CAPRIMULGUS EUROPÆUS, *Linn.*

Nightjar, or Goatsucker.

Caprimulgus europæus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 346.
——— *punctatus*, Meyer, Tasch. Deutsch., tom. i. p. 284.
——— *maculatus*, Brehm, Handb. der Naturg. Vög. Deutsch., p. 131.
——— *vulgaris*, Vieillot.

How often do we find that ideas of the ancients are founded upon a semblance to truth! and thus the herdsmen of Greece and Rome seem to have concluded that this wide-mouthed bird could frequent the neighbourhood of goats and cattle solely for the purpose indicated in the name they assigned to it; whereas it seems more reasonable to suppose that it seeks those animals for the sake of the insects disturbed by them in the act of grazing. A similar habit obtains in the Common Yellow Wagtail (*Budytes flava*), which may be daily seen tripping round the cattle in our meads, and leaping up beneath them, for flies and other insects. There are hundreds of people in England who to this day believe that the hedgehog also sucks the teats of cows; some even assert that they have seen it in the act. Now the truth is that the animal is utterly incapable of such a feat; and, like the bird, it is doubtless attracted to the haunts of the cattle by the abundance of insect-food there found. The Starling leaps on the backs of sheep, the *Buphaga* on those of the African oxen, and the Zic-zac enters the mouth of the crocodile (so says Herodotus), all with the same object. The ridiculous notions so prevalent with regard to the Nightjar and the hedgehog must therefore be regarded as mere popular errors.

The European Nightjar belongs to a very extensive group of nocturnal birds, to which the family name of *Caprimulgidæ* has been given. With the exception of New Zealand and Polynesia, the Arctic and Antarctic regions, one or other of them inhabit the land portion of the entire globe. Their food, in general, consists of insects, for the capture of which their varied forms show an especial adaptation, however different the insects may be, from the huge *Cicadæ* and *Phasmidæ* to the most delicate moth. In their structure, these Nocturnes are wonderfully diversified, some species being armed with lengthened and very powerful vibrissæ, as in *Caprimulgus*, while in others this character is entirely absent, as in *Chordeiles*; some have a pectinated middle claw, others have not; some have exceedingly wide gapes and most delicate mandibles, as *Nyctibius*; others have stout horny bills, as *Batrachostomus* and *Podargus*; some have very lengthened wings, especially formed for aerial flight, as in *Chordeiles*; others have lengthened tarsi, showing that the ground is their natural province, as in *Nyctidromus*; some are Owl-like, nest in the holes of trees, and lay white eggs, as the Australian genus *Aegotheles*; while the South-American cave-dweller, *Steatornis*, which is said to sally forth at night and vary its food with fruits and berries, has a toothed, Falcon-like bill: other genera have extraordinary appendages to the wings, as in the African forms *Macrodipteryx* and *Semeiophorus*; while in the South-American genus *Hydropsalis* the tail-feathers are so enormously developed that we are lost in wonder how the birds capture their prey. I have merely mentioned a few of the more remarkable genera of the extensive family of which our bird forms a part; and, premising that it is to the birds of this form that the old classical name of *Caprimulgus*, as a generic appellation, is restricted, we will now turn to the history of this species, for it is that in which we are more particularly interested.

In the British Islands, over the whole of which it is distributed, the Nightjar is strictly a summer visitant, arriving in the month of May, and taking up its abode in woods with open glades, fir and larch plantations with sandy and rushy bottoms, wide upland open game-covers, low copses in the neighbourhood of meadows, sterile heaths, and other waste lands. Highly cultivated districts, then, where the farmer and the Rook strive to keep down insect-life, are not in unison with the habits of the bird, and consequently it is seldom seen in such situations. Strictly nocturnal in its habits, the Nightjar lives upon insects of various genera, but especially moths and chafers, which it captures in the air or on the ground. Its flight is buoyant in the extreme, and all its aerial evolutions remarkably graceful. At one moment it may be seen diving round and among the branches of the stately oak, at another hawking over the meadow, performing, in the course of its flight, a thousand turns and dippings, similar to the evening gambols of the great noctule Bat. The air, however, is by no means the only place in which it seeks its food; for it runs over the ground and among the grass with the greatest facility, leaping up and capturing the moths and other insects which there abound, and for securing which its wide gape, beset with strong vibrissæ, is admirably adapted. On the ground also it lays its two eggs; in the forest-glade, on the bare earth, are they incubated. Here, after remaining blind for several days, its curiously marked couplets first receive the twilight; and here these little Nightjars are supplied with food until they are able to trip over the surface and catch insects for

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Walter & Cohn Imp.
J. Gould and H. C. Richter del. et lith.