

## RUTICILLA PHÆNICURA.

### Redstart.

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

*Sylvia Phœnicurus*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 511.

*Ruticilla*, Briss. Orn., tom. iii. p. 403.

*Phœnicura ruticilla*, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 240.

——— *muraria*, Swains. and Rich. Faun. Bor.-Am. Birds, p. 489.

*Ruticilla phœnicura*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom. i. p. 296, *Ruticilla*, sp. 1.

——— *phœnicurus*, Macgill. Hist. Brit. Birds, vol. ii. p. 305, and vol. iii. p.

*Erithacus phœnicurus*, Degl. Orn. Eur., tom. i. p. 502.

WHAT handsome little bird is that we see in the sunny orchard when the apple is in blossom? What is the little active creature we observe descending to the ground from the pollard in the shady part of the lane? What bird, with a trembling fiery-red tail, is that seen in the trim garden of the palace? It is the Redstart, one of our spring migrants, which has lately crossed the Mediterranean, and passed through Spain and Portugal to spend the summer in England and Scotland, but not in Ireland. No comet was ever more true to its appointed time; for, if unmolested, the same individuals return year after year to the identical spot where they have previously bred and reared their young, and again retire with a degree of regularity which surprises us. With a knowledge of this fact, should we not afford every protection to so pleasing an ornament to our grounds while it remains with us?—should we not cherish it as we do the cowslip and the primrose? or value it as highly as we do a caged Canary or a Bullfinch? Yet this is not done; and the bird in many parts of the country has become shy and distrustful, from a want of confidence in our friendship. As the knowing Sparrow avoids a person with a gun, so does the male Redstart keep aloof from our presence; for he instinctively knows that the beauty of his gay dress will attract our attention, to his own destruction.

That the Redstart could be rendered tame and familiar there can be little doubt; for no one of the smaller birds approaches so near to our dwellings for the purpose of breeding. Strange indeed are the places it frequently selects as a depository for its nest. In the forest it is a small hole in a tree; in the village lane, a hollow space in a pollard oak; in the garden, the cankered apple-branch, or between the upright hoarding of the tool-house. These, however, are not the only places; for the bird courts our familiarity still more closely. In 1862 I was shown a nest in the small square space in the wall of a forcing-house, belonging to the Duchess of Sutherland, at Cliveden, which contained the cogged wheels of the contrivance for opening and shutting the lights; and there the bird continued to sit on her eggs, neither the working of the wheels nor the presence of those who had occasion to pass through the house, and whose shoulders, from the narrowness of the space, must frequently have been within six inches of the nest, disturbing her equanimity during the fortnight she was engaged in the task of incubation. A still more strange place of deposit was also seen at Cliveden—the midst of a box of croquet-balls in the orangery. In the Rev. F. O. Morris's 'History of British Birds,' we are told that a Redstart has been known to place its nest in a watering-pot, another in an inverted flower-pot; and Bishop Stanley mentions that he had known a nest "built on a space between the gudgeons or narrow upright iron on which a garden-door was hung, the bottom of the nest resting on the iron hinge; it must have been shaken every time the door was opened. Nevertheless there she sat, in spite of the inconvenience and publicity, exposed as she was to all who were constantly passing to and fro." The same situations, continues Mr. Morris, if the birds be undisturbed, are resorted to from year to year. One pair have been known to revisit the same garden for sixteen seasons in succession; and a pair resorted for four successive years to the ventilator of a stable. Mr. Weir informed Macgillivray that "about a mile from Bathgate, in Linlithgowshire, there are three cottages belonging to the Earl of Hopetown, within a few yards of the public road, where, at the extremity of a hole in the gable of one of them, about the middle of May 1835, a pair of Redstarts took up their residence and reared their young. And, what is very astonishing, a pair built in the same situation in the summer of 1837, although a weaver had taken possession of the house, and had from five o'clock in the morning until ten at night three looms in continual operation within twelve feet of the nest, which was in the inside of a garret, and only a few open planks between them."

From the above records it will be seen that while on the one hand the Redstart is extremely shy, on the other it is very familiar; and that, although it is naturally timid, it does not hesitate to enter our very dwellings for the purpose of breeding and rearing its young. Surely, then, the remark I have made about extending to it the hand of friendship is not inappropriate.