

## MELIZOPHILUS PROVINCIALIS.

### Dartford Warbler.

*Motacilla provincialis*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 958.

*Sylvia Dartfordiensis*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 517.

— *provincialis*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit. tom. i. p. 210.

— *ferruginea*, Vieill. Ency. Méth. Orn., pt. ii. p. 446.

*Curruca provincialis*, Flem. Brit. Anim., p. 70.

*Melizophilus provincialis*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Spec. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus.

FROM the year 1773, when this bird was first noticed in England, on Bexley Heath, near Dartford, in Kent, to the present moment, it has been anxiously sought for by every ornithologist; yet how few have seen it in a state of nature! Still it is by no means scarce in all our southern and western counties; on the contrary, it is even more plentiful than other birds in the districts it inhabits. Those districts being of a peculiar character, the bird is a comparatively local one; at the same time it is a permanent resident with us, for it never leaves the furzy common and the heath, where, with the Titlark and Stone-Chat, it constitutes almost the only bird-life in the dreary months of winter. The extensive heathy lands of Surrey and Hampshire are its head quarters; it has, it is true, been found in other localities, but it is always less numerous and less certain to be met with. All the commons south of London, from Blackheath and Wimbledon to the coast, were formerly tenanted by this little bird; but the increase in the number of collectors has, I fear, greatly thinned them in all the districts near the metropolis; it is still, however, very abundant in many parts of Surrey and Hampshire. In the midst of a tract of barren land, on the top of the lower green sandstone, near Farnham, is a small patch whereon cultivation has gained the ascendancy over sterility; in this oasis dwells Mr. Smither, who is well acquainted with our native birds and insects, of which he is a sedulous collector. The Devil's Jumps (three hills so called) and the celebrated ponds of Frencham are in his immediate neighbourhood; and as Selborne is but a few miles over the heath, this district is within the area of Gilbert White's rambles, who, however, appears not to have been aware of the bird's existence there. Truthful to the letter are the stories which Smither relates respecting our native birds; and I therefore requested him to send me word what number of nests he had taken of the Dartford Warbler. The following reply will fully confirm what I have said respecting the abundance of the bird in certain districts.

"The greatest number of Dartford Warblers' nests I ever procured in a season was 65. These were collected in 1859, within a very limited distance of this place, or within the parishes of Churt and Bramshot. I went out yesterday at daybreak, and shot three males and a female. The male at this time of the morning often sits on the top of the furze, raises the feathers on his head into a crest, and erects his tail like a Wren. Sometimes the winter is so severe as to kill the furze; then great numbers perish. Such, I am told, was the case forty years ago, and it was so in the winter of 1860; but still you could, I am sure, come down and shoot the bird at any time, if you wish to do so."

In the following May I and my son Franklin went down, for the purpose of seeing the Furze-Wren, as the bird is sometimes called, in a state of nature. We met with it near the highest of the Devil's Jumps, and found a nest with four eggs, built in a bunch of thick heather. This was in the middle of the breeding-season; for their nesting-time extends from the beginning of April to the end of July: the eggs found at this latter period are, of course, a second laying.

Besides the localities above mentioned, the Dartford Warbler is found on Selsey Common, near Portsmouth, in nearly every part of the New Forest, and on all furze-clad sides of hills near the sea, in the adjoining counties of Dorset and Devonshire; in Cornwall it becomes more scarce. North of London it is seldom seen, but it is found in Worcestershire, Leicestershire, and, I believe, in the neighbouring counties. On the continent of Europe it is very local; France is probably its northern limit, while in Spain it is numerous, and also in North Africa, as we learn from the Rev. H. B. Tristram's Notes on the Ornithology of that country, published in the first volume of 'The Ibis,' where he states, at page 418, that it is "abundant in winter in the dayats, but never approaches the oases or the habitations of man. I do not believe that it is sedentary in the Sahara, but retires to the mountains to breed. I have taken several nests in the Atlas in the months of May and June."

As most British collectors must now be supplied with the eggs of the Furze-Wren, I trust Mr. Smither will be more sparing in future; for to him, as to us all, I am sure it must be a pleasure to see the numbers increase of this little native bird; on the other hand, should any young ornithologist be desirous of seeing it in a state of nature, he may always do so in the neighbourhood of Churt. Of course he would make his