

CICONIA NIGRA.

Black Stork.

Ardea nigra, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 58.

Ciconia nigra, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 96.

— *fusca*, Briss. Orn., tom. v. p. 362, pl. 31.

LIKE the foregoing species, the Black Stork is a migratory bird. In the spring it advances to a much higher latitude than the White, visiting even Russia and Siberia, and passing over Sweden towards the north in considerable numbers; but it seldom comes so far westward as England. In Eastern Europe it is frequently met with; it is included by Schrenck among the birds of Amoorland; it also inhabits North Africa, and it is particularly abundant on the Nile, whence a fine specimen was brought to me by Mr. Cuthbert Larking. The Rev. H. B. Tristram states that it is found all through the winter in small flocks on the barren plains by the Dead Sea, never visiting the upper country, and mentions that he met with a flock of about two hundred, apparently searching for food, in the barren salt plain close to the border of that sea. They were too wary to allow him to approach within shot, but did not fly far when disturbed. As well as he could discover, they were feeding on the small snails which cluster on the twigs of the *Salsora* in that arid region.

In the islands of the Mediterranean it appears to be scarce; Mr. Wright notes it as rare at Malta and Gozo, and Lord Lilford as being equally so in the Ionian Islands; Messrs. Elwes and Buckley state that it is by no means numerous in Turkey, but that a pair is found here and there in Bulgaria.

Unlike the White, the Black Stork shuns rather than courts the society of man, "and," says Mr. Bennett, "makes its temporary dwelling in the most secluded spots, frequenting impenetrable morasses or the banks of such rivers and lakes as are seldom disturbed by the presence of intruders, and building its nest on the summits of the loftiest pines." It would seem, however, that the situation of the nest depends much upon the nature of the locality; for Messrs. Elwes and Buckley state that in Bulgaria "the nest is usually built in a rock in a lonely situation, and is used for many consecutive years": and Mr. W. H. Simpson, when speaking of the low cliffs which flank the lateral valleys and occasionally the stream of the Danube itself on the shore of the same country, states that they are favourite places for the larger birds of prey; but not of these alone, for the Black Stork also breeds there; "at least," says he, "we discovered one nest in a very peculiar position for a bird which has the reputation of breeding in the densest thickets of impervious morasses. The cliff in this case was about sixty feet high, the strata being horizontal or nearly so. In the face of the upper ledge there had been at some time, artificially excavated in the soft stone, a chamber having a sort of antechamber, which communicated by means of a couple of steps with a crack in the rock, which it was not difficult to reach from the top when the exact path was once known. The chamber itself had much the appearance of a hermit's cell; but as the aperture in the face of the cliff was the entire width of one side, the apartment was airy and cheerful, commanding a fine view of the valley below. Altogether it was a place where one could have had no objection to put up for a few days in case of necessity. Here it was that a pair of Black Storks had taken up lodgings for the season, as we found out one morning about the 27th of April. Some little time elapsed before we discovered the entrance from the top, a fact of which the Black Storks were probably not cognizant. At the time of our first visit there were no eggs, nor, indeed, was there any thing exactly worthy of the name of a nest. But in the floor of the chamber was a circular depression about the size and shape of a large dinner-plate, not far from the edge of the aperture. For what purpose this depression, evidently artificial, had been made, was to us as great a mystery as the origin of the entire excavation. The Black Stork had evidently thought she could put it to some use; for it was here, upon a few dry sticks which partially filled the depression, that she meant to lay her eggs. As it was necessary for me to leave Turkey about the 4th of May, it was agreed not to approach the place again till the day before my departure. In the interim I used occasionally to take a stroll down the valley and seat myself on the opposite hill, where, through a telescope, I could see the Black Stork sitting composedly on her make-shift of a nest, looking like some spirit of darkness in its cave. Already I was counting the eggs, which would undoubtedly have been mine but for the evil curiosity of a Transylvanian shepherd, who had noticed me spying into the hole, and had perhaps seen us entering it. On the appointed day I rode over with a friend. Dismounting at the edge of the cliff we crept down to the crack in the rock, and thence through the artificial passage into the chamber itself. Neither bird nor eggs were visible; some great catastrophe had happened, and the eggs I had counted on, though laid, were missing. It transpired that the Transylvanian had done the deed, having