

TINNUNCULUS ALAUDARIUS.

Kestrel.

Falco tinnunculus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 127.

— *aureus*, Klein, Av., 49, 52, 53.—Id. Ov. t. vi. fig. 4.

— *interstinctus*, M'Clell. Proc. of Zool. Soc. 1839, p. 154.

— *fasciatus*, Retz. Faun. Suec., p. 70.

— *brunneus*, Bechst. Taschenb. Deutsch., tom. i. p. 38.

— *alaudarius*, Gmel. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 279.

Accipiter alaudarius, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 379.

— *tinnunculus*, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 393.

Tinnunculus alaudarius, Vieill.

— *interstinctus*, Gray, Gen. of Birds, vol. i. p. 21. sp. 3.

Cerchneis tinnunculus, Bonap. Comp. List of Eur. and N. Amer. Birds, p. 5.

So much has been written respecting the habits and economy of the Kestrel by both British and Continental authors, that it will not be necessary to give any lengthened details on these points, as they must be well known to every one at all acquainted with the history of our native birds; I shall therefore content myself by stating all that it is necessary to say respecting it in as succinct a manner as may be. First, then, as to its distribution: no one of the British Falcons and Hawks is so widely and so generally spread over England, Ireland, and Scotland—every locality being alike frequented, whether it be barren wastes, heathy moorlands, or districts under cultivation; on the continent of Europe it is equally diffused from east to west, and from south to north; it is just as abundant throughout Africa northward of the Tropic, Asia Minor, and the entire peninsula of India, from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin; and that its range extends even still further east has been proved by the receipt of specimens collected by Mr. Swinhoe in China, which do not materially differ from those killed in England. Why are Kestrels so numerous when compared with other Falcons and Hawks? Our acquaintance with them tells us that of all the members of the Falconidæ they are the most omnivorous, and that instead of confining themselves to birds and small quadrupeds, insects, which are preyed upon almost indiscriminately, form a considerable part of their diet; and hence, as the abundance of this kind of food is greater, the greater is the number both of the individuals and of the various species of Kestrel to which the generic name of *Tinnunculus* has been given. But to return to our own bird, the only one of its genus which visits Great Britain: what are its habits? what are its peculiarities? The first and most striking is undoubtedly its manner of hovering and sustaining itself in the air at one fixed position. Few, I conceive, who have left the town, the mansion, or the cottage, and gone out for a country ramble, but must have noticed a stationary object between them and the sky. This is the Kestrel in pursuit of his daily calling, scanning the earth for a mouse, an insect, a lizard, or, if it be the season of summer, a young lark or other bird. For several seconds (sometimes for a minute or more) this speck in the sky appears motionless; his next movement will tell us if his penetrating eye has been attracted by some living object below; for if so, he descends like a stone towards the ground; if not, his beautifully constructed wings bear him away in a succession of graceful sweeps to another part of the heath or common, where he again enacts the scene I have endeavoured to describe, but which will perhaps be rendered more intelligible by a reference to the accompanying Plate, where the bird figured is shown to be a male by the black bar across the end of its outspread silvery tail. Independently of these peculiar aerial evolutions, the Kestrel sometimes gives chase to small birds, or hunts near the ground for the nestling partridge, or perhaps a leveret; but this is not the rule, and pray let not my mentioning that he occasionally destroys a partridge chick be arraigned against him, and his doom sealed in the mind of every keeper of game; rather consider the good he undoubtedly performs by destroying the voracious Shrew, the Field-Mouse, the young Weasel, Snake, and Adder, all of which he has been known to kill. "In summer," says Mr. Selby, "the Cockchafer supplies to this species an object of pursuit and food; and the following curious account is given by an eye-witness of the fact. 'I had,' says he, 'the pleasure, this summer, of seeing the Kestrel engaged in an occupation entirely new to me, hawking after Cockchafers late in the evening. I watched him through a glass, and saw him dart through a swarm of the insects, seize one in each claw, and eat them whilst flying. He returned to the charge again and again. I ascertained it beyond a doubt, as I afterwards shot him.'" In taking its prey, the Kestrel neither affects the bold, impetuous swoop of the Peregrine, nor the dashing, low, skimming flight of the Sparrow-Hawk. In his disposition it is more tame and docile, or less bold than other Falcons. In confirmation of which trait in his nature I may cite the following interesting instance, which has been recorded in the 'Zoologist' by the Rev. H. H. Crewe, of Breadsall Rectory, Derbyshire:—"About four