ORIOLUS GALBULA, Linn.

Golden Oriole.

Oriolus Galbula, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 160.

Coracias Oriolus, Linn. Faun. Suec., no. 95.

— Galbula, Nilss. Ornith. Suec., p. 94.

Galbula, Ray, Syn., p. 68, no. 5.

Oriolus, Briss. Orn., tom. ii. p. 320.

Turdus aureus, Klein, Av., p. 66.

— luteus, Frisch, Vög. Teutsch., pl. 31.

It is possible that some of my readers who are not very intimately acquainted with our native birds may think that I am introducing to their notice a species which does not fairly belong to our avifauna; but this I can assure them is not the case, for the lovely bird represented on the opposite Plate (the Oriolus Galbula of Linnæus) has doubtless regularly visited our islands in summer from before the landing of Julius Cæsar to the present year. To enumerate all the specimens which have been shot would fill several pages. In Mr. Stevenson's 'Birds of Norfolk,' no less than twenty are recorded as having been captured or seen in that county alone; the works of Yarrell and Thompson contain many similar notices of its occurrence in other counties, both of England and Ireland; Mr. Rodd, in his recently published 'List of the Birds of Cornwall,' mentions several instances of its appearance in that part of England; the Hon. Evelyn Boscawen saw a fine male, a year or two ago, on the terrace-wall at Tregothnan; an adult male, in full plumage, which had been shot on the 26th of April 1858, was placed in my hands, the next day, by Mr. Leadbeater; and, were it desirable or necessary, many instances might be cited of its having been seen in our southern and western counties. But, although the bird is so frequently found in Britain, it can only be regarded as an occasional visitant, since our islands do not lie in the direct line of its migrations. That those individuals which cross the straits and resort to our shores have occasionally bred here, and, if unmolested, would still do so, cannot be doubted. Should any of my readers wish to see it in a state of nature, they have only to make a journey to the quiet town of Leyden, and there, on any fine spring morning, they will hear the flutelike note of the male, and perchance find one of its nests among the trees growing in the very streets of that celebrated seat of learning; during the summer-time it may also be seen in every suitable locality of the Continent, from the shores of the Mediterranean to Finland. Being strictly a migrant, it leaves its African winter quaters in April, and, after spending the summer in the more northern countries of Europe, returns again in September to its winter home among the Atlas range or even further south. In speaking of the birds of Malta and Gozo, Mr. Wright says, "This strikingly beautiful bird is a regular visitor in the spring, where it arrives in small flocks, and would probably breed were it not disturbed. It is very common sometimes in Sant' Antonio Gardens, and is very destructive to the fruit of the Japan medlars (Mespilus Japonica), of which it appears to be exceedingly fond. Occasionally females, probably old birds, are found in the brilliant plumage of the males. A few also repass in September."—Ibis, 1864, p. 63.

"During the summer," says Lieut. R. M. Sperling, "this beautiful and essentially Mediterranean bird meets the eye round the whole of the northern coast. Migrating from Africa about the middle of April, it spreads through the deep olive-woods of Corfu, the dark carob-trees of Malta, and the thick bay and myrtle covers of Albania and Greece. It is a shy and retiring bird, and generally appears like a golden gleam as it darts through the dark-green foliage; but, by sitting perfectly still, I have been enabled to watch its graceful motions for half an hour within five or ten yaads of me."—Ibis, 1864, p. 277.

Mr. H. E. Dresser, who has favoured me with a short note respecting the bird as observed by him in Finland, says, "In the southern and eastern parts it is very generally distributed; but I do not think it is found higher than Abo. At the country seat of my friend Mr. Hackman (Hertnala, near Wiborg), where I spent the summer of 1856, at least four pairs must have had nests; but I could not succeed in finding them. The Finns call this bird 'Kuhankeittäjä,' from its peculiar whistle."

One of the best accounts of the habits of the Golden Oriole I have seen is that contained in M. Bailly's 'Ornithologie de la Savoie,' vol. ii. p. 154, of which the following is a somewhat free translation:—

"In Savoy the Golden Oriole is neither scarce nor abundant during the four summer months. It arrives with us about the 20th or 25th of April, and departs again about the end of August or the beginning of September, after which a few may occasionally be met with until the 10th of October; but by that time they have all left the country. On their return from Africa in spring, the males generally arrive a few days before the females, and wander alone about the woods until they also arrive, when the pairing commences.