EMBERIZA CIRLUS, Linn.

Cirl Bunting.

The Cirl Bunting is far less generally distributed over England than the Yellowhammer; in Scotland it has never, I believe, been seen, and Ireland appears to be equally devoid of its presence. It is by no means scarce in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Hampshire, Sussex, Kent, and Surrey; but it is rarely seen northward of Yorkshire. In the Isle of Wight it is nearly as numerous as its above-mentioned ally, while in the neighbourhood of Chichester, Bognor, Worthing, and Brighton it may be regarded as a common bird. It generally evinces a partiality for the vicinity of the coast; but many instances of its inhabiting the interior of the country are on record. It has been frequently seen at Guildford and Godalming in Surrey; and I have known it to be often shot at Alton in Hampshire, in company with other small birds, in the depth of winter. My own observations lead me to believe that districts of a chalky character are those it prefers; at the same time I have seen it in various parts of the valley of the Thames, and some of the finest specimens in my collection were procured in the beautiful grounds of Formosa, near Maidenhead, in Berkshire.

The Rev. H. Harpur-Crewe has recorded, in the 'Ibis' for 1865, that while himself and his sisters were walking on a rough hilly down in the parish of Drayton-Beauchamp, near Tring, in Hertfordshire, they disturbed a Cirl Bunting from her nest in a wild juniper bush, containing three eggs, and states he has several times seen males in the same district, and twice had specimens brought to him from the adjoining parish of Pitstone: he is inclined to think it breeds near Tring regularly, and that it is far more common than is generally supposed.

Mr. Brodrick states that it is common about the haystacks at Ilfracombe in winter, and that it breeds in

In its habits, disposition, and some parts of its economy, the Cirl Bunting differs considerably from the Yellowhammer. It is more shy and distrustful, and affects the uppermost branches of high trees rather than those of less elevation; and thus, while the female is sitting over her eggs on the sloping bank of a ditch, the male may be perched on a leafy twig near the top of an elm, where his presence will only become known by his singular song, which is even less musical and more inwardly expressed than that of the Yellowhammer, which in some points it much resembles. To convey an accurate representation of the songs or natural notes of birds is simply impossible; for they strike the ear so differently that no two persons would interpret them alike; how useless, then, would it be to attempt to describe the note of the Cirl Bunting, which, Mr. Rodd says, "is drawn out in a continuous sibilous strain, not unlike that of the Wood-Wren when heard at a short distance, and never ends with the high note which characterizes that of the Yellow Bunting, but

In many of the Buntings much difference occurs in the plumage of the sexes, the males being conspicuously adorned, while the females are very plainly coloured, and in some cases those of two or more species are so much alike as to be scarcely distinguishable; but in the present instance the distinctive features of the male are strongly marked and contrasted. A glance at the accompanying Plate will render this apparent far more readily than the most minute description, however accurate; and if the reader will compare the figure of the male bird with that of the same sex of the Yellowhammer, he will at once perceive the points in which they differ. The specific distinctions are always of interest to the ornithologist, particularly if he take a general view of the science. He is pleased to see how varied are the markings of the head, neck, and breast, the parts in which the greatest differences usually occur; nor does he fail to notice that the Buntings also exhibit a well-defined character—a well-defined white mark on two or three of their outer tail-feathers, which is not observable when the bird is in a state of repose, but of which a transient view may be obtained while it is on the wing. These markings are always noted by the ornithologist, while they do not attract the attention of those who are regardless of the flight of a little bird, which may be a Sparrow or anything else, for aught they care.

On the continent, as in England, the Cirl Bunting is less abundant than the Yellowhammer; so great, in fact, is the difference in their numbers, that if a census of the two species could be taken, I suspect the latter would prove to be ten times as numerous as the former. In the south of Europe—Spain, Italy, and France—it is more abundant than in the north. In confirmation of my assertion that this species is less common—it is more abundant than in the north.