

scarcity in the neighbouring country. At some pairing-grounds there are perhaps less than half a score, whilst at others there may be forty or fifty, or even more. The hens are probably fully as numerous as the cocks, but are less noticeable, from keeping more in the trees and amongst the bushes. As soon as the birds have alighted at the pairing-ground, the old cocks begin to 'kuttra' and 'blåsa,' and to make love to the hens (to which the latter are nothing loth) or to give chase to rivals. Whilst the cock is thus parading to and fro, with his neck stretched out, his wings trailing on the ground, and his expanded tail raised nearly at right angles to his body, he frequently vaults high in the air, and in the while so 'slews' his body round that, on alighting again, his head is turned in an opposite direction. At such times the young cocks keep at a respectful distance from the old ones, and 'kuttra' and 'blasa,' fighting the while amongst themselves.

"Desperate combats between the cocks are frequent at the 'lek-ställe.' They not only savagely charge each other, but make such effectual use of both bill and claws that the feathers fly in every direction. The victory usually rests with the bird that succeeds in getting secure hold of the head of his antagonist, whom he then drags about the arena until fairly tired out, and who, when released, is pretty sure to take wing and fly away. Battles royal between the congregated cocks are also not uncommon; and one may sometimes see several engaged in a regular mêlée, tumbling over one another. While the cocks are thus indulging in their combative propensities, the hens run to and fro with drooping wings, and uttering a dolorous cry, *äck, äck, ack, åå*, expressive of their anxiety for an embrace. Actual pairing would not seem to take place so much at the 'lek-ställe' itself as amongst the surrounding bushes. Matters thus proceed until sunrise, when the birds fly up into the neighbouring trees, where for a time the cocks are silent, as if resting from their labours. But presently they descend once more to the ground, and, for a short time, the game goes on as merrily as ever. The 'lek' over, the birds separate, each cock accompanied by the ladies of his harem. The pairing-season ended, the hens separate and retire to their respective breeding-grounds, which may either be in the more open part of the forest, or on the distant moorlands. The nest is a very simple affair, being a mere hole scratched by the hen in the ground under a bush or tussock. The eggs are from six to twelve in number, in colour yellowish-white, thickly sprinkled with small rust-red spots and blotches, which towards the thicker end are somewhat larger; in length they are two inches and one sixteenth, and in thickness one inch and one sixteenth. The period of incubation, according to some, is three weeks; to others, a month. It is said that if the old bird, whilst sitting, has occasion to leave the nest, she covers the eggs over with moss.

"Fourteen days after the chicks are hatched, we are told by Elstrom, they leave their nest and follow their mother; but it is not until they are seven weeks old that they begin to fly up into the trees and perch on the branches.

"The Blackcock is easily domesticated, and, if reared from a chick or taken young, soon becomes quite tame. In the rural districts of Sweden a caged Blackcock is often seen at the houses of the gentry, the bird being greatly admired by every one for its beauty and its song, which, though perhaps any thing but musical, is wild and pleasing, and during the pairing-season almost continual."

Speaking of this bird as seen in Scotland, Macgillivray says, "In autumn the Black Grouse, from its habits and mode of life, falls an easy prey to the sportsman; but in winter and the early part of spring it is shy and difficult to procure. As the males weigh from three to four pounds, and the females about two, it ranks among the most important of our native birds as an article of food. Its flesh is whiter than that of the Red Grouse, especially the smaller pectoral muscles, which are nearly as light-coloured as those of the Pheasant. The natural enemies of the Black Grouse are foxes, polecats, and a few of the larger rapacious birds, in particular the Golden Eagle and the Peregrine Falcon. It is alleged that in some districts, and especially in the south-western parts of Scotland, great injury is inflicted on the Black Grouse by adders and vipers, which abound on the heaths and in the plantations."

Writing in 1833, Mr. Selby says that the Blackcock was then very abundant in Northumberland, and had been rapidly increasing for some years previously, and that it was but sparingly met with in Staffordshire; it would appear, however, that in the latter county, as in the former, it has greatly increased, since Mr. Bond tells me that it is very abundant in Cannock Chase, where he has seen a flock of at least five hundred on the oaks and other trees, and that it is equally numerous in Chartley Park, the seat of Earl Ferrers.

The Plate represents a male and a female, about four-fifths the natural size.