CYANECULA LEUCOCYANA.

White-throated Bluebreast.

Cyanecula leucocyana, Brehm, Naum. Vög. t. 364. f. 1, 2, & t. 365. f. 1, 2.

On reference to my description of Cyanecula suecica it will be seen that I have questioned whether the various Bluebreasts which are found in Europe and in many parts of Africa, India, and China are distinct from each other, or merely varieties of one and the same species. But if we consider the numerous Yellow Wagtails which extend over a similar area distinct, it will scarcely be consistent to unite the differently coloured Bluebreasts. When these pretty birds are more closely studied I think it likely they will be still further separated than they have been. As to the countries they frequent, each appears to be confined to a particular locality. In Europe these variously marked migrants resort in summer to very different sections of this portion of the globe. The first-described species (the Motacilla suecica of Linnæus), which is distinguished by a red spot in the centre of the blue breast, frequents the most northern and eastern parts; while the Cyanecula leucocyana, with a silky-white spot in the same place, is found in the southern and western portions of the continent—that is, from the banks of the Rhine to the Mediterranean. Both the red- and the white-spotted birds have been seen in the British Islands; but it is upon the latter only that it is necessary to remark here. Of the C. suecica sufficient has been said in the description accompanying the Plate of that species. There can be no doubt that a bird of this genus has been met with in the Isle of Wight; and Mr. Harting especially notes, in his valuable 'Handbook of British Birds,' that it had a white spot on the throat. Those who desire to know more respecting this occurrence will do well to consult the 'Zoologist' for 1865, where a considerable amount of information is given.

In the 'Natural History, General and Particular,' of the celebrated Buffon, vol. 15 (Birds), translated by William Smellie, an elaborate and interesting article on the habits of the White-throated Bluebreast will be found. A comparison is first made between it and the Robin; and he then goes on to state that "they have also the same habits; only their haunts are different: the Redbreast lives in the heart of the woods; but the Bluebreast frequents their skirts, and also marshes, wet meadows, and places which are covered with willows and reeds. And (with the same solitary instincts as the Redbreast) it seems alike to be familiar with man; for, after the summer months have been spent in its sequestered retreats, it visits the gardens, avenues, and hedges before its departure, and ventures so near that it may be easily shot. Like the Redbreast it never keeps in flocks, and seldom more than two are seen together. At the end of summer, says Lottinger, the Bluebreasts alight in the fields that are sown with large kinds of grain. Frisch mentions fields of peas as their favourite haunt, and pretends that they breed among them; but their nests are more often found among the willow, osier, and other bushes which grow in wet situations. During the love-season the male mounts perpendicularly to a moderate height in the air, chanting as he rises; he then whirls round, and drops on to a bough as cheerfully as a Pettychaps, with which the Bluebreast seems to have some habits in common. He also sings in the night; and, according to Frisch, his warble is very sweet. The Bluebreast is as fond of bathing as the Redbreast, and often haunts the margin of waters. It lives on worms and other insects, and in the season of its passage also eats elderberries. It may be seen among the fens, seeking its food on the ground, running briskly, and cocking its tail, especially the male when he hears the real or imitated voice of the female. Among the adult males some have the whole of the neck blue; and these are probably old birds, particularly as the remainder of the colours and the red zone on the breast appear to be deeper in those individuals. The others, which are more numerous, have a spot like a half collar, of a fine white, which Frisch compares to the lustre of polished silver; and from this character the birdcatchers of Brandenburg have applied the name of Mirror-bird. These rich colours tarnish and fade in confinement, and even after the first moulting.

"They are frequent in Alsace; but though they are spread through Germany, they are not very common in any part."

Bailly, speaking of the true Cyanecula leucocyana under the name of Ruticilla cyanecula in his 'Ornithologie de la Savoie,' says:—"This species is not rare in Savoy during its spring and autumnal migrations. Still many hunters do not know it, and others believe it to be exceedingly rare. It frequents thickets and hedges. I have noticed many in summer in wooded and very damp regions of the mountains near Chambéry, especially at Apremont and Entremont, near the hamlet of Coche.