

with in that neighbourhood wherever there are reeds in any quantity, with fenny land adjoining. During the autumn and winter they are found dispersed, generally in small parties, throughout the whole length of the Suffolk coast, wherever there are large tracts of reeds. I have found them numerous, in the breeding-season, on the skirts of Whittlesea, near Huntingdonshire, and they are not uncommon in the fenny district of Lincolnshire; whether they are to be met with further north I have had no means of ascertaining, but they do not appear to have been noticed north of the Humber. It begins building in the end of April. The nest is composed on the outside of the dead leaves of the reed and sedge intermixed with a few pieces of grass, and invariably lined with the top of the reed, somewhat in the manner of the nest of the Reed Wren (*Sylvia arundinacea*, L.), but not so compact in the interior. It is generally placed in a tuft of coarse grass or rushes, near the ground, on the margin of the dikes, in the fen; sometimes fixed among the reeds that are broken down, but never suspended between the stems. The eggs vary in number from four to six, rarely seven, pure white, sprinkled all over with small purplish-red spots, intermixed with a few small faint lines and markings of the same colour; size about the same as that of the Greater Tit, but much more rounded and shorter. Their food during the winter is principally the seed of the reed; and so intent are they in searching for it, that I have taken them with a birdlime twig attached to the end of a fishing-rod. When alarmed by any sudden noise, or the passing of a hawk, they utter their shrill musical notes and conceal themselves among the thick bottom of the reeds, but soon resume their station, climbing the upright stems with the greatest facility. Their manners in feeding approach near to the Long-tailed Tit, often hanging with the head downwards, and occasionally assuming the most beautiful attitudes. Their food is not entirely the reed-seed, but insects and their larvæ, and the very young shelled snails of different kinds, which are numerous in the bottom of the reedlings. I have been enabled to watch their motions when in search of insects, having, when there has been a little wind stirring, been often within a few feet of them, quite unnoticed, among the thick reeds. Was it not for their note betraying them, they would be but seldom seen. The young, until the autumn moult, vary in plumage from the old birds; a stripe of blackish feathers extends from the hind part of the neck to the rump. It has been said that the males and females keep separate during the winter; but I have always observed them in company; they appear to keep in families until the pairing-time, in the manner of the Long-tailed Tit,—differing in this respect, that you will occasionally find them congregated in large flocks, more particularly during the month of October, when they are migrating from their breeding-places.” —Mag. Nat. Hist. vol. iii. p. 328.

A question has of late years been raised by some ornithologists as to whether this bird has any real affinity to the members of the genus *Parus*. The late Professor Macgillivray, taking the digestive organs as his guide, considered it to be allied to the Buntings, and distantly related to the *Emberiza schænicus* and to the members of the American genus *Ammodramus*; and Mr. Robert Tomes has written a very elaborate article in the second volume of the 'Ibis' in support of this view. Linnæus at one time referred it to the genus *Lanius*; and Bewick termed it the Lesser Butcher Bird. After well considering the matter, I cannot perceive that it has any direct alliance with either of those genera; and while I admit that it differs in many points from the true Tits, I must advocate its Parine affinities: it is an aberrant form, certainly, but no more so than that of the Penduline Tit, *Ægithalus pendulinus*, or the Sultan Tit of India, *Melanochlora sultanea*. The *Parinæ* constitute a great group comprising many genera, with variously modified forms, the members of which are widely dispersed over the surface of the globe. Insects in their multitudinous variety furnish the main diet of the whole family; but in the Bearded Tit we find a bird with a peculiarly formed, long, thick, and muscular stomach, admirably adapted for grinding down the shells of minute testaceous mollusks, upon which and the seeds of the reed it mainly subsists. In its active movements, wandering disposition, and gregarious habits, it shows a Parine rather than a Fringilline relationship; in the number and markings of its eggs it also offers an assimilation; but in selecting a site for its nest, and the materials of which it is constructed, it differs not only from every other Tit with which we are acquainted, but also from the Buntings.

The male has the crown of the head, nape, and cheeks delicate bluish grey; between the bill and the eyes a black mark, which proceeds down the side of each cheek and terminates in a fine and lengthened moustache; throat white, passing into vinous grey of the chest and upper part of the flanks; lower part of the flanks, back, and four middle tail-feathers rich deep fawn-colour; lateral tail-feathers greyish white at the tips, with darker bases; primaries brown, margined externally with pure white; spurious wing brown; greater coverts and secondaries rich deep fawn-colour, striated with black, the inner webs of the two or three nearest the body white; under tail-coverts black; irides clear yellow; bill light orange-yellow; legs, feet, and claws black.

The female is rather less than the male, of a more uniform fawn-colour, is destitute of the black moustache, has the under tail-coverts buff, instead of black, and the bill yellowish grey.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size, with a number of young birds of the first autumn in the distance. The plant is the *Phragmites communis* of Lindley.