BUDYTES RAYI.

Yellow Wagtail.

How pleasing are the associations of spring! "Winter is over and gone;" the strength of Boreas has been expended in March; floral May has appeared in maiden sweetness, and the southern migrants have one and all responded to the invitation of the season. The earliest to appear are the Wheatear and the Chiffchaff, to which succeed the Swallow and the other Hirundines; next the pompous parasitic Cuckoo and its fostering sylvians (Sedge-Warblers, Reed-Wrens, and others) fall into their places; they are followed by the Yellow Wagtail, the Turtle, the Corncrake, and the Swift, each arrival being in strict conformity with the laws of migration. Flora's guests being assembled, the naturalist revels in the delights of the festival. It will be seen that the Yellow Wagtail is neither the earliest nor the latest of these spring visitants in making its appearance; the young wheat must, however, be sufficiently high to cover the ground, and the mead be decked in maiden freshness, before it will come to us. We may have heard the craking note of the Land-Rail or the voice of the Cuckoo, and the cheery song of the Whinchat may have attracted our notice, yet the Yellow Wagtail is still absent; but the winds of the forthcoming night may waft it to our shores, and the next morning we may see it tripping sprightly before us. Before starting, it has donned its finest plumage, is now at its best, and has come to meet its bride, or rather to await her coming; she will not be long; and then coquetting and courting with her, and tilting and battling with other males, will be the order of the day, now by the river-side, and anon in the corn-field, or in the mead among the buttercups, with the colour of which the rich hue of its yellow breast vies in beauty. These displays and many other equally interesting actions of birds are seldom seen, except by the student of nature ever watchful to increase his knowledge of her handiworks.

We who reside in England should be extremely proud of the beautiful Yellow Field-Wagtail; for ours is almost the only country in which it passes the summer. Why this should be, it is not easy to say; but such is really the case; near as is the Continent, it is rarely found in any part of it, its place in the western portion being supplied by the Budytes flava, in the central by B. cinereocapilla, and in the eastern by the B. melanocephala: all three are strictly migratory, wintering in Africa, spending the summer months in more temperate and even in northern regions, some of them proceeding to very high latitudes, and there affecting hills of great elevation, such as the Dovre and other mountains in Norway and Lapland; our species, however, is rarely found to the northward of Britain. I have, it it true, a specimen from Heligoland; but that is the most northern locality from which I have seen an example. That it is not identical with the species to which Pallas gave the name of Motacilla campestris, I think probable, and I have therefore omitted that name from the synonyms given above. Strange to say, this bird is very rarely seen in Ireland; when there, according to Mr. Templeman, it is more common about Lough Neagh than elsewhere—" an observation," remarks Thompson, "which, though correct, requires explanation to prevent an erroneous inference. About the lake, generally it is not common; nor have I been able during frequent visits to various parts of its shores to meet with it, except on one occasion, the 3rd of August 1846, when visiting its limited haunt at the north-west extremity of this great sheet of water, about Toome. Several were then seen at the side of the river Bann, adjoining Toome bridge, and the following day ten (old and young) appeared at the margin of the lake below the bridge. Having known it to be seen here in different years (perhaps forty have elapsed since Mr. Templeman observed it), I conclude that the bird is an annual visitant, and cannot but imagine that it will yet be found regularly at some other favourite localities in the island."

Macgillivray informs us that it is also rare in Scotland, and almost absent in the northern part of that country. St. John remarks that it is much more rare in Morayshire than the Grey Wagtail, and states that he only recollected seeing it two or three times. In Cornwall, according to Mr. Rodd, it is seen for a few days on its first arrival, and again in autumn on its return. Mr. Stevenson says it is a common summer visitant to, and breeds in, Norfolk, "One can scarcely think of this beautiful bird," says he, "without calling to mind the luxuriant herbage of our meadows and grass-fields during the spring months. How brilliant are the colours of the male, in his nuptial dress, as he picks his way amongst a profusion of buttercups, assimilating so closely to his own tints that his actions only betray his whereabouts. On their first arrival we find them in busy little flocks on the Denes and grassy slopes by the sea-shore, graceful in

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