

ATHENE NOCTUA.

Little Owl.

- Strix noctua*, Retz. Faun. Suec., p. 85.
— *passerina*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. i. p. 65.
Noctua passerina, Cuv. Règn. Anim., edit. 1817, tom. i. p. 332.
— *glauca*, Savig. Descr. de l'Égypte, Hist. Nat., tom. i. p. 105.
Athene noctua, Boie, Isis, 1826, p. 315.
Strix nudipes et *S. psilodactyla*, Nilss. Orn. Suec., tom. i. p. 68, tab. 2.
Athene psilodactyla, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., tom. i. p. 110, tab. 8. fig. 2.
Scotophilus nudipes, Jard. Nat. Lib. Brit. Birds, vol. i. p. 274.
Athene passerina, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 549.
Cephaloptynx noctua, Kaup, Mon. Strig. in Jard. Cont. Orn., 1850, p. 105.
Carine passerina, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 29.
Syrnia psilodactyla, Macgill. Hist. of Brit. Birds, vol. iii. p. 417.
Surnia noctua, Keys. et Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 32.

If this little Owl were indigenous to Britain instead of an accidental visitor, it would doubtless be a general favourite; for its economy is interesting, and its manners somewhat singular. It is a very common bird, even so near to us as Holland, whence specimens in the flesh are frequently sent to the London markets, and I fear often palmed upon our collectors as British killed. On the continent of Europe it attracts especial notice by its habit of resorting to villages and towns, and taking up its abode in old ruins, church-steeple, and other lofty buildings. During the breeding-season, it is often seen flying about in the evening before the shades of night have closed in upon the day, and in the dawn before the sun has fairly risen. Its notes are singular and unearthly, so much so that it is regarded by superstitious persons as a bird of ill omen; in the mind of the ornithologist no such feeling exists, and, as before stated, we should be pleased if its visits to this country were more frequent; as it is, however, they have been sufficiently numerous to entitle it to rank among British birds, and there is at least one instance on record of its having bred with us. So far back as the time of Edwards, a specimen was caught in a chimney in London; and Mr. Yarrell states that a second was taken about the same time in a similar situation in the parish of Lambeth; and from that time until the present day instances of its having been shot in nearly every county are on record. Rennie saw one nailed to a barn-door in Wiltshire, doubtless with other spoils of a gamekeeper who regarded it as pertaining to his catalogue of "vermin;" and Mr. Hunt, in his 'British Ornithology,' says, "we recollect a nest of these birds being taken at no great distance from Norwich." The most recent historian of the birds of Norfolk county (Mr. Stevenson) states that two examples have come under his notice—one taken alive at Easton in 1846, which lived in confinement till December 1848, and another captured on board a fishing-smack, about ten miles off Yarmouth, in February 1862. Mr. Bond has a specimen which was shot at Sevenoaks, in Kent, in May the same year; Mr. E. H. Rodd, of the western county of Cornwall, records one killed near Helston, and two near Plymouth; as yet, however, no example has been seen either in Scotland or Ireland.

In Bailly's 'Ornithology of Savoy' it is stated that this species, "instead of dwelling in the forests, evinces a preference for the ruins of old edifices, houses, towers, and abandoned chateaus, the steeples of churches and convents, and the hollow trees in their neighbourhood; in such situations it breeds and passes the greater part of its life. Towards the end of March or April, the female lays four or five eggs on any soft deposit in a hole in a wall, or the inner timber of houses, and sometimes on the *débris* of roots, dried leaves and rags collected by the rats for their own use, but very rarely in the hollows of trees. The eggs, which are white, are of a rounded form, and a trifle larger than those of the Scops. The Little Owl being able to see in the daylight better than its congeners, hunts for its prey during the twilight of evening and on dull mornings in the woods around its residence, and when breeding is observed to go out earlier in the evening and to return later in the morning than other Owls. During autumn and winter, it is met with at those times in the hedges and on the trees bordering the roadside, and those which occur in the middle of fields and in the centre of towns and villages. When the ground is covered with snow, it approaches the farms, and lives upon the excrements of animals; at this time it also enters isolated buildings, caverns of rocks, vaults of old castles, and other similar situations resorted to by rats and bats. From such places its voice, which is less hollow than that of most other Owls, is frequently heard to resound. The cry, which generally resembles the words *hème* or *ëdm*, is repeated several times in succession at intervals of two or three seconds, as one man calls to attract the attention of another. These cries, distinctly uttered in a strong voice during the shades of evening and in the stillness of the night, cause great alarm to those persons who are weak enough to