CINCLUS AQUATICUS.

Water-Ouzel or Dipper.

Sturnus cinclus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 290.

Turdus cinclus, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. i. p. 343.

Merula aquatica, Briss. Orn., tom. v. p. 252.

Cinclus aquaticus, Bechst. Naturg. Deutsch., vol. iii. p. 808.

— melanogaster, Temm.?

In studying the habits and mode of life of the Water-Ouzel, the ornithologist is often led into the most romantic parts of our island; and if solitude and beautiful scenery be objects of attraction to him, he may while away many hours in pleasurable delight when thus engaged. To say that the Water-Ouzel never leaves the rivers springing from the high tors of Dartmoor and Derbyshire, the rocky rivers of Wales, Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Yorkshire, and all similar localities throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland, would be wrong; for, although the bird mostly frequents such situations, it is sometimes found in the small streams and rivers of other and less rocky parts of England. I have known a solitary individual to be killed in the little river Chess, in Buckinghamshire; it has also been seen in the Colne, and in the slow-flowing rivers of Lincolnshire and Norfolk. On the Continent, all countries of a mountainous character, from Spain and Italy to Norway and Lapland, are inhabited by Water-Ouzels. In Holland and the Low Countries it is of course not to be expected. Among fishermen it has a bad character, from their belief that it feeds upon the ova of the trout and salmon; hence in some parts of Scotland it is destroyed by every device: but the charge, in my opinion, has not been established, nor have I any reason, after taking considerable pains to investigate the subject, to believe that it is just. During my visit, in November 1859, to Penoyre, the seat of Colonel Watkyns, on the river Usk, the Water-Ouzels were very plentiful, and his keeper informed me that they were then feeding on the recently deposited roe of the trout and salmon. By the Colonel's desire, five specimens were shot for the purpose of ascertaining by dissection the truth of this assertion, but I found no trace whatever of spawn in either of them. Their hard gizzards were entirely filled with larvæ of Phryganea and the water-beetle (Hydrophilus). One of them had a small Bull-head (Cottus gobio) in its throat, which the bird had doubtless taken from under a stone. I suspect that insects and their larvæ, with small shelled mollusks, constitute their principal food: and it may be that their labours in this way are rather beneficial than otherwise; for as many aquatic insects will attack the ova and fry, their destruction must be an advantage. I believe, indeed, that birds generally, nay always, do good rather than harm in the check they give to the undue extension of insect life: and it is not a little interesting to observe how their varied forms are adapted to this particular end; there is no element, and scarcely a situation in which insects can live, that is out of the reach of their more powerful enemies, the birds. This law of adaptation I have repeatedly referred to in my work on the Trochilidæ, where I have, among other examples, shown that the stout Brugmansiæ, with lengthened tubular corollas, are resorted to by Humming-Birds with enormously lengthened bills and still longer tongues, especially suited for the exploration of their inmost recesses; while, on the other hand, the little Alpine flowers are visited by species with bills of the most diminutive size. The Swallow skims the surface of the water, the more powerful Swift hawks in the air, the little Willow-Wren (Phyllopneuste trochilus) investigates the foliage of trees, the Wren (Troglodytes Europæus) the mossy bank, all for the same end and purpose; while in the Water-Ouzel we have a bird which seeks its sustenance beneath the water,—so that even in this element the bird and the insects are side by side. In the diving-habits of the Water-Ouzel we find a seeming reversal of the law of gravitation; for as the living bird is lighter than water, how is it able to descend and sustain itself at the bottom? Some assert that it is by clinging to the pebbles with its strong claws; others, by considerable exertion and a rapid movement of the wings. Its silky plumage is impervious to wet; and hence, when the bird returns to the surface, the pearly drops which roll off into the stream are the only evidence of its recent submersion. It is, indeed, very interesting to observe this pretty bird walk down a stone, quietly descend into the water, rise again perhaps at the distance of several yards down the stream, and wing its way back to the place it had just left, to perform the same manœuvre the next minute, the silence of the interval broken by its cheerful warbling song. The flight of the Water-Ouzel is straight, low, and rapid—in fact, much like that of the Kingfisher, which it also resembles in its solitary habits. It is, however, seldom found in the same situations, the latter being a frequenter of rivers flowing through a fertile country, while the Water Ouzel resorts to the rapid and limpid streams which descend the mountain-sides and run through glens at their base.