

TETRAO TETRIX, Linn.

Blackcock.

Tetrao tetrix, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 73.

—— *juniperorum*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 509.

—— *rupestris*, Brehm, ibid., p. 513.

Urogallus tetrix, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 180.

Lyrurus tetrix, Swains. Faun. Bor. Amer., p. 497.

How little interest would attach to any one class of the earth's productions were variation not to occur among them! Infinite, indeed, is the variation of colouring and form among birds and every other class of animated creatures! Nature evidently revels in variety; and marvellously does she display it. Who is there that does not derive pleasure from viewing the resplendent hues of the Monaul or Impeyan Pheasant of the higher regions of Asia, or the brilliant Flycatchers (*Pericrocoti*) of the plains of India? Who can examine the *Trochilidæ* of the New World, or the Birds of Paradise of the Old, without being amazed at the many variations, both of form and colouring, which occur among them? These remarks have been called forth by my observing that in like manner a great variation also exists in that more sombre-coloured but important family of Birds the *Tetraonidæ*, or Grouse, among which the present species is rendered especially conspicuous by the remarkable lyre-shaped tail of the male, which is sufficiently familiar to every one from its being worn in the bonnets of our northern neighbours as an emblem of their country: and well may the Highlander be proud of this noble bird, since it is in his portion of the British Islands that it is principally found; for while, with the exception of the Outer Hebrides and the Orkney Islands, the Blackcock is to be met with in all the shires of Scotland, from north to south, it is less numerous in many of the northern and still more so in some of the southern counties of England. In Ireland it does not now, if it ever did, exist; and of those which inhabit certain parts of England, some at least have undoubtedly been introduced. Out of England and Scotland, the Blackcock inhabits all the mountainous countries of Northern Europe, many parts of Germany, and some of France, Switzerland, and Savoy, going further south than either the Capercaillie or the Ptarmigan. Specimens from Switzerland have the tail much more produced than those frequenting England and more northern countries; and I have also seen examples from Siberia in which that organ was still more (indeed, extraordinarily) developed.

The *Tetrao tetrix*, although sometimes found in the heather, does not confine itself to the districts where that plant is existent, but especially loves to dwell on the sides of scrubby hills and sedgy bottoms that are sufficiently dense to afford it shelter from the sight of man and its other enemies. It readily perches on trees and bushes, dykes and stone walls, and such like. Its food consists of the tops of grasses and other vegetables, to which are added seeds and grain when procurable; neither does it reject the wild blauberries and whortleberries; ripened haws are also greedily eaten during the months of autumn and winter. It is polygamous in its habits, but deserts the female as soon as the period of incubation has passed, and then becomes very shy and wary. Like some others of the Grouse-tribe, the Great Snipe, and the Ruff, the Blackcock has its *lek* or meeting-place, where the males assemble, display themselves to the utmost advantage, and fight for the females. These and other habits of the bird are so well described in Mr. Lloyd's 'Game-Birds and Wild Fowl of Sweden and Norway,' that I shall be excused for transcribing his account from personal observation:—

"The sight of the Blackcock is reputed to be very piercing; and its senses of hearing and seeing exquisite, surpassing those of any of its confrères. Its flight, though somewhat noisy, is lighter than that of the Capercaillie; and it may often be seen flying both high in the air and to a long distance. Northern ornithologists tell us 'it is a wild, shy, and crafty bird.' To judge from its proceedings during the pairing-season, it is certainly of a most pugnacious and savage disposition.

"The Blackcock, like the Capercaillie, has its 'lek-ställe' or pairing-ground. A morass, a 'clearing' in the forest, or, it may be, the frozen surface of a lake is usually selected; and to the same locality, unless subjected to unusual disturbance, the birds resort for years together. The pairing-season usually commences in the more central and southern portion of the peninsula about the middle of March, or perhaps somewhat later, and continues until the end of May. But in the north, where the snow often covers the ground until the spring is far advanced, it begins and terminates somewhat later. The birds repair over night to the vicinity of the 'lek ställe,' where they assemble even before the first dawn of day. One and all make their appearance at the same time, the number depending on their abundance or