

## RUTICILLA TITHYS.

### Black Redstart.

*Sylvia Tithys*, Scop. Ann. Hist. Nat., tom. i. p. 157.

*Motacilla tithys*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 335.

——— *Phœnicurus*, var.  $\delta$ , *Gibraltariensis*, et *atrata*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. pp. 987, 988.

*Ruticilla Tithys*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 365.

——— *Cairii*, Gerbe.

*Phœnicura Tethys*, Jard. and Selby. Ill. Orn., vol. i. pl. 86. figs. 1 & 2.

THAT there are exceptions to all rules, applies to natural history as well as to other things, and we have an instance in point in the present species; for, whereas its ally, the Common Redstart, comes to us in spring for the purpose of spending the summer, the Black Redstart arrives in autumn, and takes its departure when the winter is over. Had it been a species which breeds in high northern latitudes, like the Bramble Finch and the Greater Redpole, its appearance in autumn would not elicit a remark, neither would its occurrence have caused so much thought to British ornithologists. The Bramble Finch and the Redpole are hard-billed birds, and mainly live on seeds; the Black Redstart, on the other hand, feeds exclusively on insects; and hence we might naturally suppose that, in common with all insectivorous migrants, it would cross the Mediterranean in autumn, and the greater number do really proceed in that direction; but a partial migration westward also takes place, and seldom do the months of October and November recur without this bird appearing in one or other of the southern and western counties, particularly those of Sussex, Devonshire, and Cornwall. That it proceeds still further west, and crosses the Irish Channel, is certain; for it is occasionally found in many parts of Ireland at the same season. It there also arrives with the fall of the leaf, and departs when the trees are putting forth their spring foliage. In the counties above mentioned, we may one day walk along the rocky coasts or among the cavernous sand-hills of their bays without seeing a single example, while if we pursue the same track twenty-four hours after, one, two, or three may be observed sitting solitarily on a stone, or flitting before us to a hiding-place in the cleft of the rock, where it will remain for a short time, or, if there be an opening, pass out on the opposite side. Sometimes an old cock may be seen in the black dress, but females and young males are ten times more frequently met with. That the specific name of *Cairii* is merely a synonym there can be no doubt; for it is certain that the numerous skins which we receive from the Continent, with that name attached, are young males of this species. I do not for a moment doubt that these young males pair with the opposite sex, and perform every function necessary for reproduction; but, in all probability, the black livery is not assumed until the bird is two or three years old.

As the bird breeds in Belgium, the north of France, and the whole of southern Germany, we might readily believe that it would perform the same duty in the British Islands; but I have never heard of an authentic instance of its so doing.

Although the habits and economy of the *Ruticilla Tithys* are very similar to those of the Redstart, still they differ in certain points. They are less arboreal than those of that bird, and present a striking resemblance to the habits of the more typical *Savicolinæ*—Wheatears, &c. The Black Redstart evinces a greater partiality for stony and rocky places; and although I have seen it nesting in the outhouse of a German garden, the nest is more frequently placed in a crevice of a stone wall or in the cleft of a rock. Its eggs are white. In this respect it also differs from its ally, as well as from the Wheatear; for the eggs of the latter bird are not so blue as those of the Redstart and many others of the *Savicolinæ*: the sexes, when fully adult, present the same difference that is seen in the Redstart; but the females of the two species are very similar.

I believe I was the first to notice this species as a British bird, since I find no record of it as such prior to the instance of its occurrence communicated by me in 1829 to the 'Zoological Journal,' and published in the fifth volume of that work. The example there noticed had been killed by F. Bond, Esq., a gentleman who has spent a long life in closely studying the works of nature, particularly the birds of this country, and than whom no one can be more courteous, more willing to impart the knowledge he has acquired for the advancement of science, or whose remarks may be more implicitly relied on. Another friend—Mr. John Gatcombe, of Plymouth—has also paid great attention to our native birds; I shall therefore append some remarks on this species with which he has favoured me.

"The Black Redstart is a regular winter visitor to the coasts of Devon and Cornwall, arriving generally the first week in November, and leaving at the end of March or the beginning of April. On two occasions only have I observed them so early as the 29th of October. They frequent the cliffs and rocks along the