

## OTUS VULGARIS.

### Long-eared Owl.

- Otus albicollis*, Daud. Traité d'Orn., tom. ii. p. 213.  
— *italicus*, Daud. ibid., p. 213.  
— *vulgaris*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 56.  
— *europæus*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. pt. ii. p. 57.  
— *communis*, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 110.  
— *aurita*, Mont. Orn. Dict. Renn. edit., p. 262.  
— *asio*, Leach, Syst. Cat. Brit. Mus., p. 11.  
— *sylvestris*, Brehm, Vög. Deutsch. p. 121.  
— *arboreus*, Brehm, ibid., p. 122.  
— *gracilis*, Brehm, ibid., p. 123.  
*Asio italicus*, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 491.  
— *otus*, Less. Man. d'Orn., tom. i. p. 116.  
*Strix otus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 132.  
*Ulula otus*, Macgill. Rapt. Birds of Brit., p. 403.

WHY one group of Owls should have elongated tufts on the forehead, like the *Otus vulgaris*, others short plumes, as in the *Brachyotus palustris*, while other groups have no trace of these appendages, is a matter for speculation among naturalists. These lengthened feathers have obtained for the two birds above mentioned the trivial names of the Long- and Short-eared Owls; but it must be understood that they are totally unconnected with the ears, and are, in fact, nothing more than a prolongation of that particular part of the bird's plumage. Of course the anatomist would find a particular muscle for the erection and depression of these tufts, for nature never bestows such a feature without the means of showing it off to the best advantage: thus the fine colours on the side of the Red-legged Partridge are displayed to the utmost, so that every band falls into its right place, and so that the varied colours are in perfect harmony; and this law prevails with every bird, from the Peacock, with its gorgeous train, to the humble Sparrow on the house-top, who, in his manifestations of love, exhibits to his mate far more varied markings than he is generally supposed to possess. My own opinion is, and always has been, that ornamentation is the chief design and intention of these beauties, and that they have little or no influence whatever on the bird's well-being and economy. It is remarkable, too, how one group represents another in the great scheme of creation; how Falcons, among birds, answer to the salmon and the trout; and the Owls the cats among Mammals, even to the appearance of the ears, to say nothing of the resemblance in their disposition and many of their actions. The poor mouse has, indeed, many enemies—the Owl, the Kestrel, the Stork, and the Heron, among birds, the cat and the weasel among quadrupeds, and the snake and lizard among reptiles. But let us revert to the history of the Long-eared Owl, one of the most interesting members of its group. Does it constantly live in England? Is it strictly an indigenous bird? Is its dispersion general, from the most southern to the most northern parts of England and Scotland? Does it inhabit the sister kingdom of Ireland, as well as the islands contiguous to Britain? To all and every one of these queries I answer, Yes. Every extensive wood, nearly every plantation of firs (larch, Scotch, or silver) has its pair of Long-eared Owls; or if it be not so, it is because the keeper, the sportsman, and the collector, instead of befriending the poor bird, strive to extirpate it by ruthlessly shooting every individual that may flap forth when the covers are beaten for the stealthy Woodcock and the Pheasant. A moment's reflection only is necessary to convince every one of the folly of destroying so beautiful an ornament of the country, and so useful a denizen of our woods and pastures, which is evidently designed to keep in check the numbers of the field-mice, young weasels, and smaller birds, all of which it readily devours. To show the great amount of good it effects in this way, I may cite the following passage from Mr. Selby's account of this species:—"In the stomach of one individual I found five skulls of mice, which were, without doubt, the relics from its repast of the previous night."

Independently of the British Islands, the Long-eared Owl is found in all parts of Europe, from Prussia to Italy. The chances are that it is generally dispersed over Africa; for we know that it frequents the wooded regions of the northern parts of that country, and that it also occurs within the Colony of the Cape. It has not yet been discovered in the Indian peninsula; but Mr. Jerdon states, in his recently published work on the birds of that country, that it inhabits the Himalayas from Nepaul to Cashmere, but is not very common: towards the east it evidently becomes more scarce. Mr. Wheelwright states that neither this species nor the Brown Owl are met with in Lapland.

In America, either this bird or a most nearly allied species is more common in the middle and eastern