

ENNEOCTONUS COLLURIO.

Butcher Bird.

Lanius Collurio, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 136.

——— *æruinosus*, Klein, Av., tom. v. f. 8.

——— *spinitorques*, Bechst. Naturg. Deutsch., vol. ii. p. 1335.

Enneoctonus Collurio, Boie, Isis, 1826, p. 973.

NEITHER Scotland nor Ireland can enumerate the Butcher Bird in their avifaunas; yet in England the bird is so common during the months of summer, that it may be found all over our southern and western counties, from Cornwall to Yorkshire, wherever localities suited to its habits occur. In the last-mentioned county, and the adjoining ones of Durham and Northumberland, it becomes more scarce; and there is no evidence of its ever having crossed the border. On the continent of Europe its range extends to Sweden and Norway, in which latter country I myself saw it, in Christiania Fjord, in June 1856. In these comparatively northern climes, as in our own, and throughout all the countries of Central Europe to the borders of the Mediterranean, it is merely a summer visitant. Examples from the Crimea, the furthest east from which I have seen it, were sent to Dr. Carte of Dublin. Specimens collected in many parts of Africa prove that it ranges widely over that continent. It certainly occurs in Nubia, as I have seen examples which had been sent from thence; and there are others in the British Museum which I believe are from Mozambique. It is not usual for any of the northern passerine birds to cross the Equator; yet we are told by Dr. Smith that it occurs still further south than the localities above mentioned, even to within the colony of the Cape.

It is not until the Hawthorn is in flower, and the grassy meadow bespangled with buttercups, that the Butcher Bird, or Red-backed Shrike, as it is also called, makes its appearance in England; before the merry month of May, therefore, it must not be looked for. That some counties in England are more favourable to it than others is certain. But even there particular localities must not be overlooked by the ornithologist, if he wishes to see the bird in a state of nature: thick hedgerows, bordering the sides of lanes, and common lands where cattle and horses are allowed by law to pasture are its favourite places of resort, as are also the sides of low coppices on light soils suitable to insect life: woodland districts are less congenial to its habits, and it is seldom or ever seen in such situations. In its disposition it is tyrannical and cruel; for it will be master of the hedgerow, let what bird may attempt to dispute its supremacy; and continual squabbles take place between the aggrieved and the aggressor. At one moment the Butcher Bird may be seen driving before it the weaker tenants of the hedge, while at another a Magpie or a Jay will call forth its ire, and cause it, by scolding and other manifestations, to evince that the visit is an unpleasant one. On the other hand, at his first coming the small birds assemble and mob him for a time; at length, however, some amicable arrangement appears to be entered into, after which they live at peace. It is necessary, nevertheless, for those that are breeding to be vigilant and careful of their young; otherwise the Shrike may resume its bad character, seize the nestling by the neck, fly to some covert or base, and tear it to pieces with its powerful bill. This trait of killing young birds, as well as mice and shrews, is, however, exceptional; for its staple food is doubtless insects of every kind and denomination, from the great Stag-beetle to the Rose-chafer, Grasshopper, and Dragon Fly. But a few days since I saw a Shrike pounce down upon a great Lob-worm at my feet, as large and as long as the quill with which I am writing, and carry it away, dangling on each side of his body, to the branch of a tree, when his further operations became lost to view; perhaps the bird descended with it again to the ground, or tore it to pieces and placed it on some thorn in the neighbouring bush. This singular habit of impaling the food is common, I believe, to all the members of the genus, nay to the whole family of the Shrikes; for I have seen the same thing done by a species of an aberrant form, the *Cracticus destructor* of Australia. If this be doubted by any one, and they should be desirous of witnessing this feat of the Australian bird, they have only to drive a sharp-pointed nail through the cage in which it is confined, when it will soon be seen to stick its meat, or any other kind of food, thereon. If there be a thorn at the end of a hedge, or a small bush out in a field in the neighbourhood of the situation where the Red-backed Shrike has taken up his quarters, the thorny branches may frequently be seen studded with various objects—perhaps the head of a little bird, the mangled remains of a Shrew, a frog's leg, snails, beetles, and other insects, particularly humble-bees. Such an exhibition, however, is not always to be met with; still, now and then it may be; I have seen it myself more than once, and I am sure that most country-people have also. The end and object of this Shrike's larder I am unable to say: the thorns are often too weak to be of any assistance to the bird in tearing the parts asunder; besides which, it is only the useless and rejected portions that are so treated and made a