PARUS ATER.

Coal Tit.

Parus ater, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 341.
—— *atricapillus*, Briss. Orn., tom. iii. p. 551.
—— *carbonarius*, Pall. Zoogr., tom. i. p. 556.
Pœcile ater, Kaup, Naturl. Syst., p. 114.

I CANNOT agree with some of my contemporaries when they state that this bird is less numerous in the British Islands than the Marsh- or Blue Tits; for my own experience tells me that it is certainly more abundant than the former, if not as numerous as the latter. Mr. Rodd states that it is common in the woods of Cornwall, particularly in those of the eastern parts of that county. Mr. Selby informs us that it is abundant in all the pine-forests of Scotland. Thompson, in his 'Birds of Ireland,' speaks of its universal distribution over that island; and I may affirm from my own observation, that in England it matters little what localities are visited, or what situations are rambled over, whether it be the wood, the coppice, or the shrubbery, there will the bird be found. Everywhere, however, it evinces a preference for extensive woods of beech and oak, to the topmost outlying branches of which trees it habitually resorts, and there displays its graceful actions, flitting or fluttering from spray to spray, peering beneath the leaves, and clinging in many elegant positions to the very extremities of the tender shoots—the ornamental patch of white on its poll offering a conspicuous contrast to the black of the head and neck. Its every movement is in accordance with those of the other members of the genus, and it is as graceful in all its actions as in its disposition it is pert and lively.

On the continent of Europe, all the countries, from the Mediterranean to Sweden and Norway, may include it in their avi-fauna. It certainly proceeds as far east as the Crimea; and Pennant states that it is found in Siberia, which is very probable, as Captain Blakiston has just brought a bird from Northern Japan, which exhibits no perceptible specific differences; strange to say, however, we have no positive evidence that it has ever been found in the Himalayas or in the peninsula of India. As the Blue Tit (*Parus cæruleus*) has a representative in North Africa in the *P. ultramarinus*, so has the present species in the *P. Ledoucii*; these representative species, which live between the great Atlas ranges and the sea, are very interesting. It will be found that the young of the *P. ater* has yellow cheeks and nape, and that this colour is also slightly suffused over the abdomen; in the *P. Ledoucii* this colouring is characteristic of the adults: and thus the young of one species closely assimilates to the old of the other; no ornithologist will, however, doubt the specific distinctness of *P. ater* and *P. Ledoucii*.

There is no perceptible difference in the colouring of the sexes; but they are subject to a slight seasonal change, the colours in summer and winter not being alike. In January the back is olive; in June it is bluish grey, and the general hues of the plumage are much darker than in winter. Some difference occurs between specimens from Germany and those killed in the British Islands; the birds from the former country, and probably those from all other parts of the Continent, are of larger size and more finely coloured than our own.

In winter the food of the Coal Tit consists of insects of various kinds in every stage of their existence, from the larva to the imago state; in summer, flies, aphides, even caterpillars, &c., to which are added small seeds, berries, and the kernels of such stone fruits as it can open with its little conical bill. The young, during the time they are in the nest, are fed entirely upon insects; after they are able to fly and gain their own livelihood, they capture them for themselves, and, as may be readily supposed, a brood of eight or ten of these prying and active little creatures must devour many thousands every hour while such feasting lasts: in winter, their insect food is sought for in the curled-up leaves, the crevices of the bark of trees, and similar situations; spiders, in particular, fall a prey to the Coal Tit at this season.

A more than usually severe winter is likely to drive the bird to more southern climes: but this remark applies to the Continental individuals rather than to our own; for, however severe the winter may be, the bird in this country holds its own.

A nest taken at Formosa in Berkshire, on the 21st of May, 1860, was singularly thick and compact, measuring at least an inch and a half through. The materials of which it was composed did not present the usual layered appearance, but seemed to be thoroughly matted or felted together; the body of the nest was mainly constructed of wool, cows' hair, and a few downy feathers; the outside was thinly coated with dried moss.

Another nest taken on the 17th of May, 1861, from a summerhouse in the same garden, presented a similar felted appearance, the various materials of moss, fine hair, and wool being all mixed together into a