PLECTROPHANES NIVALIS.

Snow-Bunting, or Snowflake.

Emberiza nivalis, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 82.

— montana et mustelina, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 867.

——— glacialis, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. i. p. 398.

Hortulanus glacialis et montanus, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus. pp. 15, 16.

Plectrophanes nivalis, Meyer, 3. Theil des Taschenb. deutsch. Vög., p. 58.

borealis, montanus et mustelinus, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 305, 306.

If we compare the avifaunas of the arctic and antarctic circles, we find that they are of very opposite characters—that probably no insessorial bird inhabits the southern land, and that Penguins, Gulls, and Petrels are almost the only birds that live in that inhospitable region. How different is it in the great polar basin of the north! how varied are the forms of birds which dwell therein! and what myriads of individuals there occur! If not congenial to the human race, it may be considered the elysium of a certain portion of the feathered creation: for where can they live more peacefully, or obtain their food with less trouble? the great warmth of the brief summer and perpetual daylight being conducive to the life of so many of the lower animals upon which they live. If the shores of these ice-bound seas be not favourable to the growth of shrubs and trees, sufficient vegetation and insect life exist to nurture several little insessorial birds, of which, perhaps, the most conspicuous is the Snow-Bunting, a species which, from its abundance and extreme tameness, must be to the Esquimaux what the Sparrow and the Wagtail are to us. No northern country yet visited by Europeans, either in the Old or the New World, has been too near the pole for its existence; for, however high the latitude that has been attained, there the Snow-Bunting has been found breeding; and I strongly suspect that if the pole itself were reached, and islands or a mainland were to be found there, this interesting bird would be seen enlivening the waste; at least we may naturally conclude that such would be the case from the circumstance of its having been met with in every part of the arctic circle yet visited-Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Lapland, Russia, and Siberia in the Old World, while Greenland, from its position, unites it with the New. The remains of the departed and excellent Franklin and his heroic companions lie in the midst of the breeding-grounds of this species; and well does its mourning attire accord with the dreary resting-place of those brave men, many of whom were my personal friends. Heaven only knows whether the skeletons of our countrymen may not have afforded shelter for the nest of the beautiful Snowflake; for Captain Lyons found one placed in the bosom of a departed Esquimaux child-"situation," remarks the Rev. F. O. Morris, "suggestive of affecting thoughts, but the history connected with which must remain unknown until that day when both land and sea shall give up their dead." One would imagine that birds are among the happiest of created beings; without effort, and with but little labour, they transport themselves from place to place, and from country to country, their wing-powers enabling them almost to annihilate time and space. They are certainly more independent than quadrupeds; for no impediments obstruct their passage from one region to another. They inhale freely the ambient air, through which they pass on their wonderfully constructed wings. To-day the Snowflake may be in the British Isles, to-morrow in Iceland, the day following in the breeding-grounds in Greenland, whence, the task of incubation accomplished, and the feathering of the young perfected, they return southward to avoid the rigours of winter, which would be fatal to so frail a bird. The individuals which leave us for the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere, singly or in pairs, in spring, return again in the autumn in flocks, and frequently hundreds together.

"This neat and elegant bird," says Dr. Richardson, "breeds in the northernmost of the American islands, and on all the shores of the continent, from Chesterfield Inlet, to Behring's Straits. The most southerly of its breeding-stations in the New World that has been recorded, is Southampton Island, in the sixty-second parallel. Its nest is composed of dry grass, neatly lined with deer's hair and a few feathers, and is generally fixed in the crevice of a rock, or in a loose pile of timber or stones. The eggs are greenish white, with a circle of irregular umber-brown spots round the thick end, and numerous blotches of subdued lavender-purple. On the 22nd July, 1826, in removing some drift timber lying on the beach of Cape Parry, we discovered a nest on the ground containing four young Snow-birds. Care was taken not to injure them; and while we were seated at breakfast, at the distance of only two or three feet, the parent birds made frequent visits to their offspring, at first timidly, but at length with the greatest confidence, and every time bringing grubs in their bills. The Snow-Bunting does not hasten to the south on the approach of winter with the same speed as other summer birds, but lingers about the forts and open places, picking up grass-seeds, until the snow becomes deep; and it is only during