

## OTIS TETRAX, *Linn.*

### Little Bustard.

*Otis tetrax*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 264.

— *minor*, Briss. Orn., tom. v. p. 24, pl. ii. figs. 1 & 2.

*Tetrax campestris*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Spec. of Mamm. and Birds preserved in Brit. Mus., p. 28.

UNLIKE the Great Bustard, which at one time was indigenous to our island, this smaller species has no more claim to rank as a British bird than any other accidental visitor. It is true that records of its having been shot in many counties, from Cornwall to the banks of the Tweed, may be found in the various works on British ornithology, but these occurrences extend over a great number of years—from the time of Pennant to that of Yarrell. North of the Tweed it has seldom occurred; and the late Mr. Thompson states that only two have been seen in Ireland. If this general view of the occurrence of the bird in Britain should not be sufficiently precise, I must refer my readers to the pages of the 'Zoologist,' the works of Yarrell and others, where the exact dates and localities will be found. I must admit that I am somewhat surprised that the majority of the specimens which fly over from the Continent to England should pay their visits in autumn or winter. Is it because our island is more humid, and less affected by the frost, than France and Germany? or are these autumnal visits of an accidental character, when the bird, finding the climate suitable for winter-quarters, tarries until it is shot, which is usually its fate?

Having stated that Britain is not the true home of the Little Bustard, and that it was never indigenous here, I now proceed to mention what parts of the earth's surface it enlivens. These are the open champaign parts of France and Spain, the sterile districts of Germany and Turkey, and the southern steppes of Russia, as far east as the Caspian Sea. In all these latter countries it is abundant, particularly in summer; and I have not the least doubt that it is strictly migratory, and that it crosses both the Mediterranean and Black Sea in spring and autumn,—the greater portion of those which summer in France and Spain proceeding to Morocco and other parts of northern Africa in winter, and those which breed in the Crimea crossing in like manner to Asia Minor and Persia.

"Pennant, in his 'Arctic Zoology,' says that the Little Bustard is frequently met with in the southern and south-western parts of Russia, where it migrates in small flocks, and that it is also found in the deserts of Tartary. It is numerous in France, and also occurs in Spain, Provence, Italy, and Sardinia, where Vieillot says it remains all the year. It is found in North Africa, Turkey, and Greece. Specimens have been sent to the Zoological Society from Erzeroum by Keith Abbott, Esq., and by Messrs. Dickson and Ross, who state in their notes that it is very common in the ploughed fields on the skirts of the marshes. Ménétriés observes that it is numerous at the foot of Mount Caucasus, particularly towards the shores of the Caspian Sea. Near Baiku, in December, he saw immense flocks passing from east to west: of all those seen or procured and examined, not a single male had any black on the throat." (Yarrell, 'Hist. of Brit. Birds,' vol. ii. p. 373.)

Africa is the principal habitat of the *Otidinæ*, more species of the family of Bustards existing on that continent than in any other part of the world; in Africa also the largest known species are found, while the smallest, the *Sypheotis aurita*, is a native of India. It is somewhat singular that, so far as I am aware, no species of *Otis* has yet been discovered in Java, Sumatra, or Borneo, while a very fine one solemnly treads the extensive plains of Australia. The family comprises about twenty species, which, though bearing a very marked resemblance in structure, have been divided into half as many sections or minor groups, to which generic appellations have been assigned,—that of *Tetrax* being given to the present bird. Without questioning the propriety of this arrangement, I shall figure our own two Bustards under the term of *Otis*. Those who have not made ornithology a study will be surprised to learn that it is in spring alone that the male is adorned with the black and white markings of the neck and the lovely grey hue of the face and cheeks, that at other seasons he is clothed like the female, and that it is only when thus gaily attired he solicits the opposite sex to mate with him. The assumption of this gay plumage is commenced when the sun returns to our latitudes, and with his genial warmth stimulates alike both animal and vegetable life; it is completed by the time the great luminary has reached the zenith, after which the bird again moults and reassumes his winter livery. In this country the Little Bustard is seldom seen in his full nuptial dress: of the many examples that have been killed here, I do not recollect more than two in this state; of these one, formerly in Mr. Bullock's collection, is now in the British Museum; the depository of the other has escaped my memory. The former is said to have been taken in Norfolk, which county, together with the adjoining ones of Suffolk and Essex, appears to have been more frequently visited by this species than any other. "Several specimens of this rare and accidental visitant," says H. Stevenson, Esq., "have occurred