

MUSCICAPA ATRICAPILLA, Linn.

Pied Flycatcher.

The Pied Flycatcher, in the strictest sense of the term, is a migrant; for it passes the summer only in the British Islands. In the months of April and May its arrival may be looked for, and solitary individuals generally seen in our southern counties, during their passage from Africa to the northern parts of the island. Here, within circumscribed limits, it takes up its abode and rears its young, and when autumn terminates, and insect-life becomes scarce, wings its way back to the south.

If we look to the works of Yarrell, Selby, and Morris, we shall find numerous instances of its accidental occurrence in many other parts of England than those above mentioned. In Scotland it is extremely scarce, that country being apparently beyond its ordinary limits of location. In Ireland I believe it has not yet been discovered. Scarce as is the Pied Flycatcher in the southern parts of England, few birds are more plentiful in Westmoreland, Cumberland, Yorkshire, and Durham. In the neighbourhood of Carlisle the late Mr. Heysham frequently met with it, when he spent a day in the suburbs of the town. It is even more plentiful at Penrith, particularly in the woods bordering the Eamont and the Lowther: in this district it breeds in abundance, and there the specimens from which my drawing was made were procured. Examples have also been sent to me from Hunmanby in Yorkshire, by Admiral Mitford, in whose gardens one or two pairs annually breed. The summer home, then, of the Pied Flycatcher in Britain is confined to a narrow belt of two or three degrees. On the Continent I believe it is also found in similar latitudes, but it there proceeds further north than with us; for I saw it breeding near the Lake Mjosen, in Norway: while Mr. Wheelwright speaks of it as being more numerous than the Spotted species in the Quickiock district of Lapland, where he saw it as high as the birch-region extends; and principally found the nest in small dead birch-stubs by the river-side. Eastward it is found as far as the confines of Europe: everywhere it is a migrant, as in England.

In its habits and economy it is much less sedentary than the Spotted Flycatcher. In disposition it is more shy, exposes itself less, and keeps to the leafy branches of the trees; I have, however, seen its breeding-place very near a dwelling-house, where the busy throng, one would have supposed, was incompatible with the shyness of its nature. The site of the nest is somewhat varied: a hollow in the bole of a large tree, the interior of an outhouse, or even in an upright post, with the least possible hole for an entrance, seems to be preferred; just space enough to squeeze its tiny body through the aperture is apparently what it likes. Beyond the entrance there must, of course, be room enough for it to construct its carelessly formed nest. On the somewhat shallow structure it deposits five or six beautiful pale greenish-blue eggs, somewhat of the character of those of some of the smaller Saxicolinæ, to which group it is seemingly allied; still its structure and arboreal habits point out that this alliance is one of analogy rather than of affinity.

As no one in England enjoyed better opportunities of observing this bird in a state of nature than the late Mr. Heysham, I cannot do better than transcribe his admirable description from the third volume of the 'Magazine of Natural History:'—

"The migration of this species appears to be principally confined to the northern counties, as it is seldom observed beyond Yorkshire, and rarely seen in the south of England, although it has occasionally been met with in Norfolk, Suffolk, Middlesex, Surrey, and Dorsetshire. In some parts of Westmoreland it is very plentiful, especially in the beautiful and extensive woods surrounding Lowther Castle, the magnificent and princely residence of the Earl of Lonsdale, where we have seen it in very great numbers, and where it has bred unmolested and almost unknown for years. On the contrary, we have reason to think it has not resorted to the vicinity of Carlisle more than five or six years, and, as far as we have yet been able to ascertain, only to one locality, where it is evidently on the increase. In this situation the males generally arrive about the middle of April; the females not until ten or fifteen days afterwards. They commence nidification early in May, and the young are excluded about the first or second week in June.