

## PARUS CÆRULEUS.

### Blue Tit.

*Parus cæruleus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 341.

*Cyanistes cæruleus*, Kaup, Naturl. Syst., p. 99.

WHEN a bird is so generally distributed over the British Islands that it is known to every school-boy, what can I say respecting it which has not been related before? Hackneyed descriptions become tiring to the reader, if incessantly repeated; while the presence of the little favourites themselves is always acceptable. Of these no one is better known or more welcome than the Blue Tit, which during the summer visits our gardens and rose-trees in search of the insects ensconced within the upcurled leaves, and which in winter, when the hoar frost puts it to certain straits, taps at our windows for a solitary sped house-fly or other insect on the inner side of the glass, or to solicit alms in the shape of crumbs or a picked bone. The child of the warm hearth within, naturally desirous of possessing it, sets his brick-trap on the snow; and the poor bird falls into the snare. Then comes the peck from its little sharp bill, and its flurry to escape, which perhaps it affects, with the loss of its tail. When the boy grows up to manhood, such desires no longer exist, and he now admires the bird in its freedom, and very properly affords it his protection for its good services.

Although I have spoken so highly of the Blue Tit, I fear my meed of praise must be qualified; for however pretty and interesting he may be, and great as may be the good he effects in the destruction of insect-life, on the other hand a grave offence is laid to his charge—that of pecking holes in our ripening apples and pears, when, the skin being broken, the wasp soon completes the destruction he has commenced. This is a serious matter; and it does not lessen the offence of the Blue Tit when I say that such conduct is common to all its brethren. This bird also, and indeed all the Tits, occasionally resorts in winter and early spring to the entrances of bee-hives, and carries off such of the insects as may have been induced by a sunny morning to come forth to seek for any opening flower.

That every bird has its own particular area, more limited with some than with others, must be well known. Europe generally is the portion of the globe where the Blue Tit is destined to dwell. And here, again, I must make use of the term “generally distributed;” for whether it be the countries of the south washed by the Mediterranean, or those bordering the Baltic in the North, the bird is a denizen of them all: on the one hand, it crosses the border-line to Sweden, Norway, and Finland as far as the 63rd degree of north latitude; on the other hand, I have no evidence that, like so many other European birds, it ever crosses the Mediterranean to North Africa, its place there being supplied by the *Parus ultramarinus*.

As spring advances, the Blue Tit becomes pert and lively, and by its busy actions and flittings to and fro soon betrays the site it has selected for its intended nest: this may be a hole in a stunted willow, apple, or other tree, a split in the gate-post, a crack in the neighbouring wall, the spout of the garden-pump, or an inverted flower-pot. Wherever it may be, the nest is commenced in April; and if left undisturbed, a numerous progeny fly off to the branches of the neighbouring trees, in the following month, and leave the parents a yet long summer to repeat the process and rear a second brood. Now come into play its useful qualities; for the number of caterpillars and perfect insects taken by a brood of ten or twelve young Tits is enormous. Mr. Weir communicated to Mr. Macgillivray his observations on the feeding of the young in the nest, between a quarter past two in the morning and half past eight in the evening, and found that they do so in that period four hundred and seventy-five times, each time bringing one caterpillar, at others two or three; so that probably this one pair of birds destroyed six or seven hundred in the course of a single day. After such a statement as this, must we not be surprised how any one can question the usefulness of these little birds? for I can easily imagine that, but for them and other allied species, we should be so overrun by insects that the consequences would be frightful to contemplate. If our little birds are let alone, a proper balance between bird- and insect-life will be kept up, with a highly beneficial result; and I cannot but believe that darkness reigned over that parish whose churchwardens' account contained an item for seventeen dozen tomtits' heads.

When insect-food becomes scarce, the bird may frequently be seen carrying about in its bill the seed of some tree, or a stone of the wild cherry, which it ultimately holds firmly between its toes on the horizontal branch of a tree, or places in a chink or interstice of the bark, and hammers at it with its little bill and all its might until a hole is made and the kernel reached. This hammering noise may often be heard in the woods; for it is made by all the Tits, as well as the more powerful Nut-hatch.