## CHRYSOMITRIS SPINUS.

Siskin.

Fringilla spinus, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 87.

Linaria spinus, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. & Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 15.

Spinus viridis, Koch, Baier. Zool., tom. i. p. 235.

Serinus spinus, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 555.

Carduelis spinus, Steph. Cont. Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiv. p. 33.

Chrysomitris spinus, Boie, Isis, 1828, p. 322.

Fringilla (Acanthis) spinus, Keys. u. Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 41.

If the Siskin be not seen in every district, it is very numerous in many parts of the British Islands. Every lover of our native birds knows where to look for it during the months of autumn, winter, and spring, and every birdcatcher where to set his net for the capture of the many thousands required to supply the birdshops of London and other large towns; for it is a general favourite with every one. The lady makes it her pet, and allows it to fly about the room, to sit on her shoulder, and to take seeds from between her lips; and in a cage it will amuse itself by winding a thread round its perch, or, if the aviary be sufficiently large, in constructing a nest, depositing its eggs, and rearing its young.

The localities chiefly affected by this harmless little bird are trees on the margins of brooks and streams and low fluviatile situations generally. The alder is its favourite, and the one upon which it most frequently displays its delicate and pretty plumage, while creeping and hanging to the ends of the smaller branches in a variety of graceful attitudes.

The alder, however, is not the only tree upon which it is found, or the one that solely supplies the Siskin with food; for, like the Goldfinch, it eats the seeds of the thistle, the dandelion, and of a hundred other plants in their season, and also descends to the ground for those that have fallen from the larger shrubs. In disposition no one of our Insessorial birds is so tame and confiding: it will allow of the nearest approach without evincing the slightest fear; and if captured by the limed twig of the country-boy, exhibits no sulkiness or sense of injury, but readily becomes reconciled and friendly.

I have many times met with small troops of Siskins during my rambles through the lovely woods of Taplow and Cliefden, particularly in the neighbourhood of the lower road by the Thames-side; frequently have I there seen these little birds picking minute seeds from the ground, and from among the fallen leaves, with the same activity that they display when clinging overhead to the catkins of the birch or the favourite alder. In summer the greater number of the Siskins leave the southern and middle parts of England for countries further north, and the few that remain and breed resort to situations different from those in which they are usually found. During the summer they have been seen on the commons, and building their nests in the furze, like the Linnet, or in the trees of the garden, like the Redpole; but the recorded instances of its breeding in this country are only few in number; for that the great mass of these birds migrate further north to spend the summer months I am certain. In Scotland it performs this office much more frequently than in the central parts of England. I could quote many accounts of the finding of its nest in England and Scotland, but shall content myself with giving the following short note, by Mr. O. P. Cambridge, and one or two others. In a letter, addressed to Mr. Bond, dated Bloxworth, June 29, 1863, Mr. Cambridge says, "A Siskin's nest was taken near here in June 1852 from a furze bush; it was beautifully built of moss, and thickly and entirely lined with rabbits' fur. It contained four eggs."

"The breeding of the Siskin in this country," remarks St. John, "has been much questioned by naturalists. I have, however, frequently found the nest in Moray, more especially in those woods where there are spruce-fir trees of considerable size; but owing to the extreme cunning or caution of the bird in going to and from the nest, it is not easy to make out its exact position. It is placed on a horizontal branch, towards the summit, or about two-thirds up the tree, and, owing to the thickness of the foliage, and the smallness of its size, may well escape notice. In some of the woods near Elgin the Siskin breeds regularly and in some numbers. The best time to find the nest is when it is being built, as the birds are more conspicuous and less on their guard when carrying a feather or a tuft of wool. It is sometimes, though not so frequently, built in the common Scotch fir; and is then also placed on a horizontal branch, at a considerable height from the ground. The Siskin breeds early. A nest, with five eggs, was taken near Inverness on the 10th of April; and on the 26th we found two, with young ones well fledged, in the woods near Lochnabo. Though so wary when at liberty, no bird is more tame and familiar when in confinement. A person in Elgin showed me a nest, with four young, he had taken only the day before from a Scotch fir tree, and in the cage with them the two old birds, which had been captured with bird-lime. The female

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