

## MECISTURA CAUDATA.

### Long-tailed Tit.

*Parus caudatus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 342.

— *longicaudus*, Briss. Orn., tom. iii. p. 750.

*Mecistura vagans*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Spec. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus.

*Acredula caudata*, Koch, Syst. Baierisch. Zool., p. 200.

I AM at a loss how to commence the history of this interesting species, respecting which so many pleasing associations exist in the breast of every lover of our native birds, from the plough-boy "whistling o'er the lea," and the lad who sallies forth from the town on a bird's-nesting excursion, to the sportsman who has been drawn out on a November day for a chance shot at a "cock," or who, still later in the season, is waiting at the end of a cover when a *battue* is the order of the day. The youth and the man alike have their attention arrested when these little wandering minstrels flit by them from branch to branch, from spray to spray. Always going ahead, the little troop passes from one part of the wood to another, or from one end of a hedge to its perchance abrupt termination, when, at a given signal, off starts the foremost bird, followed by the next, and the next, until the whole troop have streamed away, with their tails straight behind them, to the next brake, or across a river to a tree on the opposite bank, when, perpetually moving, onward they go until their daily round is completed.

As spring advances, these little families of Bottle-Tits, as they are frequently called, separate into pairs, each of which selects a site for their exquisitely beautiful nest—one pair preferring the upright bole of a tall poplar, another the side of an elm, while others fancy the branches of the wild sloe, the furze-bush, or the flat outspread branches of the silver fir. In all these and many other situations are the nests to be seen; these are the nests *par excellence* which are known to every country-boy, which have the curled feathers at the entrance often disturbed by his prying finger while feeling for the tiny eggs among the warm lining at the bottom, and which nest and eggs, without any special end or object in view, he carries home, and, curiosity satisfied, throws aside.

In all the English counties, as well as those of Scotland, as far as the Grampians, and everywhere in Ireland, the Long-tailed Tit is to be found. It is also an inhabitant of all the countries intervening between the shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, but is most numerous in Holland and Germany. Its range does not extend so far as India; but it is said to be found in Siberia and Russia. The southern parts of Sweden and Norway are probably the northern limit of its distribution in Western Europe. The Continental birds differ very considerably from our own, so much so as almost to induce the belief that they are distinct. Those of Holland and Germany are larger, have whiter heads, and the rest of their plumage is more richly coloured than British examples: still they have hitherto been regarded as mere local varieties; and as such I shall now consider them. In Japan we find its representative in a very nearly allied species, the *Mecistura trivirgata*. How singular it is that so many of our bird-forms should exist in this remote country, and that many of its species should be identical with those of Great Britain! and it is certain, from this evidence, that similar physical conditions of climate, temperature, and vegetation must also prevail there.

Wonderful, indeed, is the architectural skill displayed by the Long-tailed Tit in the construction of its closely felted nest, so warmly lined with feathers, and externally bespangled with lichens. Who can behold it without feeling the highest admiration of the bird's skill and perseverance? If closely inspected, it will be found that the glaucous sides of the lichens are always placed to the light, whereby the exterior is rendered still more beautiful. In the description of the nest, given below, it will be found that 2000 feathers were taken from a single lining; with what care, then, and diligence must the bird search for so many feathers on the surface of the ground! But this is as nothing compared with the amount of invisible cobwebs collected, wherewith to attach the decorative bits of lichen to the outside; but as the nest will be carefully described, I shall not dwell minutely upon it here, particularly as I have something to say of the young. When these birds are about ready to fly, they are very different in colour from the adults, and are altogether very singular little creatures—their comparatively short tails, broad bills, thick fleshy-yellow gape, red-ringed eyes, and white crowns strongly contrasting with the hues of the old birds. When these nestlings leave their cradle for the trees, they sit on the sunny side of the branches, and are there fed by their parents: they soon gain strength, and flit about for their own living; and when night comes on, crowd together on a low branch in a huddled heap resembling a ball of feathers, their united bodies giving out more heat in a mass than if perched singly. In the early morn, when the sun first sends forth his genial rays, these little Tits may often be seen