

TURDUS ILIACUS, *Linn.*

Redwing.

Turdus iliacus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 292.

THE northern parts of the Old World, it must be admitted, are preeminently rich in the great group of singing-birds of which the Redwing forms a part; for, besides those species which inhabit our own islands and Europe generally, there are others which pass their summer in eastern Siberia, and do not form part of our fauna: in most instances they are gregarious; nearly all are migratory; and the sexes differ but little in their colouring, our well-known Blackbird forming almost the only exception to the rule. The Redwing is one of the least of the group, yet he wings his way to this country from Norway and Lapland, and even from Iceland, with the greatest ease; and in October and November immense flights may be looked for with certainty, which on their arrival disperse over all parts of our island, from the most northern to the most southern counties. If the weather be open, the great fields of arable land are resorted to, as affording the most abundant supply of insects, worms and seeds. If frost should set in, and snow cover the ground, the hedgerow, with its abundance of haws, supplies them with food, and the orange-coloured berries of the mountain-ash also contribute to its support. There are times, however, when the seasons are too severe for them to exist, and instances are on record of thousands having perished from cold and want of food. Such calamities tend to keep bird-life in check; and it is doubtless for some wise purpose that they occur.

From the above remarks it will be understood that the Redwing is not an indigenous bird with us, but is merely a domiciled visitor during the winter season. When the Swallow and a host of other spring visitors arrive, the Redwing takes its departure for regions further north—in fact, for its natural home among the trackless forests bordering the Arctic circle: there it pours forth its chant, and serenades its mate while engaged in the task of reproduction, just as our spirited Thrush does in this country; and pretty indeed is the song it utters. This song, like that of all other birds, is an exuberant expression of joy connected with the period of reproduction; but as the Redwing does not breed in this country, we have but little opportunity of becoming acquainted with it. If my readers will journey to Norway, Sweden, and Russia, they may there hear it in perfection. But it is not necessary to leave our island for this purpose; for, wherever the bird is located, every calm and sunny spring morning will be ushered in with its low musical notes; these, it is true, are not equal to those it pours forth in its native country, still that they are very pleasing I may confidently affirm, having been in the habit of constantly listening to them at that season, from the days of my youth to the present time. I heard them in January 1864 from the tops of the high trees around the house in the beautiful grounds of Tregothnan, and more recently in several other places, particularly at Formosa in Berkshire. In confirmation of the singing-powers of the Redwing, I may quote the following passages from the pen of Mr. A. Matthews, of Gumley, Market Harborough, published in the 'Zoologist' for 1864, p. 8947:—"About the middle of March, when the weather has been fine and warm, I have, on many occasions, heard the Redwing sing, and under circumstances which rendered a mistake as to the identity of the songster impossible. During the spring it was a common custom with my brothers and myself to go in the evening to the neighbouring woods for the purpose of shooting Hawks when they came to roost. The thousands of Redwings and Fieldfares which congregated in these woods preparatory to their quitting the country without doubt formed the great attraction to the birds of prey; and often, very often, when lying in ambush for their enemies, have I been charmed with the concert of this melodious host. I think I shall be within the pale of strict veracity if I say that I have heard hundreds in full song at the same moment. But perhaps some of your readers may require more positive evidence that this enchanting concert was the actual production of Redwings and Fieldfares; and on this point I will endeavour to satisfy them. When on the look-out for Hawks, we always placed ourselves against the body of some large tree, surrounded by tall underwood, chiefly hazel and ash, and in these bushes I have seen, at the same moment, many Redwings and Fieldfares, with open bills and distended throats, in the full torrent of song, some occasionally within two or three yards of my head, as I stood motionless at my post. In such close vicinity, their plumage was as plainly seen as if I had held them in my hand; there was the clear bright stripe over the eye, and the unmistakable rufous colour on the sides of the breast; and though I blush to own it, to make assurance doubly sure, I have shot them in the act of singing. Surely this must be sufficient to convince the most sceptical. Except the Nightingale, I do not know a more beautiful songster than the Redwing; its notes much resemble those of the Song-Thrush, but are fuller, sweeter, and more melodious, many of them in tone approaching those of the Blackbird." What says Mr. Wheelwright on the subject? "By the middle of the month of April most of the spring migrants had arrived, and the

