

POECILE PALUSTRIS.

Marsh-Tit.

Parus palustris, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 98.

— *atricapillus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 1008.

— *salicarius*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., tom. i. p. 465.

Pœcile palustris, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 114.

WHETHER it be or be not to the advancement of ornithological science that such minute differences as those which are observable in the Marsh- and Coal Tits should be indicated by a distinct generic appellation is very questionable; certain it is, however, that those birds are now considered to be generically distinct, the term *Pœcile* being assigned to the former, and that of *Parus* retained for the latter. In habits and general economy the two birds are very similar; but a remarkable difference occurs in the colouring of their young, immature birds of the Marsh-Tit and of all the other members of the genus *Pœcile* assuming from the first the appearance of the adult, while the cheeks of the youthful Tits of *Parus major*, *P. ater*, and *P. cæruleus* are strongly stained with yellow during the first month after they have left the nest, in lieu of the white seen in the adult. This remarkable difference may not have been generally noticed; but that it really occurs may be verified by any one willing to investigate the subject.

The members of the genus *Pœcile* have longer feathers and a much denser plumage than the true *Parus*, are less sprightly and active in their actions, and do not cling or hang so much to the ends of branches and leaves in search of insects: at least these are the differences which have been noticed between the Marsh- and Coal Tits of our island.

The Marsh-Tit is very generally dispersed over England and Ireland from north to south, but becomes more scarce as we proceed into Scotland, being rarely found between Edinburgh and the border, and altogether absent from some parts of the north. St. John states that it is found in the fir-woods of Morayshire in winter; Macgillivray was not aware that it had been met with further north than Fifeshire; and the Duke of Argyll writes to me, "I have never seen it in Argyll- or Dumbartonshire, whilst its closely allied congener, the Coal Tit, is very abundant. This is a curious case of restricted distribution, which it is difficult to connect with any special conditions of food or climate. In the neighbourhood of London the Coal and Marsh-Tits seem equally common; nor have I observed that, in England, marsh-lands are at all peculiarly the habitat of the Marsh-Tit. I may add that I have never observed the Marsh-Tit in Scotland at all; but my opportunities of observation have been chiefly in the western counties. It is undoubtedly a rare bird in Scotland generally."

Several species of the genus *Pœcile* inhabit Europe, and others America. Most of them affect the northern portions of their respective continents; and hence it is that I am surprised to find that the Marsh-Tit is comparatively rare in Scotland. On the continent it is very generally dispersed, and is doubtless found as far north as Sweden and Norway, where it meets its close ally the *Pœcile borealis*.

There is no difference whatever in the colouring of the sexes, and they differ so little in size that dissection must be resorted to to distinguish one from the other.

The Marsh-, like the Coal Tit, inhabits all the great woods in the neighbourhood of the Thames and other parts of England; it also frequents coppices, hedge-rows, and swampy grounds; and I have not failed to observe that it affects the lower trees and shaws, while the Coal Tit resorts to the higher branches of tall beech trees in chalky districts, as well as those of flat alluvial land: not so, however, the Marsh-Tit; for although not excluded from such situations, it is less frequently found there.

In its nesting and in its general mode of nidification it also slightly differs from its frequent associate the Coal Tit, the nest being generally placed in a stub near the ground, or in a bank-side. It varies in size according to the nature of the situation in which it is placed, being sometimes as small as a cricket-ball, at others half the size of a man's hat. Rabbits' down is a favourite material, and I have seen nests composed almost entirely of it. One taken from a hole in a birch tree was compact, cup-shaped, smooth both externally and internally, and mainly composed of rabbits' hair, interwoven on the inner side with minute chips of dried grasses, and on the outer side with fine moss; another, taken at Formosa, in Berkshire, was a thick matted structure of moss and dogs' hair, the former predominating on the outside, and the hair inside. As an instance of the great care some birds take to prevent the detection of their nests, Mr. Bond tells me that he once observed a pair of Marsh-Tits, who were excavating a hole in an old tree as a place of deposit for their intended nest, carefully carry away the bits of wood in their beak one by one, fly over a neighbouring hedge, and there drop them—a trait in the bird's economy which is not generally known,