ÆGIOTHUS RUFESCENS.

Lesser Redpole.

Fringilla flavirostris, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 322 ?
——— *rufescens*, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxxi. p. 342.
——— *linaria* (partim), Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit. tom. i. p. 373, and tom. iii. p. 167.
Linaria minor, Selby, Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. i. p. 320.
Linota linaria, Yarr. Hist. of Brit. Birds, edit. of 1838, vol. i. p. 514.
Fringilla (Acanthis) linaria, Keys. & Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. xli.
Linaria rufescens, Degl. Orn. Eur., tom. i. p. 239.
Acanthis rufescens, Bonap. et Schleg. Monog. des Loxiens, pl. 54.
Ægiothus rufescens, Cab. Mus. Hein., Theil i. p. 161, note.

The Lesser Redpole is an extremely neat and trim little bird, and one of the smallest members of its numerous family, the *Fringillidæ*. It is strictly a native of Britain, where it is to be found in all situations suitable to its habits, both in winter and summer. During the former season it resorts to the low and fluviatile districts where the alder flourishes, the seeds of which appear to constitute a favourite article of food; in summer it affects the orchards, gardens, and hedgerows, but only of certain districts, for there are whole counties in which, at this period, it is not to be seen. On the continent of Europe it is by no means so generally dispersed as with us; and although it must be regarded as a northern rather than a southern species, its northern range is very limited when compared with that of the Mealy Redpole; for instead of extending throughout Norway and Sweden, it only just reaches the most southern province (Scania) of the latter country; and consequently it is almost impossible that the present bird should have been the Lesser Redpole of Linnæus. Further south than France or Germany it does not seem to occur, except as a winter migrant. Its eastern range is wider; for I have specimens from Japan, and Mr. Swinhoe states that it "comes down into North China from Amoorland in winter."

It is strictly gregarious, and, as autumn approaches, assembles in flocks of considerable numbers, when the birdcatcher makes his harvest, and many thousands are yearly captured and sold in the metropolis, its tame and confiding disposition, and the readiness with which it settles itself in its little cage, rendering it a general favourite. Of its song little can be said; but it may be easily taught to draw up its own supply of water, and to perform other amusing little feats. Among the branches of the trees it is amazingly active, and, when engaged in search of its favourite seeds, assumes many elegant positions, hanging at one moment to the tips of the twigs, and creeping about among the catkins at another. It rarely descends to the ground, except it be to search for fallen seeds or to examine the flowers of the thistle and other plants that may offer it a change of diet. Its powers of flight are amply sufficient to enable it to cross the moorlands, and pass from one part of the country to another.

Of its breeding in England Mr. Stevenson writes, in his 'Birds of Norfolk,' "The Lesser Redpole may be regarded as a resident in this country as well as a regular and, in some seasons, very numerous visitant. Its nest is found year after year in certain favourite localities. I have known as many as four taken in one summer from a garden at Bramerton, which has been a favourite resort of these little creatures for a considerable time, and they also breed regularly at Eaton, near Norwich, whence I have received young birds in August, as well as their delicate blue and speckled eggs, and the exquisite little structure in which they were laid. In these localities the nests have been mostly found in the apple- and cherry-trees, but Mr. Alfred Newton informed Mr. Hewitson that near Thetford, where it also breeds yearly, the nests are placed 'close to the trunk of trees in plantations of young larch firs of no great height,' though he once found one at least sixty feet from the ground, and placed near the outer end of a branch. In Suffolk several nests have been found by Mr. Dashwood in the neighbourhood of Beccles. The Lesser Redpole often retains in confinement, throughout the winter, the rosy tints on the head and breast, which properly belong to its breeding-plumage. A male in my aviary, netted in November 1863, and chosen from many for the beauty of its plumage, did not lose its pinky hue until the autumnal moult of 1864; once lost, however, by the actual shedding of the feathers, the red breast is not resumed, and even the red poll changes to a dull yellow—the effect, no doubt, of an artificial state of existence." It breeds quite as freely about Halifax, in Yorkshire, whence I have received some beautiful nests; according to the late Mr. John Wolley, it does the same near Beeston in Nottinghamshire; his brother found its nests in Warwickshire; Mr. Briggs in Derbyshire; and many other localities might be enumerated. In Scotland it breeds beside the wild mountain lakes, in little thickets of birch, and among the alders wherever they occur; and we learn from Thompson that it frequents many parts of Ireland, from north to south.