

SITTA CÆSIA, *Wolf et Meyer.*

Nuthatch.

Sitta cæsia, Wolf et Meyer, *Tasch. Deutsch. Vög.*, tom. i. p. 128.

— *Europæa*, auct., nec Linn.

— *affinis*, Blyth, *Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng.*, vol. xv. p. 288.

ORNITHOLOGISTS are at variance as to the correct scientific appellation of our Nuthatch, and whether the *Sitta Europæa* of Linnæus and our bird, which has been called *cæsia*, are one and the same species, or only varieties of each other, due to climatic influences. Had Linnæus ever seen our bird, he would doubtless have noticed the difference of its colouring from the Nuthatch inhabiting Sweden and Norway, and he might, or he might not, have considered them as mere local varieties; but had he been aware that the Swedish bird (his *S. Europæa*) was found in Zealand, but not in Jutland, and that the English bird, *S. cæsia*, was an inhabitant of the latter country, as stated to me by Professor Steenstrup, of Copenhagen, he would probably have described them as distinct; and as our bird is found very generally over the Continent, except its northern portion, let me do so in the present work, but, at the same time, admit that, except in colour, I can scarcely perceive any difference between them; the wash of chestnut-red on the under surface, however, is constantly found in every British specimen, as well as in those of France and Central Europe, while the same part is white in examples from Norway, Sweden, and other northern countries. The mode of progression of the Nuthatch is no less singular than the trees it frequents are varied. It runs obliquely over the main stems, commencing its roundabout travels at the largest part, and finishing with the smaller branches, or *vice versâ*; unlike the Woodpecker, Creeper, and Wryneck, it passes over the bark with its head downwards as frequently as in an opposite direction, never making use of its tail as a support. In this inverted position it may be seen prying for spiders and insects, or searching for a suitable chink wherein to place the nut or cherry-stone, which it has either found on the ground or gathered during its restless movements—movements so peculiar that every one is interested when he first sees a Nuthatch, or has his attention attracted by its loud ringing notes. Like the Woodpecker and the Wryneck, it selects the hole of a tree for the purpose of nidification, but, unlike them, lays spotted instead of white eggs, and makes a nest of leaves or shreds of bark. It frequently selects a much larger hole than is necessary, and plasters up the entrance with a thick and solid wall of mud, like the Hornbills of India and Africa, leaving only just sufficient room for egress and regress.

My readers will readily imagine that this bird is a very curious and amusing denizen of our woods and gardens, and would fain, I should hope, be desirous of making a closer acquaintance with it. To effect this, the best way will be to acquire a knowledge of its oft-repeated, monotonous note, when, by looking attentively in the direction whence it proceeds, they will soon perceive the bird passing over and round the boles and branches in a series of short jumps, or performing a dipping flight from tree to tree, followed by another and another, sometimes to the number of six or eight, which incessantly call and restlessly follow each other from branch to branch. There are times, however, when the bird is less noisy and less actively engaged among the branches: the chances are that he is now on the ground searching for a nut or a cherry-stone, or he may perhaps pick up a stray bean which the keeper has cast abroad for his Pheasants; in a few minutes more he will be hammering away at whatever he has found, in the chink or interstice of a branch, or in a slit in a rail or gate-post, in which he has placed it, and at which he continues to peg away with all his might until the kernel is reached and eaten. Mr. Bond tells me that the Nuthatch often, and particularly during the month of May, selects the top upright dead boughs of trees, and from thence sallies forth to capture insects, after the manner of the Flycatcher.

I do not know that I can add to the interest which attaches to this bird by stating what counties of England it inhabits, but I may mention that Montagu was in error when he affirmed that it was not seen in Cornwall; for I have the authority of Mr. Rodd's 'List of Cornish Birds' for stating that it is "very common in the eastern woodlands;" and I have certain evidence that it occurs in the great woods at Tregothnan, the seat of Viscount Falmouth, since I have received two notes on the subject, one from his Lordship, and another from the Honourable Evelyn Boscawen. "I write to inform you," says Lord Falmouth, "that the keeper brought me in a Nuthatch yesterday, which he had killed at Nancarrow Creek, near the eastern end of the park." Mr. Boscawen says, "This morning, when out in the garden, I saw a Nuthatch; I afterwards heard another; and I believe the bird to be far from scarce in this neighbourhood."

The Nuthatch is not found in Ireland or Scotland, and Mr. Selby states that the Wear and the Tyne are the most northern points to which he has been able to trace it: in all the midland counties of England

