

## CIRCUS ÆRUGINOSUS.

### Marsh-Harrier.

*Falco æruginosus*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 23.

— *rufus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 266.

*Circus æruginosus*, Savig. Descr. de l'Égypte, Hist. Nat., tom. i. p. 90.

— *rufus*, Savig. *ibid.*, p. 91.

*Falco arundinaceus*, Bechst.

— *Krameri*, Kram.

*Accipiter circus*, Pall. Zoog. Ross.-Asiat., tom. i. p. 362.

*Circus variegatus*, Sykes, Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr., 1832, p. 81.

— *rufus*, var. *indicus*, Less. Compl. Buff., tom. vii. p. 155.

— *Sykesi*, Less. *ibid.*, p. 161.

*Buteo æruginosus*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 55.

*Accipiter æruginosus*, Koch, Syst. der Baier. Zool., p. 119.

*Pygargus rufus*, Kaup, Class. der Säugeth. und Vög., p. 113.

*Buteo rufus*, Jenyns, Man. Brit. Vert. Anim., p. 88.

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THAT the physical condition of a country determines the birds, reptiles, and insects which resort thereto, is evident to every naturalist; for he sees that the low fenny portions of our globe, its hills, and woodlands are frequented by forms peculiar to each. Harriers generally inhabit open wastes, moorlands, and flat sedgy districts; but the bird here represented, which is one of the largest members of the genus *Circus*, resorts more particularly to the great marshy depressions of the countries wherein it is destined to dwell. In Britain it was always more abundant in Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Huntingdon, and Lincolnshire than elsewhere, those parts, in fact, which are opposite to the Low Countries (Belgium and Holland); but the draining process, which has converted our fens and rush-beds into fields of waving oats, has sadly interfered with its comforts by depriving it of its natural feeding-grounds; wherever such transformations have been effected, a death-blow to the Marsh-Harrier was the consequence. In Holland, however, there are districts in which the conditions favourable to its existence remain unchanged; and there it still dwells in comparative security, and readily obtains its usual food of reptiles, insects, small quadrupeds, fish, and young marsh birds; there it still flaps over the tops of the reed-beds, or buoyantly flies up and down the open marsh in pursuit of its prey. How different are its actions from those of the fleet chase-giving Falcons, the lazy offal-feeding Kites, or the pouncing Hawks! The Rev. R. Lubbock, in his 'Observations on the Fauna of Norfolk,' published in 1845, says:—"The Marsh-Harrier might, twenty years back, have been termed the Norfolk Hawk, so generally was it dispersed among the broads. Almost every pool of any extent had its pair of these birds; they consumed the day in beating round and round the reeds which skirted the water; this was done for hours incessantly. All the birds wounded by the sportsman fell to his share. He was, as it were, the *genius loci*, the sovereign of the waste; but although still often to be met with, he has, like all his congeners, receded before the gun of the gamekeeper; the curse of his race is upon him. I once kept one of these birds in confinement. It was full-grown when taken; its courage and ferocity were very great, perpetually endeavouring to attack those who went close to its mew. It killed a large land-rat, put into its cage uninjured, in an instant. Sir T. Browne represents it as occasionally carrying off the young of the otter to feed its nestlings with. I have found the nest amongst a bunch of reeds on Barton fen with two young. Mr. Gould first, I believe, noticed the grey tinge which old males of this species assume, somewhat similar to the colouring of the Hen-Harrier. This, I think, must occur only in very old specimens. I never remember having seen it but once in any specimen upon the wing; and formerly on the larger broads one or two were sure to be observed in the course of the day. At the time I thought the reflexion of the sun caused the bird to look greyish, but am inclined now to think that it was in the stage of plumage mentioned by Mr. Gould. In decoys this is a most troublesome bird, keeping the fowl in such continual restlessness that the decoy man can do nothing with them."

If we consult the various writers on British Birds (Yarrell, MacGillivray, Thompson, and Morris), or the local faunas that have been written of most of our counties, we shall find that the Marsh-Harrier has a place in the whole of them. In Cornwall, Mr. Rodd tells us, it is "rare throughout the whole county; a few specimens have been procured at the Land's-end, Boswharton Moor, and Lamorna; but the species appears to become more rare every year." Thompson states that it is found and is resident in all suitable localities in Ireland, and, as might be expected from the nature of the country, is of more frequent occurrence there than in Scotland, where MacGillivray informs us that it is very rare in the northern and middle divisions, but