FALCO SUBBUTEO, Linn.

Hobby.

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

— Barletta, Daud. Traité d'Orn., tom. ii. p. 129.

— subbuteo major, Lath. Ind. Orn. Suppl., p. 10.

— hirundinum, Brehm, Isis, 1832, p. 740.

— (Hypotriorchis) subbuteo, Kaup, Classif. der Säug. und Vög., p. 111.

Dendrofalco, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 375.

Hypotriorchis subbuteo, Boie, Isis, 1826, p. 976.

Dendrofalco subbuteo, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, p. 3.

Hypotriorches subbuteo, Blas. List of Birds of Eur., Engl. edit. p. 4.

If an ornithologist were requested to name the most elegant species of Falcon inhabiting the British Islands, he would unquestionably reply, the Hobby; for the proportions of no other raptorial bird are more evenly balanced, or the colours more harmoniously distributed. Its long, pointed wings indicate that its powers of flight are fully adequate to the performance of the lengthened journeys it makes from one country to another, and to enable it to overtake the Snipe, the Lark, and other swift-flying birds: it is true that its legs are not so strong, or its hind claws so powerful, as those of the Peregrine; but they are amply sufficient for the seizure of the small-sized species upon which it chiefly preys. Unlike the little dashing Merlin, which frequents the northern portions of this country, the Hobby affects the open fields and champaign parts of our southern districts, and evinces a preference for the woodlands. It differs from the Merlin also in the nature of its food; for, while it does not hesitate to give chase to the Snipe and the Plover, or to harry over the fields in pursuit of the Lark, it lives much upon insects. The dragonfly of the water-side is not free from its attacks by day, nor the hard-winged chaffer, which buzzes round the chestnut-blossoms, in the evening. In the capture of the latter insect, its movements are most graceful, and strongly remind one of those of the Nightjar. To carry the comparison between the Hobby and the Merlin still further, I may state that one is a migrant, the other is not; and to make the matter more clear, the former is a bird of the south, coming to the central parts of England in the spring, and departing again in the autumn, while the other dwells more exclusively in the north: further still with the comparison, the Hobby nests in trees, and the Merlin generally on the ground.

The counties of England most favoured with the presence of the Hobby are Devonshire, Dorsetshire, Hants, Sussex, and Oxfordshire; it does, however, occasionally frequent all the midland counties to Yorkshire and Durham, beyond which it is seldom seen. It is considered a rare bird in the sister kingdom of Ireland, only one or two instances of its occurrence there being recorded.

The Hobby, as I have said, is a migrant to our islands, and these islands appear to be the extreme verge of its western range; on the continent of Europe it is abundant in Spain, Italy, France, and Germany, north of which its numbers become gradually less. In all of these, as with us, it is a summer visitant, proceeding south in winter. Captain Loche informs us that it inhabits the three provinces of Algeria, where other species of this particular form also occur, such as the Falco Eleonoræ and the F. concolor; these, with the present bird, have been distinguished by a separate generic title—that of Hypotriorchis. Eastward the Hobby extends from North Africa, through Persia, to India, where Mr. Jerdon states it is a winter visitant, but is not very common: he has killed it near Jalna, and it has been taken at Calcutta and in various parts of the Himalayas; there, as in this country, it preys upon Larks and other small birds, and not unfrequently upon insects. The one procured by Mr. Jerdon near Jalna had its stomach crammed with dragonflies, which he had seen it hawking for over a tank just after sunset; he adds that it does not breed in India.

M. Bailly, in his 'Ornithologie de la Savoie,' states that the Hobby dwells in the forests of fir, where it builds in the highest trees or in the cleft of a rock in the neighbourhood. The nest is constructed in May, and is formed of the same materials as that of the Peregrine: by the end of the month, the full complement of eggs is laid; they are four or five in number, of a dirty white, covered with reddish-grey spots, and are about 1 inch 8 lines in length, by 1 inch 4 lines in breadth. The young are hatched in about twenty-four days, and are then entirely covered with a pure-white down; they remain in the vicinity of the nest for a month, during which time the parents bring them food and teach them to fly. In autumn, with the first migration of the Thrushes, the Hobby abandons the mountains, and disperses over the plains, particularly those which are studded with small hills. At times, especially in the morning, the old birds fly towards the fields to hunt the Lark, the Wagtail, and the Swallow. It does not fear to follow the sportsman, and will