

## OTIS TARDA, *Linn.*

### Great Bustard.

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

I CONSIDER it would not add to the interest of my account of the Bustard, were I to give a detailed list of the places and times of its capture in this country. In the convenient handbooks of Selby and Yarrell, this kind of information may be found. I shall therefore only mention some of the later occurrences of this noble bird, which I have selected as a vignette for the cover of the present work.

The extensive warrens and open parts of Norfolk and Suffolk, the heaths about Newmarket in Cambridgeshire, the plains around Salisbury and Stonehenge and other parts of Wiltshire, the downs of Berkshire, Hampshire, and Sussex, and the Yorkshire wolds are among the localities where it formerly existed and doubtless bred; but, like the Great Auk, which has not been seen alive since 1844, it is now extirpated from our island. Dr. Fleming observes that it seems to have been found in Scotland in the days of Hector Boethius, but had become rare in the time of Sir Robert Sibbald. In Ireland it appears never to have been more than an accidental visitor.

Gilbert White, in his diary, mentions, under the date of Nov. 17, 1782, "Being at a lone farm-house on the downs between Whorwell and Winchester, the carter told me that, about twelve years before, he had seen a flock of eighteen Bustards at one time on that farm." In a note lately addressed to the Rev. John Fountaine by Henry Dugmore, Esq., and kindly placed in my hands by that gentleman, he says:—"I cannot remember the year I was riding with Mr. Hamond when I saw a flock of twenty-seven Bustards rise from Westacre field, and wheel round us within 80 or 100 yards; but I should say it was as far back as 1820."

Frederick J. Nash, Esq., of Bishop's Stortford, several times told Mr. Yarrell "that when he was a young man, and then taking the field as a sportsman, he once saw nine flights of Bustards in one day, not far from Thetford, in Norfolk. Some of these were probably seen more than once; but at that time, about the beginning of the present century, the country between Thetford and Brandon, and thence southward to Mildenhall, was considered to be the head-quarters of the Great Bustard in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk."

It is evident, then, that until within the last fifty years the Bustard was very far from being killed off, and with ordinary care and protection it might have been preserved until the present day. Whatever interest the landed proprietors may have taken, the small farmer and the poacher made quick work of shooting down the remnant of this fine species. The males appear to have been the first to disappear in all parts of the country, a few females lingering behind until they, too, encountered that fate which awaits so many of the larger animals.

Henry Stevenson, Esq., of Norwich, informs me that "in 1833 three nests were found on Massingham Heath, near Swaffham. Together they contained five eggs, all of which were taken under the impression that no cocks were then existing, and that therefore the eggs would not be fertile. From this time until 1838 hen birds continued to drop eggs at random, forming no nest. The last nest found in Suffolk, according to Mr. Newton, was discovered on the borders of Thetford Warren."

I shall now enumerate some instances of the occurrence of the Bustard since our indigenous birds ceased to exist—stragglers which have now and then flown across from the Continent, like other accidental visitors, and which, like the Sandgrouse, received no other welcome than that of being shot that their skins might adorn some public museum or private collection.

A female, killed near the Lizard, in March 1843, is now in the possession of E. H. Rodd, Esq.; another specimen was shot near St. Austell in 1854.

In 1850 a specimen, said to be a female, was killed at Lydd, in Romney Marsh; in December 1851, another was shot in a marshy piece of ground in the parish of Bratton Clovelly, North Devon. Mr. Gatcombe informs me that the stomach of this bird, which he examined, "contained a quantity of turnip-leaves and a number of flat stones, some of which were about the size of a sixpence. The bird is now in the possession of J. G. Newton, Esq., of Millaton Bridestow, North Devon."

In March 1854 a female was killed at Leeshill, in Cumberland.

In January 1856 one was caught by a boy near Hungerford, and now graces the collection of M. H. Marsh, Esq., M.P. for Salisbury.

In 1859 a young male was killed near Romney, in Kent, by Mr. Chittenden; it is now in the possession of George Simmons, Esq., of East Peckham.

In February 1861 a specimen, the sex of which was not stated, was killed near York.

The middle countries of Europe appear to be the centre of the area over which the range of the Great