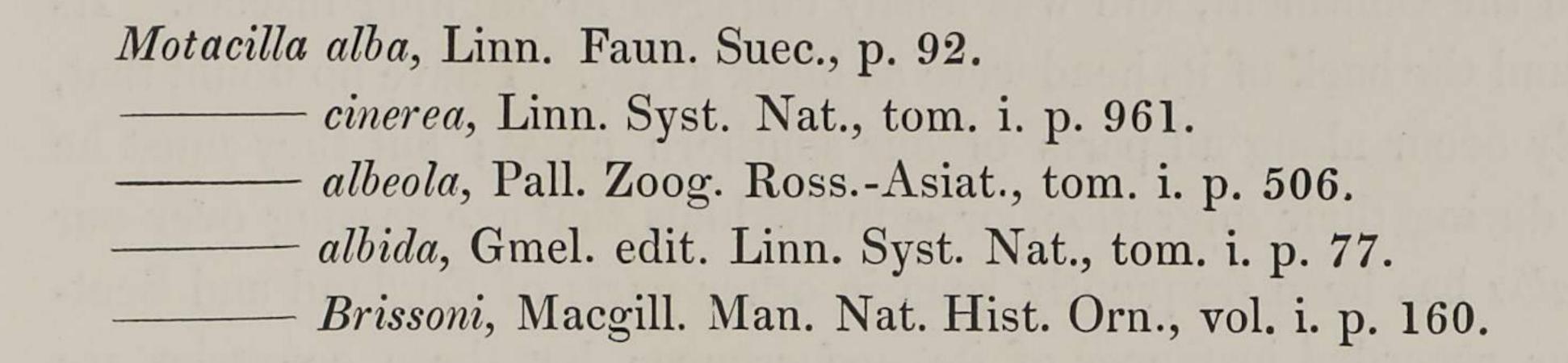
## MOTACILLA ALBA, Linn.

White Wagtail.



In size this elegant species differs but little from the Pied Wagtail, so common in our islands; but a little attention to the colouring of adult examples in their summer dress will, I am sure, convince any one, however sceptical, that the two birds are distinct, and not identical as has been affirmed. Had I seen any variation in the colouring of continental specimens of Motacilla alba, or an approach to M. Yarrelli, in the dark hue of their backs, or found any of our own birds assuming a delicate grey tint in that part of their plumage, I should have come to a different conclusion. It is true that young examples of M. Yarrelli may be found with a clouded grey upper surface; but I never saw one of so light a hue as a specimen of the same age of M. alba, or so coloured that I could not at once unhesitatingly pronounce to which species it belonged. In the investigation of this matter I have been greatly aided by the study of the Wagtails of India, whose affinities ally them to each other in a similar way as those of Europe; among them I find the differences which exist are constant, and that a similar law prevails with the Motacillæ of both countries. Nothing like a cross appears ever to take place among these nearly allied species—a circumstance which, indeed, rarely occurs among birds in a state of nature. We have, then, but two alternatives—to keep them all as one, or separate them according to their specific characters, however slight they may be. I shall follow those of my contemporaries who adopt the latter view, not only in this group of birds, but in all others in which I find certain characters are constant and unchanging.

The winter and summer changes of plumage of the M. alba are precisely similar to those which occur in M. Yarrelli. Both have the throat black in summer, and white in winter. I must remark, however, that the fully adult examples of the former, at any period of the year, more closely assimilate in colouring than do the adults of the latter, the females of which may be known by their back being of a lighter hue than the male's. It cannot be denied that there is a great difference in the habits and economy of the two species, the M. Yarrelli being stationary, and the M. alba regularly migrating to Norway and Sweden in spring, and returning to more southern climes in autumn. In those countries the inhabitants regard its arrival with joy as the harbinger of spring, and raise their hats to the first example that makes its appearance there, just as people do in this country to the first Swallow they observe. Norway and Sweden, however, do not constitute the limit of its migration northwards; for we learn from Walker's "Ornithological Notes of the Voyage of the Fox," published in the 'Ibis' for 1860, that it visits Greenland; and Mr. Alfred Newton states, in his 'Notes on the Ornithology of Iceland,' that "the White Wagtail (Motacilla alba) is not quite so common as the Wheatear, but from its more familiar habits is more frequently observed, arrives at the end of April, leaves in September." Now is it not strange that a bird whose principal winter home is the southern portion of Europe and North Africa, should only pay an occasional visit to the British Islands, and rarely, if ever, remain to breed therein, when we know that it resorts for this purpose to countries much further north? Is it because it finds our islands already occupied by another species, and that there is no room for a second, and that, if it were to remain, it would be an interloper and interfere with nature's intentions? as would be the result if foreign species were to be introduced into our island, or any other country where nature had not placed them. Efforts respecting the re-introduction of such extirpated birds as the Capercailzie and the Bustard are praiseworthy; for they were formerly inhabitants of this country, and the attempts will be successful provided its physical condition remains unaltered.

I have never yet seen a true *Motacilla alba* from India, its presence there appearing to be supplied by the *M. Dukhunensis*. It frequents, however, most of the countries along the shores of North Africa, bordering the Mediterranean, and thence westward as far as the island of Madeira. It is also generally dispersed over every part of Europe, but is most numerous in France, Holland, and Germany. That it winters on the European shores of the Mediterranean is certain; for I possess a specimen collected by my son, Dr. Franklin Gould, during that season at San Remo, in the Maritime Alps. The following note was penned by myself during a visit to Norway in 1856:—" *Motacilla alba* is numerous in all but the higher parts of the country; is very tame in its disposition, and a great favourite with the inhabitants; not so sprightly in its actions as the English *M. Yarrelli*, and does not throw up its tail so violently." In England I observed a beautiful freshly