

CIRCUS CYANEUS.

Hen Harrier.

Falco cyaneus, et *pygargus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. pp. 126-128.

— *strigiceps*, Nilss. Faun. Suec., tom. i. p. 21.

Circus Ægithus, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. & Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 9.

— *gallinarius*, Savig. Descr. de l'Égypte, Hist. Nat., tom. i. p. 92.

— *pygargus*, Cuv. Règn. Anim., edit. 1817, tom. i. p. 324.

— (*Strigiceps*) *cyaneus*, et *uliginosus*, Kaup, Mus. Senckenb., p. 258.

— *cyaneus*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 549.

Pygargus dispar, Koch, Syst. der Baier. Zool., p. 128.

Strigiceps pygargus, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List. of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 5.

Buteo cyaneus, Jenyns, Man. Brit. Vert. Anim., p. 89.

WERE I to say to the rising ornithologists of the present day, "If you wish to see the Hen Harrier and its consort the Ringtail performing their buoyant and elegant flight, and hunting in concert over an open part of the country, go to the Gossmoor of Cornwall, the lofty hills of charming Devon, the great heaths of Surrey, Sussex, and Hampshire, the flat fenny districts of Suffolk, Norfolk, Huntingdon, and Lincolnshire, the Yorkshire wolds, the fells of Westmoreland and Cumberland, the rushy hill-sides of the Scottish border, the Cheviots, and the Grampians, as far north as the land trends," I fear I should be sending them on a bootless errand; yet there was a time, and that within the present century, when the birds might have been seen in any of the localities above enumerated. Such, however, is now rarely the case. Nature and her productions have been greatly interfered with; some species have been extirpated from districts where they were formerly plentiful, while others have become abundant in situations where previously they were but little known. That the Harriers and other large predatory birds are no longer to be found in their wonted haunts is not to be wondered at when we remember how large a portion of the country formerly in a natural condition has now been brought under cultivation, and that the keeper and the shepherd exterminate them whenever they can. It is not to be expected that such people are imbued with the love for nature and her wonderful works which reigns in the breast of the true naturalist; they do not even care to read the many beautiful passages which have been written on our native birds, from the time of Gilbert White to that of those authors who have but recently passed away, among which none are perhaps more truly descriptive of the habits and actions of birds than Macgillivray's,—who, speaking of the *Circus cyaneus*, says:—

"Having examined the form, and somewhat of the structure of the Hen Harrier, we are prepared for the exhibition of its faculties. Kneel down here, then, among the long broom, and let us watch the pair that have just made their appearance on the shoulder of the hill. Leave these beautiful flowerets to the inspection of yonder botanist, who, should he wander hitherward, will be delighted to cull the lovely tufts of maiden-pinks that surround us.

"How beautifully they glide along, in their circling flight, with gentle flaps of their expanded wings, floating as it were in the air, their half-spread tails inclined from side to side, as they balance themselves or alter their course! Now they are near enough to enable us to distinguish the male from the female. They seem to be hunting in concert: and their search is keen; for they fly at times so low as almost to touch the bushes, and never rise higher than thirty feet. The grey bird hovers, fixing himself in the air like the Kestrel; now he stoops, but recovers himself. A hare breaks from the cover; but they follow her not, though doubtless, were they to spy her young one, it would not escape so well. The female now hovers for a few seconds, gradually sinks for a short space, ascends, turns a little to one side, closes her wings, and comes to the ground. She has secured her prey; for she remains concealed among the furze; while the male shoots away, flying at the height of three or four yards, sweeps along the hawthorn hedge, bounds over it to the other side, turns away to skim over the sedgy pool, and hovers there a short while. He now enters upon the grass field, when a Partridge springs off, and he pursues it with a rapid gliding flight; but they have turned to the right, and the wood conceals them from our view. In the meantime the female has sprung up, and advances, keenly inspecting the ground, and so heedless of our presence that she passes within twenty yards of us. Away she speeds, and in passing the pool again stoops, but recovers herself, and, rising in a beautiful curve, bounds over the plantation and is out of sight.

"The Hen Harrier feeds upon small birds and the young of larger, on young hares and rabbits, on mice, frogs, lizards, and serpents. For the most part it pounces upon its victims as they repose upon the ground; but it also pursues birds in open flight; and, so far from confining itself to feeble game, it has been known to seize the Red Grouse, Ptarmigan, and Partridge.