

themselves; ultimately they hawk in the air, and, like their parents, perch lengthwise on the rugged branches of the trees. Under the stimulating influence of the abundance of food procurable at midsummer, they quickly attain size and strength, and by the end of August or beginning of September enter on their first travels to the "unknown land" where their parents spent the previous winter, and which is doubtless Morocco.

Independently of the British Islands, the Nightjar inhabits all the warmer and temperate portions of Europe; I believe it also frequents the whole of Africa, and ranges as far east as Affghanistan.

From the above remarks it will be seen that the Nightjar is plentifully diffused over nearly every part of Great Britain; yet I venture to affirm that there is not one in a thousand persons who has ever observed it in a state of nature: they may have seen a skin or a mounted specimen in some museum; and this is all the evidence they have of its being one of the birds of our island; of its history, habits, and economy they are totally ignorant. It is the ornithologist, inspired by a love for nature and her works, who seeks out its whereabouts, silently watches its movements, and lends an earnest ear to its spinning, vibrating, or chirring notes, which, commencing precisely at the setting of the sun, are poured forth at intervals during the whole night. The pastor who rests him on yonder stile while returning from his visit to some sick parishioner, the village lad and lass whose evening walk has thoughtlessly led them far away, the cottager who takes a turn round his garden before retiring to his early rest, the watcher who seats himself under the hedge or in the glade of a copse, the stealthy poacher of the eggs of the Pheasant and other game birds, these are the persons who are acquainted with the Nightjar and its habits in a state of nature.

May be the horse of the farmer, who is sleepily returning from the market-town, suddenly starts backward and throws his rider; the cause is probably unknown, but it most likely was the Nightjar, which has abruptly risen from the road under the horse's nose. Let not this trait in the habits of the bird be doubted; for we know that it frequently squats in the road and pathway, and it is asserted that both rider and mule are in like manner often tumbled over the precipices in some of the more dangerous mountain-passes of South America by the sudden rising of the *Hydropsalis psalurus*, with its long whip-like tail. Superstitions of various kinds attach to most nocturnal birds, and our Nightjar forms no exception to the rule; for Mr. Smither informs me that the labouring classes round Churt, in Surrey, believe that it has the power of rendering any person annoying it "puckeridge-struck," and hence they have an objection to disturb either the bird or its eggs for fear of the consequences. Gilbert White mentions a similar superstition; but in this case cattle, and not human beings, were supposed to be the objects of their malevolence.

The male may always be recognized by the presence of a series of white spots on the wings and tail; in all other respects the two sexes are alike in colour.

The peculiar use of the pectinated claw of the middle toe has not yet been satisfactorily stated; it has been supposed that it was intended as a means of clearing the vibrissæ from any matters that might attach to them during the act of feeding; but this cannot be the case, for the pectinations are so close to each other that the stout vibrissæ could not possibly pass between them. The actual use of this pectinated claw must, I fear, remain for the present involved in obscurity. It is believed by some persons to be a means by which the bird rids itself of certain parasites.

The usual resting-place of the Nightjar during the day is on the ground, where it sleeps like other nocturnal birds, but from which it is easily disturbed, when it flies off to some other part of the wood, and either settles again on the earth or lengthwise on some large branch of a tree. During the intervals of feeding, it perches on the tops of trees, on the summit of a heap of turf, a large stone, rail, or gate-post, where its chirring note, resembling the sound of a spinning-wheel, is constantly uttered from sundown until the shades of night are lost in the early dawn. While flying, it frequently claps its wings together over its head, thereby producing a sound very similar to the first flushing of a Woodcock.

The throat of one of these birds which I examined was crammed with *Xylophasia polyodon* and one specimen of the cream-coloured Tiger Moth (*Arctia villica*), most of which were still alive, notwithstanding the bird had been dead two days.

The eggs are oval in form, and always two in number, beautifully clouded and veined with bluish grey on a white ground; they are 1 inch and 2 lines long, by  $10\frac{1}{2}$  lines in breadth.

The young are very easily reared, if taken at an early stage of their existence, by first cramming them with scraped beef, and afterwards supplying them with hard-boiled eggs, chopped fine, and insects; they soon become very tame, run over the room with facility, and evince no desire to escape, unless a window be suddenly opened, when they are off in an instant. In this way a fine specimen was lost by my friend Dr. Günther, after he had carefully reared it to the size of the mature bird.

The Plate represents a male, a female, and two young ones a few days old, of the size of life.