

COLUMBA ŒNAS, Linn.

Stock-Dove.

Columba œnas, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 75.

Palumbœna columbella, Bonap. in Parz. Cat. des Ois. d'Eur., p. 9. sp. 311.

IN form, size, and colouring, the Stock-Dove is directly intermediate between the Ring-Dove and the Rock-Dove, and it is equally so in its economy, particularly in its habit of flocking together during the months of autumn and winter, as well as in its mode of breeding, or rather the situations chosen for its nest; for while the Ring-Dove almost invariably places its light nest on the flat branches of trees, that of the Rock-Dove is constructed in caverns and holes in the rocks; the Stock-Dove, on the other hand, usually nestles in holes of pollard trees or on their tops, near the bole or in a fork formed by the bifurcation of two branches: but, as will be seen below, it has been stated to lay in other situations; these, however, must be regarded as exceptional.

British ornithologists are somewhat divided in their belief as to whether this bird is a migratory or a stationary species. It may be both; for the bird is certainly found here in winter as well as in summer, but I believe I have certain evidence of great numbers arriving in our island from the south during the months of spring. It appears to be as plentiful in all the central parts of the European continent as it is with us. Bailly states that it is abundant in Savoy during its spring and autumn migrations; Mr. Wright informs us that it visits Malta at the same seasons, but does not remain to breed; Captain Loche enumerates it among the birds of Algeria; and examples were sent to the Zoological Society from Persia. I have never seen an example from India, and Mr. Jerdon does not include it in his work on the birds of that country. It evidently does not go far north; for Macgillivray states that it is never found in Scotland, and it is not mentioned in Thompson's 'Natural History of Ireland;' yet M. Nilsson includes it among the birds of Sweden. In England it is very generally dispersed over the central parts of the country, from the New Forest to the great rabbit-warrens of Suffolk and Norfolk. Among other situations near London in which this bird annually breeds, I may state, on the authority of Mr. Jesse, that a few pairs take possession of the old oak-pollards in Richmond Park; and I have myself observed it similarly engaged in the fine woods at Cliefden, Hedsor, and Taplow, and I have no doubt that it is equally numerous in all such situations in Middlesex, Essex, and the other neighbouring counties. In a very interesting letter from Mr. Alfred Newton, who some years ago kindly sent me several examples of this bird as studies for this work, that gentleman says, "With us these birds generally breed in the rabbit-burrows; and it is a very enjoyable sight to watch a pair at the mouth of a burrow on a fine afternoon in early spring, the sun warmly lighting up the bright yellow sand so as to make it contrast beautifully with their sober-coloured plumage. The male, with his neck inflated almost to the size of his body, with his wings drooping, and his tail outspread, walks with hurried steps backward and forward on the short rabbit-cropped turf above the hole, at the same time rolling out his loud rumbling love-story to his mate as she lies lazily on the loose dry sand. Crouching down behind a bank and gazing around, we find nothing to break the horizon save a ragged fern-stalk or the ears of a rabbit nibbling the lawn-like grass: a male Wheatear may, perhaps, suddenly spring up, perform his odd series of gesticulations, and sing; but there is little else to enliven the scene, and all one's attention is directed to the principal objects in it—the happy pair of Stock-Doves. When they return to the burrow after having been out to feed, and are about to alight, the male performs the same evolutions that the male tame Pigeon does, soaring round in circles and smiting his wings. One can generally recognize the bird at any distance by this peculiarity."

Mr. Harting informs me that this bird sometimes breeds in rocks, and, in his letter on the subject, says—

"During the nesting-season of 1865, I spent a fortnight on the Dorsetshire coast, and explored the cliffs between St. Aldham's Head and Weymouth, in order to ascertain what birds were breeding in that locality. I had been told that I should find the Rock-Dove (*Columba livia*) there, and should have little difficulty in procuring examples of the bird and its eggs: although I was out from morning to night, I did not even see the bird; but I found another Pigeon breeding among the cliffs in limited numbers. This, even at a glance, could not be mistaken for the true Rock-Dove, as it had not the white rump, nor the double bar on the wing, peculiar to that species. I did not suspect it to be the Stock-Dove, because most authors state that that bird 'never breeds in rocks and cliffs like its congener the Rock-Dove;' I therefore supposed it might be a cross between the Stock-Dove and some escaped Dove-cote Pigeons. In order to settle the point I obtained two young birds from a nest in the cliffs and brought them home with me. One of them by an accident escaped; the other I have still in my aviary. It is now in fine plumage, and last