

“The Capercali is a polygamist, and in the spring of the year collects the hens about him by means of his *spel* or love-song. The *lek-tid*, or pairing-season, usually commences towards the end of March or beginning of April—the time more or less depending on the mildness or severity of the weather, the state of the snow &c.—and continues until the middle or the end of May. The *lek-stalle*, or locality where affairs matrimonial are carried on, is commonly a wooded eminence near a morass, tarn, or opening in the forest, sometimes, however, ‘on a level rock, with fir trees growing in and about it.’ The *lek-stalle* is generally of some extent; and the Capercali resort to it year after year, unless the trees have been felled or the forest otherwise disturbed. The oldest or strongest male is the first in the spring at the *lek-stalle*; and in the more northern forests, even when the snow is deep on the ground, he commences his spel, either on the surface of the snow—on which the marks of his trailing wings, where he has paraded to and fro, are often visible,—or perched on the upper branch of a pine. At such times his neck is stretched out, his wings droop, and his tail spread out like a fan.

“The spel of the Capercali consists of three notes. An attempt has been made to imitate it by the following words:—First note, *Pelleg!-Pelleg!-Pelleg!* Second note, *Klickop!* Third note, *Hede!-Hede!-Hede!-Hede!* The first note is said to resemble two dry sticks struck together; the second has been likened to a sort of gulp in the throat, the noise made when the tongue is sucked against the palate, or when a cork is drawn out of a bottle; the third has been compared to the sucking in of the breath, or the sound caused by sharpening an edged tool on a whetstone. The utterance of these notes may occupy from two to three minutes; and, provided the bird be not in any way disturbed, he immediately repeats them, and continues to do so almost without ceasing. His spel is not loud, and, if there be wind stirring at the time, cannot be heard at any considerable distance. In the most favourable weather, indeed, it is not audible at more than one hundred and fifty to two hundred paces.

“On hearing the spel of the cock the hens assemble at the *lek-ställe* from all parts of the surrounding district, and alight on the very tree where he is perched, or on others in the immediate vicinity, where they make their presence known by their somewhat melancholy call-note, resembling the words *Gock! Gock! Gock!*, or, rather, perhaps, the croak of the Raven. A little before sunrise the cock usually descends from his perch and alights on some open spot in the forest close by, where the hens collect about him; and here during the intervals of his spel, which he still continues, and whilst parading amongst the ladies of his harem, he pairs with each in succession. Immense excitement is then exhibited by both sexes; the female flitting round and round her lord with outstretched neck and hurried movements as if challenging his notice, until at length it nestles close beside him and solicits attentions which his gallantry ultimately accords.

“During the pairing-season the Capercali is very pugnacious; and fierce combats are then common between rival males. These always take place on the ground, and for the most part on some little eminence free from brushwood or other obstruction. The birds when charging each other spring high in the air, in the manner of game-cocks, and while striking with their wings tear one another with their claws. Their bills are also brought into play, and he that succeeds in getting such fast hold of his opponent as to pin him to the ground, in which position he punishes him severely, usually comes off the victor. Whilst the fight lasts, and it is often of long continuance, the combatants not unfrequently snap their bills together with great force, the noise of which, together with that caused by the blows inflicted with their wings, may in clear and calm weather be heard at a considerable distance. During these duels the birds are not unfrequently so blinded by rage as to be entirely forgetful of their own safety, and, if due precaution be used, may then be captured by the hand.

“It is fortunate for the sporting world that the Capercali is once more included in the British fauna; and I feel proud in having been a contributor to so desirable an event. Years ago I volunteered my services to more than one influential proprietor in Scotland; but for a long time no one would move in the matter. In the autumn of 1836, however, the late Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, ‘influenced by a desire to introduce these noble birds into Scotland, coupled with that of making a return to Lord Breadalbane for some recent kindness,’ requested me to procure, at whatever cost, the requisite number; and within a few months twenty-nine, followed shortly afterwards by twenty more, were forwarded to Taymouth Castle, and, with a single exception, arrived in safety. The success of the experiment was fully realized; and it is very satisfactory to add that the Capercali have subsequently flourished in the Highlands in an extraordinary manner. A few years ago, Lord Breadalbane told me he imagined there were fully a thousand on the Taymouth property; and his head keeper estimated them at double the number.”

It is hardly necessary for me to speak of the disparity in the size of the sexes, since it is well known to most persons; but I may mention that the male is twice the size and weight of the female, whose remarkably barred markings are well shown in the accompanying Plate. Neither is it necessary to say more than that the bird forms an important article of commerce, every poulterer’s shop in London and other large towns being amply supplied with it during the months of winter and spring; they are principally imported from Norway, and frequently in a frozen state.

The Plate represents both sexes, about two-thirds the natural size.