

CACCABIS RUBRA.

Red-legged Partridge.

Tetrao rufus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 276.

Perdix rufa, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 647, β .

—— *rubra*, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 236.

Caccabis rufa, G. R. Gray, Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 508, *Caccabis*, sp. 1.

It has always appeared to me questionable whether such birds as the Red-legged Partridge and the Pheasant should be regarded as pertaining to the avifauna of our islands more than the Guinea-fowl or the Turkey. The only reason that can be assigned for giving them a place therein is the circumstance of their now being found in a semi-wild state, whereas the Turkey and the Guinea-fowl can only be considered as additions to our domestic poultry; and hence it is that British ornithologists have, by common consent, included the former in their enumerations of our birds, and excluded the latter. I consider that the Red-legged Partridge affords the acclimatizer the best evidence that a bird may become naturalized in a foreign country. The Pheasant, without protection and a constant supply of artificial food, would probably die out in thirty years; but I believe the Red-leg would thrive and multiply to almost any extent in certain parts of our island; this, however, is not saying much, since a narrow strait only separates us from France, where the bird is strictly indigenous.

I have often had occasion to comment in the present work upon the splitting up of natural groups of birds into minute genera — to agree with the propriety of the measure in some instances, and to condemn it in others. The separation of the present bird and its allies from the other members of the *Perdix* is to be commended; for although many ornithologists consider the Red-legged and the common Partridge too closely allied to admit of their being so treated, it will be found on a comparison of the two birds that they differ very considerably, both in structure and in the colouring of their plumage; and I therefore think Dr. Kaup was fully justified in separating them and in establishing the genus *Caccabis* for the reception of the former. The Red-legged Partridges are some of the most beautifully coloured members of the *Gallinaceæ*; the sexes are alike in colour; and the males are armed with powerful blunt spurs on their tarsi. The species (which are about seven in number) all inhabit the dry sterile sandy districts of the countries in which they are respectively found, while the true Partridges, for which the generic term of *Perdix* is retained, comprise only our well-known *P. cinerea*, the *P. Hodgsoniæ* of Thibet, and the *P. barbata* of Central Dauria. Of these birds the sexes differ considerably in colour, and the males are destitute of spurs. They dwell in the more humid and thickly clothed districts of their native countries.

Of the European species of the genus *Caccabis*, viz. *C. rubra*, *C. petrosa*, and *C. saxatilis*, the one here represented is the commonest. All three are very circumscribed in the extent of their respective habitats, and one rarely encroaches on the domain of the other. The grey partridge, on the other hand, ranges over nearly the whole of Europe, from Constantinople to Britain, from Norway to Spain. Since the introduction of the Red-legged Partridge into England, towards the end of the last century, some valuable papers have been written respecting it—its objectionable qualities, its interfering with the happiness of and displacing our indigenous bird, the inferiority of its flesh for the table, &c.; and I might have my say on these points, having had many opportunities of observing the bird while enjoying the pleasure of shooting in the preserves of several friends in Suffolk and Norfolk; but I could not communicate anything more to the purpose than has been furnished by Dr. W. B. Clarke, in the 'Magazine of Natural History' for 1839, or than is contained in the carefully written account by Mr. Stevenson in his recently published 'Birds of Norfolk'—a publication I strongly recommend to the notice of all who take an interest in the local faunas of our islands, and from which I shall transcribe some of the more important passages, with due acknowledgment; for it would be unfair to rob Mr. Stevenson of any portion of the laurels he has so justly won by the good service he has rendered to the natural history of his county.

"The Red-legged Partridge," says Dr. Clarke, "is found in France and the Islands of Guernsey and Jersey.

It is generally about half as large again as the Common Partridge, from which it is at once distinguished by the variety in the colouring of its plumage. It was introduced into England about the year 1790, by the Marquis of Hertford and Lord Rendlesham, each of whom had eggs procured on the continent, carefully brought to England, and placed under domestic fowls,—the former at Sudbourn, near Orford, in Suffolk, one of his shooting-residences; the latter on his estates at Rendlesham, a few miles from Sudbourn: from these places the birds have gradually extended over the adjoining counties; and in the ratio of their increase the Grey Partridge appears to have diminished.