CERTHIA FAMILIARIS, Linn.

Tree-Creeper.

Certhia familiaris, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 38.

—— scandulacæ, Pall. Zoogr. Ross.-Asiat., tom. i. p. 432.

— macrodactyla, septentrionalis, brachydactyla, et megarhynchos, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 208, 210, 211, pl. 15. fig. 5.

There are few persons, I presume, who have given a passing thought to the many interesting objects which surround them during their walks through the woods and shrubberies of our islands, that have not often noticed a little, creeping, mouse-like bird traversing the boles and horizontal branches of the larger trees, the palings of an enclosure, or (among other places) the upright sides of an old wall; this is the Common Creeper, Certhia familiaris, a bird known to every country boy in the British Islands from north to south, and which is almost as numerous in Sutherland- and Rosshire as in Middlesex, Dorset and Cornwall, Wales and Ireland. It is generally solitary, or at most in pairs, but is sometimes seen in company with Gold Crests and Tits—the latter frequenting the branches, while the admirably adapted structure of the Creeper enables it to seek its spider and coleopterous food among the corrugated interstices of the boles and larger limbs.

One of the great difficulties I experience in writing a history of our native birds is to find something to say respecting them that has not been previously written; but the subject is a hackneyed one, and every detail relative to their habits, manners, and actions has been fully recorded by one or other of my contemporaries, leaving little or nothing that is new to be said; it has been my practice, therefore, to select those passages from such authors as MacGillivray, Yarrell, Selby, Thompson, and others, upon which I could not improve, and to give additional information as to the area over which the particular species may range, its alliance to other members of its genus, and the countries they inhabit, believing that I am better able to do so than either, or all, of the worthy authors above mentioned, from the circumstance of my having studied ornithology in a more extended sense. I shall now, then, give a brief enumeration of the known species of the genus Certhia and the countries in which they are found, and particularize the area over which our own species is said to range. America is tenanted by two birds of this form—the C. Americana of Bonaparte, inhabiting the Eastern portion of North America, and the C. Mexicana of Gloger, frequenting the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific and Mexico,—both of which are very nearly allied to C. familiaris. India, or rather that portion of it which includes the southern slopes of the great Himalayan range, is inhabited by four species, namely, our own C. familiaris, C. Himalayana, C. Nipalensis, and C. discolor. If the C. Nattereri of Bonaparte, vel C. Costæ of Bailly, of the lower alpine region of Europe, should prove to be identical with C. familiaris, as I believe it to be, then the range of the latter species will be wide indeed; for it will extend throughout Europe from Quickiock, in Lapland, to the shores of the Mediterranean; over the province of Algeria, according to Loche; Western India, as evidenced by a specimen killed therein by Captain Stackhouse Pinwill; Amoor-land, as recorded by Schrenck; and Japan, whence the younger Mr. Whitely brought a beautiful specimen, killed at Hakodadi, and which is now in my collection. I have, in fact, at this moment before me examples which I believe to be true Certhiæ familiares, from Hampstead, in Britain, from the neighbourhood of Paris, from Western India, and from Japan, whence to draw my conclusions.

The following truthful and elegant account of the Creeper is extracted from the work of the departed MacGillivray, and is here given to render it more familiar to some of my readers.

"If, early in December, you should fall in with a flock of Reguli and Pari scouring a wood, you may be pretty well assured that a few Tree-Creepers will be found at no great distance. There, clinging to the rough bark at the base of that old elm, you see one advancing upwards by short jerks. At each movement it emits a shrill but feeble cry. See how it climbs, searching every crevice, now proceeding directly upwards, now winding round the trunk, presently passing behind it, and in a short time appearing on the other side. Observe it well and you will see that it crouches close to the surface, presses its tail against it, now and then picks something from a cleft, jerks itself forwards, never rests for a moment, but seems in the utmost haste, and expresses its anxiety by continually emitting its lisping cry. Yet its efforts are not laborions; it seems to hold on with perfect ease and unconcern, and, although it is now halfway up, it exhibits no sign of fatigue. There it passes off from the trunk, creeps along a nearly horizontal branch, winding round it, adhering even to its lower surface, with its back towards the ground. Having gone as far as it finds convenient, it flies back to the trunk, which it ascends, until you lose sight of it among the twigs