from six to ten eggs, in May or June, on bunches of grass and mosses or the decayed reeds always near water. The eggs are of an elongated form and of a clear olive-red, with indistinct spots and markings of a darker tint. The flesh of the bird is in full flavour in autumn, and is not inferior to that of the *P. minuta* in delicacy.

In size the *Porzana pygmæa* is considerably less than the *P. minuta*; and it is to be regretted that the