

GLAREOLA PRATINCOLA.

Common Pratincole.

Hirundo pratincola, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 345.

Glareola austriaca, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. pp. 695, 696.

——— *torquata*, Meyer, Taschenb. Deutschl. Vög., tom. ii. p. 404.

——— *pratincola*, Leach, Trans. Linn. Soc., vol. xiii. p. 131, pl. 12.

THE *Glareola pratincola* is the type of one of those isolated forms which have sadly puzzled systematic ornithologists as to the place they should occupy in their arrangement of birds. By many of the earlier writers it was classed with the Swallows; some of the more recent ones have noticed its Tern-like actions; while by most modern systematists it is arranged with the *Grallatores* and in close alliance with the Plovers.

The celebrated Linnæus, following Aldrovandus and Willughby, included it in the genus *Hirundo*, in the 12th and last edition of his 'Systema Naturæ' (of 1766); but at that time Linné had not seen a Pratincole, a fact of which I have become aware from a letter I possess in his own handwriting, dated 1774 (eight years later), addressed to the Reverend John White, a brother of the well-known Gilbert White, of Selborne, in which, after rendering eternal thanks for, and commenting upon the interesting objects he had just received from him, he says:—"Pratincolam antea non vidi; ad Grallas spectat, et proprii generis:" *i. e.* "Pratincola I had not seen before; it is evidently allied to the Grallæ, and forms a distinct genus." This must have been the source of information to which Latham refers in his General History, vol. ix. p. 361, where he says:—"The late Mr. White informed me that, finding Linnæus had placed this bird with the Swallows, he sent one to him, which had been shot on the shore of Gibraltar, in May 1770; on the sight of which the great naturalist concurred in opinion that it belonged to the Waders, and not to the Passerine Order." I must fairly admit that at one time I was inclined to the Hirundine theory; and regarded the bird as a terrestrial Swallow rather than, as it appears to be, an aerial Plover; and this notion prevailed with me until a very recent period, when (after soliciting various friends visiting North Africa, Spain, and India to send me young Pratincoles one or two days old, an examination of which I knew would confirm or refute my ideas on the subject) I was so fortunate as to obtain, through the kindness of Lord Lilford, two chicks of the required age in spirits, accompanied by a note informing me that the young birds run over the ground immediately after exclusion from the egg, and are not blind, naked, and helpless, like newly hatched Swallows,—facts which leave no doubt on my mind that the Pratincole should not be associated with those birds.

As Linnæus remarked, the bird does belong to a distinct genus, of which since his time several other members have been discovered, the whole now amounting to nine or ten in number, all inhabitants of the Old World, over nearly the whole of which one or other of them are distributed. In Europe there are two—*Glareola pratincola* and *G. melanoptera*; in Africa, besides these, there are at least three others; in India four or five, and in Australia two, one of which is perhaps not found elsewhere.

In England the Pratincole has been killed many times and at various seasons of the year; it has also been taken at least once in Ireland; but, as yet, Scotland has either proved to be too far north, or the birds which would have passed over England to that country have met with the usual ill fortune of accidental visitors. It is stated, however, that Bullock obtained an example in the Isle of Unst, one of the Shetland group, which, at the dispersion of his collection in 1819, was sold for eight guineas, and transferred to the British Museum.

According to Temminck, the Pratincole frequents the borders of lakes, rivers, and inland seas, particularly such as form extensive marshes covered with aquatic herbage. In Hungary, it abounds on the marshy confines of the lakes Neusidel and Balaton, where he saw it in flocks of hundreds together. It is likewise met with in some parts of Germany, France, and Spain, and also in Switzerland, Italy, Piedmont, and Savoy; but in these latter countries it must be regarded as a bird of passage or occasional visitant. Temminck also states that it breeds in Sardinia, and is very abundant in Dalmatia, on the borders of the lake Bocagnaro during its spring migration. It has been observed in Persia and in considerable flocks in the neighbourhood of the Caucasus; and I possess examples from Western India. It is also said to resort to Tartary, but not to go further north than latitude 53°; and it will be seen from the following notes that it frequents Palestine &c. Mr. Osbert Salvin found the Pratincole frequenting the salt lakes and freshwater marshes of the tableland of the interior of the Eastern Atlas, and says:—"Its fearless manner and familiar habits cause it to rank high among the interesting birds of the country. When in proximity to their breeding-places, the whole flock comes wheeling and screaming round, while some dart passionately down to within a few feet of the intruder's head, retiring again to make another descent. When the first transports of excitement