CRITHOPHAGA MILIARIA.

Common Bunting.

Emberiza miliaria, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 308.
——— *calandra*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 83.
Miliaria septentrionalis, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 291.
——— *germanica*, Brehm, ib., p. 292.
——— *peregrina*, Brehm, ib., p. 293, tab. 19. fig. 1.
Cynchramus miliaria, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 35.
Spinus miliarius, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 1841, p. 61.
Miliaria Europæa, Swains. Nat. Hist. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 290.
Crithophaga miliaria, Cab. Mus. Hein., Theil i. p. 127.

If this be not the largest member of the *Emberizinæ*, or family of Buntings, it is unquestionably the largest species inhabiting the British Islands.

It is a bird familiarly known to us as the Common Bunting, Corn-Bunting, and Bunting-Lark. The first of these trivial names is especially applicable, since its dispersion is so general that there is no species more ubiquitous. Not only does it inhabit the mainland of these kingdoms, but even the smallest islands around them are not destitute of its presence. Macgillivray states that no bird is more common in the Outer Hebrides, where it is known by the name of Sparrow. Now, although so generally dispersed, numerically it is less abundant than most of the other species of its family. In England at least it is a solitary creature, dotted here and there; sometimes it may be seen perched on the topmost branch of the hedgerow, at others on the telegraph-wires, which now, like great cobwebs, stretch over nearly every part of the country. The sexes being precisely alike in colour, and differing but little in size, it is impossible to say whether it be a male or a female that surmounts the hedge or sits on the outermost branches of the trees we may be approaching in our country walks. It is somewhat shy in its disposition, seldom admitting an observer to come nearer than sixty yards before it dips down towards the earth, and skims Lark-like into the middle of the neighbouring field. Its nest is built among the corn, sometimes under the shelter of a tuft of grass, at others in the midst of a small mass of tangled herbage a few inches above the ground. The eggs are very conspicuously blotched and clouded with dark brown, on a purplish-grey ground; they are four, five, or six in number.

Out of the British Islands, the Common Bunting forms part of the avifauna of the temperate and warmer portions of Europe; in the northern part of Africa "it is so abundant about Martinmas," says the Rev. C. A. Johns, "that all the trees in the public roads and squares of the villages are literally covered with these birds, and they become a staple article of food;" in Palestine, Mr. Tristram says it is as common as the Sky-Lark in England on all the corn-plains throughout the year; it is known to be equally numerous in the islands of the Mediterranean and in Asia Minor; and that it is also found in Persia is certain, for I have a specimen which was killed at Erzeroum.

The projecting, knob-like, horny excrescence on the roof of the mouth and the opposed cutting-angle of the lower jaw peculiar to the true Buntings, is perhaps more conspicuous in the present species than in any other member of the family; this structure is doubtless admirably adapted for breaking down and shelling the grain and seeds upon which they mainly subsist.

Though seen only in pairs during spring and summer, the Common Bunting becomes gregarious in autumn and winter, and may then be observed flying in flocks with Chaffinches, Sparrows, and other birds, which at that time resort to farm-yards and barn-doors in search of food. A very destructive habit, which it exhibits in these situations, is thus described by Mr. Knapp, in the 'Journal of a Naturalist:'—"It could hardly be supposed that this bird, not larger than a Lark, is capable of doing serious injury; yet I this morning saw a rick of barley, standing in a detached field, entirely stripped of its thatching, which this Bunting effected by seizing the end of the straw and deliberately drawing it out, to search for any grain the ear might contain—the base of the rick being entirely surrounded by the straw, one end resting on the ground, the other against the mow, as it slid down from the summit, and regularly placed as if by the hand; and so completely was the thatching pulled off, that the immediate removal of the corn became necessary. The Sparrow and other birds burrow into the stack and pilfer the corn; but the deliberate unroofing of the edifice appears to be the habit of this Bunting alone."

During the cold nights of the winter season the common Bunting mostly resorts to thick bushes for shelter; but many of them take up their quarters in the stubble-fields, and are caught with Sky-Larks in nets employed for the purpose, and sent to market; at this time they are remarkably fat, and are considered to be superior to most of our other small birds as an article of food.