PARUS CRISTATUS, *Linn.*

Crested Tit.

Parus cristatus, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 97.
—— *mitratus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 467.
Lophophanes cristatus, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 92.

A CONSIDERABLE degree of ornamentation is displayed among the different members of the family *Paridæ* or Tits. Much diversity of form also occurs among them: the *Mecisturæ*, for instance, with their short beaks, fluffy plumage, and very long tails, differ considerably from the rest of the family, as they also do in constructing very beautiful nests: the continental Penduline Tit, *Ægithalus pendulinus*, with a sharp-pointed bill and a short square tail, makes a lovely felted one, like a bag or purse. In India there are other forms, and among them some with crests: the lengthened plumes on the crown of all these genera, as they have been termed, appear to be given solely for the purpose of ornament, and to have no influence on the economy of the birds; for they have all the manners and actions of the species which have not these appendages. It may not be uninteresting if I mention the principal countries in which the *Paridæ* are to be found. Asia may be considered their headquarters; for there they abound, both in species and individuals; but no country to the north, where shrubs can grow or trees can live, appears too cold for them: some are found within the arctic circle; and the Siberian forests have one species as beautifully coloured as those seen in India or our own country. Tits are also found in Japan, China, India, Persia, and Africa; but the form is very feebly represented south of the equator. They are less numerous in the New than in the Old World, and are there also chiefly confined to the north, although some exist as far south as Mexico. Scarcely any of the European species go to India; but, as is the case with so many others of our birds, the Coal Tit is found in Japan, or one so nearly allied that it would be difficult to define the particulars in which it differs.

The Crested Tit is probably more strictly European than almost any other bird; for I believe it never visits Northern Africa, Asia Minor, or the Holy Land. In the great forests of Norway it is plentiful; and it is scarcely less so in Sweden, Germany, and the Swiss Alps. In England it is never seen: or if this expression be too strong, let me alone be responsible for the opinion; for I want further evidence than any I have yet had presented to me before I become a convert to the statement that it occurs here. On the other hand, it is tolerably abundant in many of the old forests of Scotland, particularly those on the banks of the Spey and the lower Findhorn; it has been shot in Perth- and Argyle-shires; and through the kindness of Mr. Lewis Dunbar I have received several specimens in the flesh from the neighbourhood of Elgin. As any information respecting this little Tit is of interest to all who make a study of our native birds, I give an extract from the writings of Mr. St. John:—

"The Crested Titmouse is a very beautiful little bird, and one not generally known to breed in Britain. From the number of specimens which have been procured from the woods of Strathspey, it is evident that this bird must be there in great abundance, although it does not appear to extend its visits to other parts of the country, with the exception of the woods about Dulcie, on the Findhorn. In these picturesque and beautiful woods the Crested Tit is found, but not in such numbers as in Strathspey. Its habits are the same as those of the other species, searching actively among the fir trees for insects, and hanging from the branches in every possible attitude, probing every crevice with its tiny but strong bill. All the kinds of Titmice are very carnivorously inclined, feeding greedily on any dead bird or other animal which they may meet with." (Tour in Sutherland, by St. John, vol. ii. p. 160.)

Even at the risk of being tautological, I shall add a passage respecting this bird from the same author's 'Natural History and Sport in Moray,' p. 20:—

"I know no bird so confined to particular spots as the Crested Titmouse. Its only regular place of abode, as far as has been ascertained, is the large forest near Grantown, on the Spey, where it builds abundantly in the decayed clefts and holes of the old fir trees, making a smaller nest than most other birds of the same genus. It lays about six eggs, white, with dark-red spots. Its habits are like those of other Titmice, searching the trees for small insects, and flying from branch to branch, uttering a loud shrill cry. On the head is a tolerably long and pointed crest of black feathers; the upper parts of the body are pale greenish brown; the lower parts dull white; tail grey. This is the dullest-coloured of all the Titmice, but easily distinguished by its remarkable crest, which it erects with great facility."

In the 'Zoologist' for 1862, p. 7998, will be found a note by Mr. H. L. Saxby, which I transcribe, in the hope that he was not deceived in regard to the species; for I must own that I have learned to be a sceptic in all