

GALLINAGO MAJOR.

Great Snipe.

Scolopax major, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 661.

— *media*, Frisch, Vög., tab. 228.

Gallinago major, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 51, pl. 8.

— *Montagui*, Bonap. Geogr. and Comp. List of the Birds of Eur. and N. Am., p. 52.

Scolopax palustris, Pall.

— *paludosa*, Retz.

— *gallinacea*, Dumont.

Telmatias major, Blas. List of the Birds of Eur., Engl. edit. p. 19.

Scolopax leucurus, Swains. and Rich. Faun. Bor.-Am., vol. ii. p. 501.

HOWEVER numerous this species may be on the European continent, England is not the country in which it regularly breeds, or to which it pays its visits with any degree of certainty. Our islands are out of its line of migration; and hence those which occasionally occur must be regarded as individuals which have deviated from their regular course, and therefore come under the denomination of accidental visitors. Still the Great Snipe is far from being a scarce bird, and an autumn seldom passes without specimens being shot by sportsmen and others. I have several times purchased the bird in our great poultry-market in Leadenhall Street, and I advise any of my readers not to let the chance slip, if a similar opportunity should offer itself to them; for, in an epicurean sense, a greater treat than a roasted, fat Double Snipe of the year can scarcely be enjoyed; and when I tell them that its weight is eight and sometimes nine ounces, they will readily imagine that such a Snipe is a *bonne bouche* of no ordinary kind. Nearly all the examples that have come under my notice have been birds of the year, and in this youthful state they differ very considerably in plumage from the adult, killed in spring. The four outer tail-feathers in the young are crossed with strong zigzag bars of brown, whereas in the adult they are snow-white, with square blotches of black on the external margin near the base; hence the broad white tips of the outer tail-feathers show very conspicuously in the old birds, as also do the several semicircular bands across the wings, formed by the white tipplings of the secondaries and wing-coverts. The breeding-individuals further differ from autumn-killed young birds, by the stronger markings of black on every part of the under surface of the body.

Montagu's specimens now in the British Museum, and to which the name of *Montagui* was given by Prince Charles Bonaparte, are young birds of this species. The *Scolopax leucurus* of Swainson, said to have been received from Hudson's Bay (a statement which I think is very questionable), is the present bird in its adult livery.

In its habits and disposition the Great Snipe differs very much from the common species, *Gallinago scolopacinus*; it is not so recluse and shy; and it is not gregarious, never being seen in such large flocks. When it rises, it flies heavily, and soon pitches again; in a word, it lacks the sprightliness and spirit of the Common Snipe; for it has not the quick turning and dashing flight of that species, which rises high in the air and makes a survey of the heavens before it descends to the ground again. I have stated that the Great Snipe must be regarded as an accidental visitor to our islands. The low swampy grounds of Brabant, Friesland, and Hanover, and the wet moorlands of Norway and Sweden, are probably the nurseries whence it comes. Independently of these places, it is found during summer in all parts of Northern Russia and Western Siberia, which it leaves in autumn for Asia Minor, while those that have been bred further west proceed to Africa, some great flights stopping by the way, in the Pontine Marshes around Rome and similar situations.

I am indebted to Mr. Percy Godman for the skin of a young bird only a few days old, which, when compared with the young of the Common Snipe at the same age, presents some remarkable differences. First, the hair-like feathers which cover the body are longer, the general tint is lighter, and the markings of the head and back are much less complicated and not so pretty; in a word, the young Double Snipe approaches as much to the general appearance and markings of the Woodcock of the same age as to the Common Snipe. Mr. Godman also gave me some information, which he has since published, relative to an artifice adopted by the female of this species to prevent the discovery of her nest:—

“On walking across the open part of the marsh at the back of the village of Bodö, in Norway, on the 26th of May, we flushed the first Great Snipe. This bird had evidently only just arrived, and did not fly more than a few yards before it settled again. Whenever else we observed this species, it was amongst the brushwood on the borders of the marsh. A few days after, on pushing our way