## CURRUCA ATRICAPILLA.

Blackcap.

Motacilla atricapilla, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 332.

— moschita, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 970.

Curruca atricapilla, Briss. Orn., tom. iii. p. 380.

Sylvia atricapilla, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 508.

Monachus atricapillus, Kaup.

Curruca Heineken, Jardine, Edinb. Journ., 1830, i. p. 243.

As a songster, the Nightingale must ever rank first among the sylvan birds of Great Britain, and next to it the Blackcap, whose richly modulated and melodious notes salute the ear of every one who visits the woodland parts of the country at the commencement of spring, at which time the bird arrives from the warmer parts of Europe or direct from Africa. In all probability, those individuals which make our island their summer home have wintered in Morocco, while those which have been absent from Central Europe during the cold season, it is almost as certain, have spent the winter further east, in Algeria. Instances are on record of examples having been seen long after other migrants have left us, and it is no unusual occurrence for one or other sex to be met with in the depth of winter, which induces me to believe that the bird is more hardy than most of its sylviine congeners. Dr. Heineken states that it inhabits Madeira; and I may add that during my visit to Malta, in February 1854, I observed it to be numerous among the oliveand caroba-trees of the gardens and rocky gulleys of that island. It will be seen that I have placed Sir William Jardine's Curruca Heineken (the "Tinto negro de capello" of the Madeirans) among the synonyms of this bird, in deference to the general opinion that the darker-coloured individuals thus designated are merely examples of the present species in some abnormal state of plumage.

To particularize the parts of the British Islands frequented by the Blackcap would be of little interest; instead of so doing, I may briefly state that it is very generally distributed over the southern and western counties, and becomes gradually more and more scarce as we proceed northwards; consequently it is far less numerous in Scotland than in England. The Duke of Argyll informs me that it is found at Inverary, but not at Balmoral; on the other hand, Mr. Osborne, of Wick, states that he has obtained it in Caithness, as will be seen by the following extract from his obliging note to me on the subject:—"With all diffidence, I think the fact of a male and a female Blackcap having been obtained in Caithness in the month of October is worthy of your notice. They were shot by me on the 16th and 28th of the above month, 1861; and on the 8th of November 1862 I saw a female feeding on the same tree from which I shot the others: I did not molest her, and I do hope she will again visit the far north." Under the date of May the 11th, 1852, the late Mr. St. John records, in his 'Natural History and Sport in Moray,' "We heard a bird singing in the garden, whose note was new to me; on watching, we found it was a Blackcap—a very rare bird so far in the north: I have only on one other occasion ascertained the presence of the bird."

I have mentioned that the Blackcap is occasionally met with in the depth of winter, in confirmation of which I may cite the following passage from Mr. Rodd's 'List of British Birds as a guide to the Ornithology of Cornwall: '—"The Blackcap is sometimes found in the winter months sparingly, in the neighbourhood of Penzance. It has been observed in ivy against walls—the most favourable locality for insects, spiders, &c." In a letter addressed to me by Mr. Isaac Illsey, dated Daylingworth, near Circncester, February 28th, he says, "A summer bird of passage appearing at this season is, I think, a somewhat unusual occurrence; this afternoon, however, I observed a bird catching flies in a sheltered place near the garden, which, to my surprise, turned out to be a hen Blackcap. It was evidently much exhausted, and with some little trouble I contrived to catch it. It was as sleek and trim in every respect as any I had seen in the summer. I placed it in a basket, covered with a net, in the greenhouse; and it soon became sufficiently reconciled to eat freely of privet-berries, which I observed it was doing before capturing it."

In Ireland the Blackcap is less numerous than with us, but it is everywhere sufficiently abundant to be considered a common bird. On the continent of Europe, it proceeds far towards the north: Magnus von Wright enumerates it among the birds of Finland; and, according to Nilsson, it also visits Lapland. Temminck states that it is found in Japan; but I have never seen any evidence that such is the case, neither is it, I believe, an inhabitant of India or China. The area over which it extends is nevertheless very great; for, besides being abundant in all parts of Europe, it is generally distributed over Africa northward of the equator. Like all other birds, the Blackcap has its favourite places of resort—plantations of moderate growth, thickets, and shrubberries: here its merry note often indicates its presence, while, from its shy and secluded