

ŒDICNEMUS CREPITANS.

Stone-Plover, or Thick-knee.

Charadrius œdicnemus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 255.

Otis œdicnemus, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 661.

Fedoa œdicnemus, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 28.

Œdicnemus crepitans, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1815, p. 322.

Œdicnemus desertorum et *Œ. arenarius*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 539.

——— *griseus*, Koch, Baier. Zool., vol. i. p. 266.

——— *indicus*, Salvadori, Att. Soc. Ital. Sc. Nat., 1866, tom. viii.

——— *Belloni*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 114.

THE European Stone-Plover (or Thick-kneed Bustard, as it is commonly called) is a bird of considerable size, and one which, in my opinion, is unusually interesting, its large lustrous eyes, long and well-proportioned legs, and ample wings rendering it very graceful in appearance. It is a shy, wild creature, preferring the most stony fields and chalky downs to alluvial flats and cultivated districts, is very locally distributed over England, is not found in Scotland, and is extremely rare in Ireland. Here in England it is more often heard than seen, and would rarely be detected did not its peculiar whistling note, which is most frequently uttered in the night, betray its presence.

Its usual position in the daytime is in the centre of the largest fields of the uplands (not unfrequently among the thin crops of turnips or the few cereals that struggle for existence in such localities), in warrens, and in heaths. According to the Hon. and Rev. W. Herbert, "the Stone-Plover is found only on chalk or on ploughed land where there is a chalk subsoil. Whether this be an invariable rule or not, I must leave to others to determine; but it is a remarkable fact that in Middlesex, where there is but little chalk, the Stone-Curlew is a very scarce bird."

Some ornithologists have questioned whether this bird is a migrant, or if it be a stationary species in our island; it is certain, however, that if a migratory movement to other countries takes place in autumn, a certain number stay with us, and merely remove from one part of the country to another; at least, such is the inference I deduce from the notes I have received from various correspondents.

"In Berkshire," says Mr. Hewett, "the Stone- or Norfolk Plovers arrive in spring, and soon form nests by scratching holes in the ground; they remain till September, when they leave."

"It is singular, but quite true," says Mr. Rodd, "that this species has never, to my knowledge, occurred in Cornwall in the summer season; at that time the bird is entirely unknown to us, being neither heard nor seen, although, year after year, specimens are procured in the depth of winter. The migratory movement of this bird is, no doubt, similar to that of others which come to us in the breeding-season, and retire again in the autumn and towards winter to the southern countries of Europe and the north of Africa. The only way to account for the regular hyemal visits of the Great Plover to this district is, that the extreme southern latitude of the British Isles, which may be included between the Lizard Point and the Land's End, is the exact northern boundary of the space occupied by the species in its winter quarters."

"A pair of Stone-Plovers," says Mr. Philip Crowley, of Alton, "were shot at Holybourne on New-Year's day. Their plumage was much brighter than one I have, which was killed in the summer. They generally leave here about the middle or end of September; at least I have never seen or heard of any after that time."

"A friend of mine," writes Mr. W. Brodrick, of Ilfracombe, Devon, "shot a Norfolk Plover (*Œdicnemus crepitans*) on Braunton burrows, about ten miles from this place, on Monday last (Jan. 18th, 1858). It was a male bird in perfect plumage and condition. The stomach contained the remains of small beetles."

In our islands it is almost in England alone that this bird is to be found. On the continent of Europe its distribution is more general; and it is equally numerous in North Africa, Palestine, Asia Minor, Persia, and India; for I do not regard the species inhabiting the latter country as different: if I did, I must then separate the bird I killed in Malta, as it varied from both English and Indian specimens, though so slightly that it could only be regarded as a local variety. I might quote from twenty writers the accounts they have given as the result of their acquaintance with this bird in various parts of North Africa, Malta, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France; but I will end this part of its history by a few lines from Temminck, who, speaking of its distribution, curtly says:—"Abundant in the middle of France, in Italy, Sardinia, the Archipelago, and Turkey; occasionally in Germany, and very seldom met with in Holland."

The late Mr. Salmon, in his notice of the arrival of migratory birds in the neighbourhood of Thetford, in