

SYRRHAPTES PARADOXUS.

Pallas's Sandgrouse.

Tetrao paradoxa, Pall. Itin., tom. ii. p. 712, tab. F.; Id. Zool. Ross.-Asiat., tom. ii. p. 74.

—— *paradoxus*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 643.

Syrrhaptes paradoxus, Ill. Prod. Syst. Mamm. et Av., p. 243.

—— *Pallasii*, Temm. Hist. Nat. des Pige. et Gall., tom. iii. pp. 282 et 716.

Heteroclitus Tataricus, Vieill.

Syrrhaptes heteroclitus, Vieill. Gal. des Ois., tom. ii. p. 64, pl. 222.

THAT an Asiatic bird, of whose history we have hitherto known but little, and which, until very recently, was the sole representative of its genus, should have suddenly made its appearance in many parts of the European continent, and in almost every district of the British Islands, is so remarkable that the occurrence may almost be regarded as a phenomenon. This unwonted exodus of a species from its native country is one of the most strange events that has happened within the memory of naturalists; and no similar instance, so far as I am aware, is on record.

With the law of migration we are now tolerably well acquainted; for we have determined with accuracy the coming and going of many of the birds which roam over our planet, and we know that this movement is an impulse regulated by the sun, the great luminary which influences creation in all her varied forms. Migration, then, is one of nature's laws, and indisputably apparent to our senses. But we can no more account for the irruption of this interesting bird into Western Europe than we can for the appearance of the American Weed (*Anacharis Canadensis*), now so widely spread over the rivers and water-courses of our island. Other instances of Asiatic birds visiting this country have, it is true, occurred; but these visits have been few and far between, and generally consisted of solitary wanderers. Pallas's Sandgrouse, on the other hand, has arrived in numbers at a time, and for several years in succession. Since its first appearance in 1859, it has been steadily arriving, either in pairs, little companies of from eight to ten in number, or in packs of from fifty to a hundred. In a letter from Mr. Rodd of Penzance, dated June 15, 1863, he states that he had just received a Sandgrouse which had been shot in the neighbourhood; and on the 27th of the same month, he informs me that a specimen was picked up dead on the Scilly Islands. In the 'John o' Groat's Journal' for the 11th of July is a notice of one having been shot in Caithness, out of a flock of eight. I mention the occurrence of the bird at these extreme points of the country to show that the immigration was by no means a contracted one. I might fill pages with a record of its occurrence in the intermediate districts; Mr. Stevenson, in a paper published by him in the 'Zoologist,' mentions that no less than sixty-three examples have been killed in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, between the 23rd of May and the 9th of June 1863; and many others have been killed on each side of those counties, from Romney Marsh on the south to Scarborough and Hartlepool on the north-east. It has also been seen in Wales, in the north-west of Ireland, and on the Walney Island, off the Lancashire coast. On the Continent it has occurred in all the northern parts, from Holland to Norway; but nowhere in greater abundance than in that house-of-call for strange birds, the Island of Heligoland, where M. Gätke, with his wonted perseverance, obtained many specimens. He states, in a letter in the 'Field' of July 25, 1863:—

"This very beautiful and interesting stranger was observed and shot here first on the 21st May, the weather being very fine, with a moderately easterly breeze. All successive days up to the earlier part of June this bird was seen here in flocks varying from about three, five, fifteen, to fifty, and in one or two instances even to a hundred. Out of these, near thirty had been shot—the earlier birds being, with two exceptions, all very fine male specimens, the latter, nearly all female birds—every one of them in the most perfect plumage.

"After the lapse of a fortnight, viz. on the 22nd June, again six Sandgrouse made their appearance, out of which five were shot: these, without exception, were all females, whose plumage had no longer the same fresh and tidy appearance as in the earlier instances; so that all through this abnormal and mysterious excursion, they still adhered to the rules observed by birds in their migrations, that is, the males formed the van, the finest old specimens coming first, after which the females make their appearance, the rear being invariably brought up by weak, badly developed, or injured individuals, of a shabby appearance."

Mr. Alfred Newton informs me that the bird is actually breeding on the Danish Islands, and that six or seven sets of eggs have already been found there. This circumstance tends greatly to increase the interest attached to this new comer; for it is evident that its sudden occurrence in Western Europe has been no