

PERDIX CINEREA, Linn.

Partridge.

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

Perdix cinerea, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 645.

—— *vulgaris*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 27.

—— *cineracea*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 525.

Starna cinerea, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 43.

THE genus *Perdix*, as now restricted, comprises but three species—our own well-known bird (*P. cinerea*), the one inhabiting the Thibet side of the Himalayas, named in honour of Mrs. Hodgson *P. Hodgsoniæ*, and a third, from Northern China (*P. barbatus*). Each of these very distinct species enjoys a wide but different geographical range over the Old World; neither of them, however, frequent the boreal regions of the north nor the torrid ones of the south; consequently Africa, India, and Southern China are not tenanted by any member of this genus. The area over which our own Partridge extends may be expressed in a single word—Europe, out of which it rarely occurs. In England it is very generally dispersed; in Scotland it is abundant in the southern districts, but is rarely met with in the northern, and never, I believe, in the Hebrides; in Ireland it is dispersed over the cultivated grounds and their vicinity, but has never been so numerous as with us. Besides specimens from very many parts of the British Islands, my collection contains examples from Sweden, Russia, and Greece, all of which exhibit a close resemblance to each other in the colouring and markings of their plumage.

The British Partridges differ considerably in size and weight—a circumstance mainly attributable to the more or less nutritive character of the food upon which they have been reared; the grass-land birds are smaller than those from chalky districts, and those from rich alluvial and grain-bearing soils the largest and heaviest. The late Earl of Craven, when shooting on the chalk downs of Ashdown, in Berkshire, was so good as to weigh a thousand expressly for my information, and found the heaviest to weigh fifteen ounces, while the average weight of the whole was thirteen and a half. The examples which have from time to time been kindly sent to me by L. H. Cumberbatch, Esq., from the centre of the New Forest in Hampshire, where they could never have seen corn-stubble, were round, compact, little birds, rather dark in colour; of these the weight of the heaviest, fully adult males, varied from twelve and a half to thirteen ounces. A Partridge exceeding a pound in weight is rarely met with; in the whole course of my shooting I never killed but one; this was at Preston Hall, in Kent; but Mr. W. A. Tyssen Amhurst sent me a Partridge which had been killed at Hunmanby, in Yorkshire, that weighed half an ounce over a pound; and Mr. Elwes favoured me with six heavy birds from Norfolk, one of which weighed the same.

To enter into any details respecting the nesting of a bird so common and so well known would seem superfluous; but I may mention that some individuals lay earlier than others, and that I possess notes, among my MSS., of coveys having been seen as early as the 7th of May, while from the 18th to the 25th of June is the date at which the chicks usually burst the shell.

The Duke of Wellington's Norfolk keeper, who was with me on the 14th of May, 1862, stated that he had on the morning of that day a Partridge sitting, which he expected would hatch her eggs before night. But, more remarkable still, Mr. Dilwyn, three days previously, showed me a note from his keeper in Wales, in which he informed him that he had seen one covey of Partridges; these, therefore, must have been hatched a week before, or about the 7th of May. The season certainly was a remarkable one, much warm weather alternating with cold and wet.

Generally the nest is either placed in the open field or on the sunny side of a bank or hedge-row; but at this season the Partridge, like the Wood-Pigeon, throws off its usual shyness, and sometimes confidingly nests in a cottager's garden or on a bank near it by the roadside, where hundreds of persons must pass and repass during the period of incubation. Instances have been known of the deposition of twelve or fourteen eggs in the flat head of a pollard tree, several feet from the ground, and in other equally unlikely situations; perhaps one of the most remarkable is described in the following note by the Rev. John Hill, which has been kindly transmitted to me by his brother and my estimable friend Viscount Hill:—"In Weston churchyard, close to the lodge of Hawkstone Park" (his Lordship's seat in Shropshire), "a Partridge has made her nest, containing thirteen eggs, in some long grass against the side of a flat tombstone raised only two or three inches from the ground. A new grave has been