SYLVIA CURRUCA.

Lesser Whitethroat.

Motacilla Curruca, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 329.

—— longirostra, Bechst. Naturf., xxvii. 43. 2.

—— dumetorum, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 334.

Curruca garrula, Briss. Orn., tom. iii. p. 384.

—— sylviella, Flem. Brit. Anim., p. 71.

Ficedula cannabina, Gerin, tom. iv. tab. 392. fig. 1.

Sylvia Curruca, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. i. p. 509.

—— Sylviella, Lath. ibid. p. 515.

—— leucopogon, Heckel.

—— garrula, Macgill. Hist. of Brit. Birds, vol. ii. p. 357, and vol. iii. p. 729.

There can be no doubt that the Lesser Whitethroat, which was evidently well known to Linnæus, Brisson, and all the earlier writers on natural history as an inhabitant of the European continent, must, at the time they wrote, have also been a frequenter of our islands; yet the venerable Latham informs us that he was indebted to his friend the Rev. J. Lightfoot for a knowledge of its existence in this country, that gentleman having apprized him of its building, in May and June, among the brambles and other low bushes about Bulstrode in Buckinghamshire. That its occurrence in Britain should have been first made known by a clergyman is not surprising, since the men of this high calling have ever included among their number some who have devoted much time and attention to natural history, in proof of which assertion I need do no more than mention the researches of Gilbert White, Herbert, and Bishop Stanley; and it is much to be wished that many more would follow their example, for no branch of science or kind of study would furnish them with more important texts than the power, wisdom, and goodness of God as manifested in creation.

On the continent of Europe, the Lesser Whitethroat is very generally distributed, and in England it is as well known as any other of the sylvan birds which visit us in spring, and make our islands their summer home.

The Blackcap, the Garden Warbler, and the Whitethroats have many characters in common, both in their structure and mode of life; still certain marked differences are observable among them, and, trivial though they be, it is necessary, or at least desirable, that they should be pointed out in a work on our native birds; this has been done, with respect to the former, in my account of each species; and I now proceed with the history of the Lesser Whitethroat. With the exception of Cornwall, Devon, and perhaps some parts of Wales, it inhabits during the summer months every locality in the British Islands suited to its habits, from Sussex to the south of Scotland, but becomes more scarce the further we go north. In Ireland, I believe, it has not been found. The situations the bird affects are gardens, orchards, shrubberies, hedge-rows, and woods. It is particularly partial to plum- and cherry-trees, on which, if closely watched, it may be seen passing from branch to branch, and inquisitively searching beneath the leaves for aphides and other kinds of insects and their larvæ. At other times it threads the thicker trees of the hedge-row; but it then exhibits a greater degree of shyness and caution. When in a garden, its peculiar song may now be heard in one part of it, and the next minute in another; it appears, in fact, to be constantly on the move, going its rounds from tree to tree, and from shrub to shrub, sometimes crossing a river to a neighbouring garden, at others descending into the thicket or hedgerow. It is rather late in its arrival, and May has generally commenced before the ear is struck by its garrulous babbling note, which, when once heard, can never be mistaken for that of any other species of the genus. The male precedes the female by a few days, and, his impatience being terminated by her arrival, the pair soon begin to construct their slight and very frail nest in some shrub, bramble, or among the tangled herbage of the ditch-side. The eggs are four or five in number; and in about ten or twelve days the young are hatched. If the weather be warm and insect food abundant, they are soon able to shift for themselves, and leave their parents at liberty to enter upon the duty of producing a second brood. Again the garrulous note of the male is heard, and again the gardens ring with its monotonous song.

The Lesser Whitethroat is a compact little bird, and in its form assimilates nearly as much to the Blackcap as to its congener the Common Whitethroat. The sexes are alike in colour; and the young, although bearing a very general resemblance to the adults, are even more neat and pretty in their dress and general contour.

The law which influences the distribution over Europe of so many of our sylvan birds also governs that of the Lesser Whitethroat. It is found, during the summer months, in every country, from Spain and Italy to