The Stone-chat is an early breeder, and begins to construct its nest in the beginning of March; consequently by midsummer the brood are strong fliers, and the old birds are occupied with a second hatching.

Mr. Weir informed Macgillivray that of all the nests of which he had been in pursuit, he found that of the Stone-chat "the most difficult to discover, as it is usually built in a collection of whins, and covered by them. The best way to find it is to watch the female when she comes off her eggs to take food. Even then, she will not go in until you retire to so great a distance that you will scarcely be able to observe her, she hops so quickly from bush to bush, and in a moment disappears. I have again and again beat the bush in which they had their nest before I could make them rise, so closely do they sometimes sit. The nest is composed of dry grass and moss, lined with hair and feathers, and sometimes with wool. The eggs are usually six in number, of a pale greenish blue, with small spots of reddish brown at the larger end. I have seen the brood, when they were very young, come out from under a bush to be fed by the old birds, and then immediately retire to their place of concealment."

"When the nest is approached," says Macgillivray, "the old birds evince much anxiety, flutter and flit about, incessantly emitting their sharp snapping note, and endeavouring to lead the intruder off in pursuit of them.

"In winter I have seen this species about the gardens and even the doors of cottages, apparently not much less familiar than the Robin. But this happens only in severe weather; for at this season it generally continues in its summer haunts, or betakes itself to thickets and hedges. Its song is short, modulated, and not unpleasant, being very similar to that of the Whinchat, and frequently performed while the bird is hovering over a bush. It is seldom heard before the beginning of April, or after the middle of June."

A fine nest, sent to me by Mr. Smither from Churt, was mainly composed exteriorly of dried grass interwoven with moss; the walls were thick, and the interior was neatly lined with horsehair, between which and the exterior was an interlining of fine dried grass-stalks: it contained five beautiful eggs, which are now in my collection.

The eggs seem to differ considerably in the intensity of the blue ground-colour, some being much deeper than others; both, however, are finely freckled with light brown.

The food consists entirely of insects of various kinds, but principally of Coleoptera and their larvæ.

The sexes are at all seasons sufficiently different in colour to be readily distinguishable; but a marked seasonal change takes place in spring and autumn, the male having those parts which are deep black in summer of a rusty brown in winter, the change apparently being effected by the loss, in summer, of the brown tips of the feathers, which before were so conspicuous, leaving the black bases more visible; the rufous colour of the breast, too, is brighter, and the white on the wings purer.

Continental examples differ from those obtained in this country in being of a larger size, of a brighter colour, and in having a greater amount of white on the lower part of the back.

The Plate represents the two sexes, of the size of life, in summer plumage.