

COTURNIX COMMUNIS.

Common Quail.

Tetrao coturnix, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 74.

Perdix coturnix, Lath. Ind. Orn., tom. ii. p. 651.

Coturnix communis, Bonn. Ency. Méth. Orn., part. i. p. 217.

——— *dactylisonans*, Meyer, Vög. Liev- u. Esthl., p. 197.

——— *vulgaris*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 45.

——— *major, media et minor*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 527, 528, 529, tab. 26. fig. 4.

Ortygion coturnix, Keys. et Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 66.

HISTORICALLY speaking the Quail is one of the very oldest known of migratory birds, and is especially interesting from more than one point of view. It fed the Israelites of old, as it now does the epicures of London and Paris, was better known to Moses than to those who now regard it as a choice luxury for the table, and its arrival was looked forward to with as much interest in the East nearly 4000 years ago as it is at the present moment in Sicily, Italy, and elsewhere. It migrates from south to north in April and takes the reverse course in August and September, crossing the Mediterranean and the Black Sea as regularly as a planet pursues its course.

So much has been written on the history of the Quail and the extent of its range over the globe, that little or nothing now remains to be said on the subject. Its range is vast indeed; for it not only inhabits the whole of Europe, but the greater part of India, Russia, and, perhaps, China and Japan.

In Britain it is far less regular in its appearance than on the neighbouring continent, being plentiful in some seasons and at others but sparingly dispersed; thus at one period the corn-fields and stony elevations almost ring with their "*whit, whit,*" while at others the stillness of evening is scarcely disturbed by their well-known notes. Of the three kingdoms, Ireland is the one most frequented by the Quail, the next England, and lastly Scotland. The bird does not appear to evince a preference for any particular counties, and it is just as likely that a pair or pairs may be found breeding in Cornwall as in the northern or any of the intervening English counties: it is the same in Scotland, for it may just as probably be met with on the Grampians as in the Lowlands; and it has been known to breed in the Outer Hebrides. In whatever locality it affects it is only to be found in summer; if an example be seen at the opposite season the circumstance must be regarded as an unusual one: not so, however, in Ireland, for there many whose migratory instinct would seem to be in abeyance, remain during the winter, unless shot during frosts and sent over with Snipes and Plovers for sale to the London markets, where I have frequently seen examples at this period of the year; and on inquiring what part of Ireland they were from have been told Tralee, a portion of the country spoken of by Thompson as one in which Quails are most abundant. If a correct statistic account could be obtained of the numbers shot in the British Islands, and of the numbers brought to our markets alive from Egypt, Italy, and other southern and eastern countries, I imagine we should be truly astonished. Latham stated, nearly forty years ago, that the Quails came twice a year into the island of Capri in such vast numbers that the bishop of the island drew the chief part of his revenue from them, and that on the west coast of Naples, within the space of four or five miles, 100,000 had been taken in a day. Of the bird in a wild state in England, I have myself taken toll from three beves in one day, as near to London as the parish of Langley, and within sight of the Royal Castle of Windsor; but the total number was few as compared with the ten or twelve brace a day killed by Mr. Newcome at South Ferry Fens, in Norfolk, as stated by Mr. Stevenson; and I have known similar instances of a like number having been procured by other sportsmen. In the year 1870, Quails came to this country in unusually large numbers, spreading themselves far and wide over England and Scotland, affording much sport to the pursuers of game; for the ground which is suited to the Partridge is equally so to this diminutive but highly nutritive species.

Who better than a clergyman, especially when he is at the same time an excellent ornithologist, ought to be able to settle the vexed question as to whether the "*selav*" of the Hebrews, with which they were so miraculously fed in the wilderness, was or was not the Quail? Surely, then, no apology is necessary for the insertion of the following extract from my friend the Rev. H. B. Tristram's 'Natural History of the Bible':—

Ingenious commentators have spared no pains in the attempt to prove the '*selav*' was not a Quail, but some other creature they imagined more likely to be found in the desert. In spite of all etymology, and of the distinct allusion in the Psalms to *feathered* fowl, some have suggested locusts, some flying fish; others