

LAGOPUS MUTUS.

Ptarmigan.

Tetrao Lagopus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 274.

—— *mutus*, Montin, Act. Soc. Lund., tom. iii. p. 55.

—— *alpinus*, Nilss. Orn. Suec., tom. i. p. 311.

—— *montanus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl.

Lagopus vulgaris, Vieill.

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

—— *montanus*, Brehm, Handb. de Naturg. Vög. Deutsch., p. 516.

—— *alpina*, Nilss. Skand. Faun., pls. 8, 9 & 10.

—— *cinereus*, Macgill. Hist. of Brit. Birds, vol. i. p. 187.

IF we take a glance at the natural productions of the globe, we shall find that in general those of each hemisphere are very different, but that, in the department of ornithology, some are peculiar to one of them, while others are common to both. This feature becomes still more strikingly marked as we approach the poles, the Guillemots and Puffins of the Arctic and the Penguins of the Antarctic circles furnishing an apt illustration of the peculiar restriction of certain groups of birds to the northern and southern polar regions. Besides these, there are other great northern groups whose organization adapts them to peculiar localities, and the character of whose flesh renders them most useful to man, while, in a sporting sense, they stand out more prominently than any others; I mean, of course, the great family of Grouse, a family comprising so many distinct forms, that it ranks second to none in importance in the class *Aves*, and respecting which it will be unnecessary for me to say more than that, while the term *Tetraonidae* is employed to designate the entire group, the various sections into which it appears to be naturally divided have each received a generic appellation, the old Linnæan name of *Tetrao* being retained for the Capercaillie, while that of *Lyrurus* has been assigned to the Black Cock, *Bonasia* to the Gelinotte, and *Lagopus* to the Ptarmigan.

With these brief remarks on the family to which it pertains, we will now proceed with the history of the *Ptarmichan* of the Gael, the bird which fosters the pride of the highlander; for he knows that it is only among his native mountains that it is now to be found in Britain, whatever it may have been in days gone by. It is said to have formerly inhabited Wales and Cumberland; but it is now confined to Scotland and the small adjacent islands; its most southern limit is the Grampians: here, among other elevated spots, it lives on Loch-na-gar and Ben-na-muic-dui; on the west it frequents many parts of Ross-shire, on the north Sutherlandshire, and several of the western islands; but, according to Thompson, it has never inhabited Ireland. Supposing, then, that the Grampians is the nearest locality to England where the bird may be seen in a state of nature, engineering science annihilating space, distant parts are brought into closer proximity; how much more do we accomplish now than we did at the commencement of the present century! A few hours' travelling will take any one from the metropolis to the foot of those hills. In summer no journey could be more easy, pleasant, or exhilarating; nature will then be found in her gayest garb, and the bird in its finest dress, and surrounded by everything that is pleasing. The part of the mountain which a few months ago was covered with snow is now the breeding-place of the Dotterel; and the heather and other plants, which the Ptarmigan had to burrow for, are radiant with blossoms. The bird at this season is invested with colours in unison with the surrounding objects—the female rayed with bars of rich tawny and brown, and the fiery combs of the male more largely developed and of a still richer hue, while much of his mantle is black. These rich liveries, which are only carried in their perfection for a very short time, are exchanged, as autumn approaches, for a totally different dress of mottled grey, a costume which is common both to the adults and the young of the year. Now is the time the sportsman visits these alpine regions, and the Ptarmigan must pay black mail for the protection afforded to it during the summer. Now "packs" must be on the alert, or their numbers will be much thinned; for the sportsman will not climb the rugged hills without "making a bag." As winter approaches, the bird gradually assumes its white garb; and as the sportsman has returned to the south, no further molestation need it fear until the next shooting-season.

It will now be necessary to consider a point in the history of the Ptarmigan on which there is much diversity of opinion. It is whether our bird enjoys the very extended range over northern countries which some are inclined to assign to it—whether the Ptarmigans of England, Germany, Norway, Lapland, Switzerland, Iceland, Behring's Straits, and Greenland are one and the same species. It appears to me that there is a oneness in the whole of these birds, and that the differences they present are not greater than may be due to variation of locality. I have arrived at such a conclusion after a minute and careful comparison of