

TURTUR AURITUS, *Ray.*

Turtledove.

Turtur auritus, Ray. Syn. Meth. Av. et Pisc., p. 184, tab. 26

Columba turtur, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 284.

Peristera turtur, Boie, Isis, 1828, p. 327.

Turtur vulgaris, Eyt. Hist. Rarer Brit. Birds, p. 32.

THE Turtledove, at once the smallest and most elegantly formed of the British *Columbidæ*, is not a permanent resident with us, but strictly a migrant, and one which evinces a partiality for certain parts of our island to the exclusion of others; thus it is more abundant in the southern and central portions of England than it is in those further north. Wherever it appears in spring it is hailed with pleasure as an indication that summer is coming; for it is not until the strong gales of March have exhausted their fury, the showers of April passed away, and May somewhat advanced, that its pleasing "turr" is heard in our woods and shrubberies, or that its slight flat nest among the branches, and its two immaculate eggs, can be detected. From Africa direct, with but little delay on the road, has the Turtle followed in the rear of our other summer visitants. Of late years it appears to have increased in number among us, and to have extended its range in a northerly direction; for within my own recollection it was extremely scarce in the border counties of England and Scotland, but now, like the Missel-Thrush and the Starling, it is observed there much more frequently than heretofore. Its stay with us not extending to the seed- and root-time of autumn, little mischief can be attributed to this docile and pretty bird, and therefore a price need not be put upon its head (as in the case of the Wood-Pigeon), its principal food consisting of the seeds of the vetch and wild plants, the tender shoots of herbs, and small-shelled snails.

"The Turtledove has the discredit," says the Rev. C. A. Johns, "of resorting to fields of green wheat, for the sake of feeding on the milky grain. I am doubtful if this charge can be sustained. Often enough, when walking through a cornfield, one may see two or three Turtledoves rise suddenly from the thick corn, with a rustle and a low cry of alarm, rapidly dart away in the direction of the nearest grove, disappearing in the shade, all but the white segment of a circle formed by the tips of their tail-feathers; but, on examining the spot from which they rose, I have been unable to detect any ears of corn rifled of their contents—though the ground was thickly matted with weeds, which might have furnished them with food. I have been informed by a young friend, who has often shot them while rising from such situations, that he has invariably found their crops distended with the green seed-vessels of a weed common in cornfields—the corn-spurry (*Spergula arvensis*). This being the case, the Turtledove is more a friend than an enemy to the farmer, even if it sometimes regales on ripe grain or interferes with the occupation of the gleaner."

How much would the delights of summer be detracted from were we not visited by nearly forty spring migrants! Without the Swallow and its kindred, the sultry heat would be unbearable, from the inordinate increase of tormenting insects. The croak of the frog and the crake of the Landrail assist at this time in breaking the monotonous stillness of night; and the cooings of the Dove relieve the mind by calling up soothing and pleasing thoughts not easily described.

When the Turtle comes to us, in spring, it generally arrives in pairs; in the autumn, on the other hand, the various broods assemble in our corn-fields and arable lands in considerable flocks, and in the month of September migrate in a southerly direction, through Portugal and Spain, to Morocco, where, in all probability, these, as well as many other birds that visit us in summer, pass the winter; while those which have summered in the eastern parts of the European continent proceed to Algeria, *viâ* the Maltese group of islands, where, for a few days in spring and again in autumn, the Turtle is especially numerous, and large numbers are captured at the former season in nets, precisely after the manner employed by the bird-catchers in this country. "As an illustration of the great power of flight of these birds," says Mr. Wright, "it may be mentioned that thousands of them are annually to be seen passing over Malta without alighting. When they reappear in September they are on their way from Europe, and are not generally so plentiful as in spring. At this time they consist chiefly of birds of the year, which want the collar of the adult, and are altogether of a duller hue."

Mr. Yarrell mentions that he could find no notice of the Turtledove visiting any part of Scandinavia; but Magnus von Wright includes it in his 'Birds of Finland'; and the late Mr. Wheelwright remarks:—"Strange to say, a pair of Turtledoves were shot at Quickiok a few years since, on the ground in front of the priest's house." Still its occurrence in that part of the European continent must be regarded as exceptional; from its central regions, however, to the shores of the Mediterranean it is more or less abundant in summer