## STURNUS VULGARIS, Linn.

Starling.

Sturnus vulgaris, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 77.

—— varius, Wolf & Meyer, Taschenb. Deutschl. Vög., tom. i. p. 208.

—— solitarius, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 18 (young).

—— guttatus, Macgill. Hist. Brit. Birds, vol. i. p. 595.

Turdus solitarius, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 834 (young).

The distribution of the Starling over the British Islands is very general, but it is more plentiful in some counties than in others. The northern position of the Orkneys and Hebrides does not deter it from breeding there almost as abundantly as in some parts of Scotland, England, and Ireland. In selecting a site for the purpose of incubation it confides in the poor as well as the rich for protection during the performance of that important duty, making itself equally at home among the castellated towers of the Sovereign and on the tiled roof of the humblest cottager. It also builds its carelessly constructed nest under the eaves of churches, in the rain-pipes of the wayside inn and other country-houses, in decayed walnut-trees, in the deserted holes of Woodpeckers, or in the precipitous sides of a chalk-pit. On a summer morning, Starlings may often be seen perched, sentinel-like, on the crown of a weather-cock or on the letters indicating the points of the compass; later in the day they may be found among the cattle in the field, or sitting on the backs of sheep in the pasture. In winter such situations are partially, if not wholly, deserted, and both old and young are flocked together and engaged in seeking their daily food in the field, the meadow, and on the seashore; in the evening these flocks form assemblages so vast that, were I to attempt to estimate the number of birds comprised in any one of them, I should be considered to be dealing in the marvellous; I therefore leave such assertions as will be found hereafter to others, remarking at the same time that I fully believe them to be correct. In England many wonderful sights in connexion with the congregating of birds may be seen by visiting their places of incubation, their banquetings and evening meetings. The number of Rooks at Tregothnan, spoken of in my history of that bird, of Rock-birds at Handa and St. Kilda, of Gannets on the Bass Rock, or the Crag of Ailsa, are as nothing compared to the prodigious assemblages of Starlings at their roosting-places on a December evening in many parts of England. These social gatherings have been very fully described by many British authors; and some of their accounts are given below. Besides being generally dispersed over the British Islands, the Starling is also found in all parts of Europe, from Lapland to the shores of the Mediterranean, but is more numerous in Holland and similar low countries than in mountainous ones. I question if it be not an inhabitant of Africa, from north to south; of its northern half it certainly is, and also of Madeira, the Canaries, and the Azores. I believe that it also frequents many parts of India. In the temperate portions of Russia, in Amoorland, China, and Japan our veritable Starling is likewise said to occur. A lengthy chapter might be written on the changes of plumage which the bird undergoes between youth and maturity. The transformations may be termed wonderful; for so different is the youthful state from that of the adult that the young bird has been described as distinct under the name of the Solitary Thrush (Turdus solitarius). The uniform brown plumage which led to this error, however, is retained but for a short period, a month or so at furthest from the time it leaves the nest.

The second moult, which is complete before autumn arrives, is characterized by the feathers being spotted with white on a blackish ground; and truly beautiful are the birds at this period. This plumage, with a purplish black beak, is carried over the ensuing year, as I have had abundant proofs from numerous specimens I have killed in the second summer of their existence, when they certainly do not breed, and frequently remain flocked together when the old yellow-billed and brilliantly coloured birds are carrying on the task of incubation.

The flight of the Starling is straight and vigorous; and when a flock is sporting in the air, they perform many graceful evolutions, sweeping, dipping, and turning with rapidity and ease. These movements would appear to be preconcerted; for otherwise a clash of wings, and the utmost confusion would be the result, while, on the contrary, they are performed with the utmost regularity—the dark cloud of birds instantly changing their position by a concerted plan, only known to themselves. On the ground the Starling is quick and nimble in all its actions; pert and inquisitive, it turns its head and pries into every tuft of grass and every crevice or hole in which insects or their larvæ are likely to be found. When a flock visits the mead or waste, it moves quickly from one part of the field to another; those foremost in the van finding abundance of food, and leaving little behind them, the hinder birds are constantly rising, and pitching in front, until the whole field has been examined; and the amount of good they must do the farmer, the husbandman, and the country at