

SCOLOPAX RUSTICOLA, Linn.

Woodcock.

Scolopax rusticola, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 60.

——— *major*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Spec. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 31.

——— *pinetorum*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 613, pl. 32. fig. 3.

——— *sylvestris*, Brehm, ibid., p. 614.

Rusticola vulgaris, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. iii. p. 348.

——— *sylvestris*, Macgill. Man. of Nat. Hist. Orn., vol. ii. p. 105.

THE principal summer home of the Woodcock is the northern portion of the Old World; and so widely is it spread over those parts of the globe that it is to be met with from eastern Siberia to the western extremity of Europe. There the main body of the Woodcocks lay their eggs and rear their young; and thence, when nature prompts them so to do, they migrate in a southern direction, those of Kamtschatka probably resorting to Japan, those frequenting Mongolia to China, and those which have bred in western Siberia and Thibet proceeding to the mountainous districts of Burmah, India, Affghanistan, and Persia. It must therefore be the Woodcocks that summer in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia which spread over the British Islands, continental Europe, Palestine, and North Africa. The bird also breeds yearly in the Madeiras, and, according to Mr. Frederick Godman, in the Azores. It has also once occurred in Newfoundland.

Now, although I have spoken of the Woodcock as an inhabitant of the north, there is not, I believe, a county in the central portion of England, or any part of Scotland or Ireland, in which it does not yearly breed in considerable abundance; these, however, are but few when compared with the great numbers which resort for this purpose to the countries above alluded to.

It is well known that the impulse which periodically stimulates a species to change its position is equally strong, whether the bird be in confinement or at large; a Turtledove in a cage, or a Cuckoo brought up by hand, each will destroy itself by dashing its head against the roof of its prison at the period when its fellows depart for other climes; and, I believe, the Woodcocks which are bred in England and Scotland are prompted to leave their native woods, as the Snipes do the fells, and to proceed southward when the proper season arrives, like those whose breeding-quarters lie further north. All our native-bred birds, however, may not leave the British islands; and I think it probable that the flights which appear yearly in Cornwall and the Scilly Islands may be a portion of them. These flights, which are said to arrive from the east, might go out to sea from our south coast and, if they encounter adverse winds, double back upon Cornwall and Scilly. If this be not the case, I cannot account for their occurrence at the early period at which they are said to arrive. Mr. Rodd states that they make their first appearance in the neighbourhood of the Land's End about the second week of October, and the first flights usually take place with a south-east wind; and Mr. Augustus Smith has furnished me with a precisely similar account of the arrival of the bird on the Scilly Islands.

I need not recapitulate the hundreds of recorded instances of the bird's breeding in England, Scotland, and Ireland; but in confirmation of the fact I may state that I have myself several times received young birds from localities in the counties of Middlesex, Surrey, and Kent, as near to London as Caen Wood, at Highgate, on the north, and Streatham Common on the south. The Marquis Camden tells me that at least a dozen nests have been found during a single season in his woods in Sussex.

The late Mr. St. John states, in his 'Tour in Sutherlandshire,' that "the Woodcock breeds every season in the north of Scotland, not only in the large fir-plantations, but also in the smaller patches of birch &c. which fringe the shores of many of the most northern lakes. That those bred in the country migrate, I have no doubt, as they all invariably disappear for two or three months between summer and the first frosts of winter. As I have seen their nests at all times from March to August, it is natural to suppose that the Woodcock breeds more than once in the season."

Mr. Atholl MacGregor writes me word that Mr. White, the head keeper on Lord Mansfield's estate in Scotland, says "that all the under keepers can testify to Woodcocks breeding in every wood, and that one of them states that between thirty and forty remained in the covers under his charge during the months of April and May 1864, and that the greater number of them bred. Mr. White adds that in a short walk on the 23rd of July he flushed three couples, and that his own impression is that they breed two or three times in the summer, he having seen broods in the same stage of plumage both in May and August. When the month of August or September is dry, many of the birds leave; but he thinks they do not go out of the country."