TURDUS VISCIVORUS, *Linn.*

Missel-Thrush.

Turdus viscivorus, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 79.
——— *major*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 379.
——— *arboreus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 380.
Silvia viscivora, Savi, Orn. Tosc. tom. i. p. 208.
Ixocossyphus viscivorus, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 145.
Merula viscivora, Selb. Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. i. p. 158.

There are so many interesting traits in the character of the Missel-Thrush that it is a great favourite with every lover of a country life. It is the largest species of its genus inhabiting the British Islands, and is distinguised from all other Thrushes by the breadth of its colouring and by the richness of its pectoral markings; it is, moreover, a vigorous, bold, and spirited bird, and, unlike the Song-Thrush and the Blackbird, whose habits lead them to frequent ditches, gardens, fields of turnips, and sheltered situations, evinces a preference for the tops of the loftiest trees and the open pasture. In disposition it is tyrannical and quarrelsome, two pairs seldom living in peace in the same coppice or garden; moreover it is by no means friendly to the other birds in its vicinity, and there is but little doubt that it often seizes their callow young and carries them off to feed its own offspring; at least it is so affirmed by some observers, and the accusation is probably a true one: at all events, after the perusal of Mr. Weir's notes on the subject, published in Macgillivray's 'History of British Birds,' and given below, my readers will be disposed to give it credence. Notwithstanding this offensive feature in its disposition, it is, as I have said, a general favourite. Of all birds it is the first to carol the coming spring; for scarcely has January commenced, let the weather be fine or stormy, ere its loud, shrill, monotonous notes, without compass or variety in tone, and few in number, are poured forth with remarkable vigour.

Generally speaking, the Missel-Thrush is shy and distrustful, and it avoids man in the most marked manner. In winter, should the open fallow not afford a sufficient supply of insects, or frost and snow preclude them from being sought for, it stealthily visits the hedgerow, and feeds on haws and the berries of the mountain-ash, or searches the wood for the berries of the holly, ivy, and juniper. Like many other birds that are shy under ordinary circumstances, when spring arrives with its incumbent duties the Missel-Thrush does not hesitate to descend to the trimly mown lawn, to enter gardens, and even to build its nest in the immediate vicinity of houses and among the stirring bustle of men, dogs, aud domestic cattle. Here, early in the morning and at those hours of the day when attention is least likely to be directed to its labours, it builds its nest, mostly on a low horizontal branch of a tree, sometimes within ten feet of the ground, but occasionally on the higher limbs, and in its construction frequently displays much art in assimilating the materials to the colour and character of the surrounding part of the branch; here, if unmolested, the young are hatched and reared, but decoyed away as soon as their pinions are sufficiently developed to admit of their flying. A second brood is not unfrequently hatched and successfully reared during the same season. In autumn it sometimes assembles in flocks of forty, fifty, or a hundred individuals, but generally in parties of a smaller number. Its flight is strong and vigorous; and as the bird passes high in the air with a dipping action, the white of the underside of the wings shows conspicuously.

The Missel-Thrush is distributed over all parts of the British Islands, but is nowhere so plentiful as the Song-Thrush and Blackbird. Formerly, even down to the commencement of the present century, it was comparatively rare in Scotland; but it is now as numerous there as in England. On the continent of Europe it is equally abundant, from the shores of the Mediterranean to the Baltic, and, up to a very recent date, was supposed to inhabit the Himalayas and other parts of India; but some of our best ornithologists now regard the bird there found as distinct, and have bestowed upon it the appellation of *Turdus Hodgsoni*.

"It is not generally known," says Mr. Weir, "that the Missel-Thrush is one of the most voracious of our native birds. Having shot all the Magpies and Carrion-Crows which infested my immediate neighbourhood, I could not conceive for a long time what had been the cause of the destruction of so many young birds and eggs, until I observed a Missel-Thrush flying out of a nest in which he had been carrying on his murderous operations. As I was passing Balbairdie Loch I saw one flying with something in its bill. It was, I suppose, a young Hedge-Sparrow, as the robber was keenly pursued by an old one, which attempted again and again to make it drop its prey, but, alas! to no purpose; for it carried it off to its nest, where it no doubt afforded an agreeable repast to its greedy young ones. One forenoon, when going to my garden, I looked into the nest of a Thrush, which was built on the branch of a small spruce-tree a few feet from the ground and contained