BUDYTES FLAVA.

Grey-headed Wagtail.

Motacilla flava, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 92?
——— *neglecta*, Gould, in Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., 1832, p. 129.
——— (*Budytes*) *flava*, Keys. et Blas. Wirb. Eur., p. 49.
Budytes flavus, Cuv. Règn. Anim., 1817, tom. i. p. 371.
——— *flava*, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 18.
——— *Gouldii*, Macgill. Man. Nat. Hist., Orn., vol. i. p. 163.

Some of the Field-Wagtails forming the genus *Budytes* range throughout Europe, Africa, Persia, India, and China, while one or more frequent Malasia, the great islands of Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and the Moluccas; now, with a knowledge of the wide distribution of these birds, and of the great differences in the colour of their plumage, we cannot, in my opinion, but believe that there are many distinct species, and not only three or four, as some are inclined to think. Structurally they are all exceedingly similar—so similar that the anatomist from a comparison of their bony frames alone would, I believe, find it exceedingly difficult to separate them; colour and marking, then, must guide us in our inquiries respecting this group. Some ornithologists have separated the European Field-Wagtails into three or four species under as many specific names; others, while admitting that they differ, hesitate to view them in that light. Dr. Schlegel, of Leyden, in his 'Revue Critique des Oiseaux d'Europe,' while keeping both the yellow and the pied species under the one generic name of *Motacilla*, designates them thus:—*Motacilla flava*, *M. flava Rayi*, *M. flava cinereocapilla*, *M. flava melanocephala*, and *M. citreola*; but such trinomes are not admissible in modern zoological nomenclature. The bird under consideration Schlegel calls *Motacilla flava*, considering it to be the oldest named species, and the one to which Linnæus gave that specific appellation. This, however, in my opinion is questionable, since it rarely goes so far north as Scandinavia, while that *B. cinereocapilla* commonly does so is certain; for I killed many examples in those countries, some with their breasts spotted with black, as mentioned in Linnæus's description in the 'Fauna Suecica;' and this is the reason why I called the present bird *neglecta*, a term which, although not employed here, may subsequently have to be adopted for it; and in that case *cinereocapilla* will have to rank as a synonym to *flava*. *B. flava*, *B. Rayi*, *B. cinereocapilla*, and *B. melanocephala* are evidently regarded by Schlegel as varieties of the same species, while *B. citreola* he considers distinct. Let us institute comparisons between the four nearest-allied of these birds in their full nuptial attire. Can we for a moment associate our citron-faced Yellow Wagtail with the jet-black-headed *B. melanocephala*? or does its bright-yellow throat assimilate to the white throat of the grey-headed *B. flava*, vel *neglecta*, or the dark ash-headed *B. cinereocapilla*? If they be really the same, then we must unite with them at least three species from India, and perhaps others from Africa and China. It would be quite out of place here to venture upon the subject of the origin of species, or whence these distinctions emanated. We find in these birds, as well as in the typical *Motacillæ*, certain well-marked characters, which are very apparent in the fully adult birds, while the young so closely assimilate as to render it almost impossible to distinguish one from the other. In this respect the European Wagtails are like the Sparrows, *Passer domesticus*, *P. cisalpinus*, and *P. hispaniolensis*, the young of all three of which, but particularly of the two latter, are extremely similar; I might also cite the members of the nearly allied genus *Anthus* of Europe and Asia, were it necessary to select other groups bearing upon the subject of amalgamating or separating what may or may not be considered species. My own opinion is that ornithological science will become more interesting and better understood by the student if we treat of each of these constant variations under distinctive appellations. It is now time to say something of the countries where the present bird is found, and of its occurrence in our island. In Europe it is strictly a migrant. In the vernal months it passes the Mediterranean in great numbers, resting on its way on the Maltese and other islands, and spreads over many of the southern parts of the Continent, but is more abundant in France, Belgium, Holland, and the south of Germany than elsewhere. After breeding and passing the summer in those countries, it retires again and winters in Africa, following the same law, in this respect, as other southern migrants. In England its presence is purely accidental, but its appearances are too numerous to be given in detail. Sometimes it comes in company with the Yellow Wagtail, at others alone; we may perchance meet with it the first day we visit the country, and years may roll over without our again seeing it. A mere narrow strait separates this bird from us; and the chalk cliffs of Dover may exchange greeting with those of Boulogne; for each has its downs tenanted with Yellow and Pied Wagtails distinct from those of its opposite neighbour, and seldom are the domains of either encroached upon; nature whispers to each their prescribed limits, beyond which they are not to proceed.