

LAGOPUS SCOTICUS.

Red Grouse.

Bonasa scotica, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 199, tab. 22. fig. 1.

Tetrao lagopus, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. ii. p. 750, var. γ .

—— *scoticus*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 641.

—— *saliceti*, var., Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1815, p. 296.

—— *saliceti scoticus*, Schleg. Rev. Crit. des Ois. d'Eur., p. 76.

Lagopus scoticus, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 27.

Oreias scotica, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 177.

THERE is, perhaps, no one of our British birds with which so many pleasing associations are connected as the Red Grouse, nor one which affords greater interest to the ornithologist, the sportsman, and the lover of nature,—to the ornithologist from the circumstance of its being peculiar to our islands, to the sportsman from the unrivalled enjoyment with which it furnishes him during the latter part of the summer and the early autumnal months, and to the lover of nature from its principal home being among the wildest mountain-districts of the northern parts of Britain, to which annually resort our princes, nobles, and legislators for the reinvigoration of their health after the fatigues of the Parliamentary session and the jading pleasures of the London season. As affording sport it is second to none; and its flesh is unequalled in flavour by that of any other member of its family. Its remarkable flight is viewed with pleasure, and its wild cry is enchanting to the ear of all who have an opportunity of treading the springy heather. “The crow of the Grouse,” says St. John, in his ‘Tour in Sutherland,’ “is as inseparable in my mind from the mountains of Scotland as the song of the Water-Ouzel is from its birch-covered glens or the spring-call of the Peewit from its marshy meadows.” Numerous as are the birds which frequent the British Islands, the Grouse is the only one we can truly call our own; for it never migrates nor ever oversteps its natural boundary; it is always at home, bringing forth its brood among charming beds of blossoming heather. Southward of Wales it is not found; but northward from this point it ranges over most of the counties of England and Scotland, the Orkneys, the Western Islands, and the sister kingdom of Ireland.

The vexed question of the identity of *Lagopus scoticus* with *L. albus* I shall not enter upon here. To sink the former specific term for the latter would, I know, be distasteful to most of my readers; and as it is a matter which still remains undecided, I shall give our bird the benefit of the doubt. *Lagopus albus* possesses many characteristics by which it differs from the Red Grouse: thus it exchanges its rich brown dress of summer for one of pure white in winter; but, unlike many other animals which alter in colour from the rigour of climate, the tail always remains black, and appears, indeed, of a deeper tint during that season. Those who consider the two birds identical believe that our humid climate and almost peculiar vegetation may have gradually effected a change in the coloration of our Grouse—a change which, during the lapse of ages, has become permanent. If this be the correct theory (and I must admit that I think it probable that it is), then the range of the species would be a vast one, extending more or less throughout the northern portions of both the Old and New World at about the same degree of latitude as in Europe. To test their unity, I paid a visit to Norway, to form my own opinion on the subject; and I must say I was much struck with the similarity of the two birds in their habits and economy, and in the crowing call of the male. On this head, Mr. Oscar Dickson, of Gothenburg, wrote, in ‘Land and Water’ for September 26th, 1868:—“Some leading Swedish naturalists maintain that there is no other difference between the Scotch and Norwegian Willow-grouse than what may be accounted for by the influence of climate. They say that the call and also the droppings are just the same, and that there is no dissimilarity in the skeletons of the two—that most Willow-grouse have white pens in the wings, but not all, which they can prove by specimens at the Stockholm museum. When I point to the different habits of the birds—such as the Scotch Grouse not being found near trees, and that they do not turn white in winter—they account for this by the influence of climate; and when I ask why the Willow-Grouse are not met with in the middle and south part of Sweden when they, in Scotland and England, are found in lower degrees than Copenhagen (which is about the same latitude as Edinburgh), they say that the Grouse prefer the colder parts, and therefore, also, they appear in greatest numbers in the north of Scotland.”

Some of our writers have affirmed that the Red Grouse never perch on trees; but this assertion must not be taken literally: the fact is they frequently do so, either for the sake of changing their food or to escape