

VANELLUS CRISTATUS.

Lapwing or Peewit.

Tringa Vanellus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 248.

Vanellus cristatus, Temm. Man. d'Orn., p. 348.

——— *Gavia*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Spec. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 29.

Charadrius Vanellus, Wagl. Syst. Av., *Charadrius*, sp. 1.

INDEPENDENTLY of the British Islands, the Lapwing is found all over the temperate and warmer portions of Europe, from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean; it also inhabits Morocco and Algeria, occurs in Madeira, and extends its range eastward to Egypt, Syria, Persia, and the Punjab. Moreover we know that it forms part of the avifauna of China and Japan; for Mr. Swinhoe informs us it is found from Shanghai to Pekin; and the Russian naturalists have observed it at Astracan, in the vicinity of Lake Baikal, and in Amoorland.

Whatever misdemeanour may be laid at the door of some of our native birds, the Lapwing, at least, is, free from any such charge; for where is there one that is more useful or less inclined to mischief? No kind of depredation can be brought home to it, its whole existence and economy leading it to frequent the open wastes, and seldom to trespass upon cultivated districts, unless it be when the land is in fallow or occasionally during seed-time. Fields of waving corn and orchards redundant with fruit offer it no temptation: its province is the upland sheep-walk, the wild moorland, the wet grassy mead, the marsh, and the chases of olden times (if any be left), over which it trips and enlivens their solitude with its plaintive cry of *pee-wit*. Before scientific farming and drainage were in vogue, when the border-lines of two countries, now happily united, were haunted by the moss-trooper, and the neighbouring moors were too often fields of blood, it was more abundant than it is now. Happily, associations of a far different character are connected with it, since its justly esteemed eggs rank first among the viands of the wedding breakfast, and the festive supper is never complete without them, if procurable. The great heaths of Surrey and Hampshire, the peaty lowlands and sandy warrens of Norfolk and Suffolk, the marshes of Lincoln- and Cambridge-shires, Essex, and Kent, yearly send their quota: the number thus, combined with those sent from Holland must be immense, and it is surprising that the bird, though perhaps more rapidly declining in numbers than any other British species, is so plentiful as it still is. Dr. Plomley informed Mr. Yarrell that two hundred dozen eggs were sent from Romney Marsh alone to Dover in 1839.

Notwithstanding that the enclosure of many of the localities formerly frequented by this bird has greatly curtailed its habitat, it is still plentiful in the more sterile parts of the country; and I know of no British bird more generally diffused over the three kingdoms, for it is found far and near in sufficient abundance to render it common everywhere: in the west of Cornwall and on the sea-girt Scilly Isles it is as numerous in winter as it is in the north of Scotland in summer; its range also extends over the Orkney, the Shetland, and the Western Isles, and it even visits Iceland. Mr. Augustus Smith informed me that the Lapwing usually comes to Scilly in severe winters, and was more plentiful in 1862 and 1863 than usual, and that many then died from starvation.

In its disposition the Lapwing is naturally shy and distrustful, and, except in summer, when it is dispersed over the country in pairs, seldom admits of a very near approach. During the nesting-period it employs many artifices to draw the intruder away from the part of the heath or marsh in which its eggs are deposited, in the course of which it performs many singular and interesting evolutions, tumbling, dipping, and turning with great rapidity; still, with all its cunning, man's reasoning powers and his habit of observation render him more than a match for the bird, and those who are accustomed to the search readily find the eggs, although they are deposited in the midst of the moor, without, apparently, any means of direction to their site. Quick-eyed, indeed, are the eggers whose daily bread depends upon the success attending their long tramps over the heaths and commons on which live the Lapwings, the Stone-chats, and the Wheatears but scarcely aught else. Like the Wren and some other small birds, who often build several nests before determining in which the eggs shall be deposited, the Lapwing is capricious as to the site for the nurture of her future progeny, on which point the following passage from the late Mr. St. John's 'Natural History and Sport in Moray' may be appropriately quoted:—"They 'seem to commence several nests before they determine on laying their eggs in any one, as I have frequently seen three or four nests begun all near each other; and the Peewits are far too quarrelsome for these to be the nests of different birds. By the time their four eggs are laid, they generally collect a considerable quantity of straws, roots, or sticks, appearing to increase with every egg they lay.'" In confirmation of