

ACCIPITER NISUS.

Sparrow-hawk.

- Falco Nisus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 130.
Accipiter fringillarius, Ray, Syn., p. 18.
—— *Nisus*, Pall. Zoog. Ross. Asiat., tom. i. p. 370.
—— *maculatus*, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 314.
—— *Dussumieri*, Jerd. Madras Journ. of Lit. and Sci., vol. x. p. 84.
—— *nisosimilis*, Tick. Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. ii. p. 571.
—— *subtypicus*, Hodgs. in Gray's Zool. Misc. 1844, p. 81.
Nisus communis, Cuv.
—— *fringillarius*, Kaup.
Sparvius Nisus, Bonn. et Vieill. Ency. Méth. Orn., pt. iii. p. 1262.

It would be interesting to know at what date the term Sparrow-hawk was applied to this bird. Craig's Dictionary states that *Speara* is the Saxon, and *Sparwa* the Gothic name of the Sparrow, and *Hafoc* the Saxon for Hawk; and hence probably the term was derived. Nine out of every ten persons apply the term to the Kestrel, a bird that is much more common, and totally different in colour, actions, and economy. The comparatively harmless Kestrel or Windhover may almost any day be seen fanning the air with its lengthened wings, while the round-winged dashing Sparrow-hawk is much more recluse, generally sitting in the midst of some leafy tree, perchance watching a flight of Starlings or a flock of Larks, on which he may steal, unperceived, sufficiently near to make a successful stoop; while at other times he may be seen perched on the bare branch of a tree, rail, or post, whence he makes a raid upon some poor Sparrow, Yellowhammer, or Greenfinch that has attracted his attention; or displaying great cunning whilst stealthily winging his way over the fields, or surprising his Fringilline victim by overtopping the hedge and securing the terror-stricken bird with the quickness of lightning, before it can find shelter among the foliage. How different are one and all of these actions from those of the Windhover, who poises himself aloft on quivering wings and scans the surface of the ground for a mouse, a great beetle, a frog, or perchance a young lark! How varied are the actions and economy of the two birds! How different are they in temper and disposition—one naturally tame and docile, the other morose, sulky, and spiteful, throwing forward its long legs and grasping anything within its reach with its sharp and powerful talons. The very eye of the Sparrow-hawk, beautifully coloured as it is, is indicative of his wicked disposition, while the soft, full black eye of the Kestrel betokens a very different nature. I make these comparisons to bring into stronger contrast the difference in their mode of life, and to show that diversities in structure are always accompanied by peculiar habits. But, to return to the Sparrow-hawk as a native of England, next to the Kestrel, the *Accipiter Nisus* is our commonest species of Hawk, and is so universally dispersed that every portion of the British Islands is alike frequented by it. That self-preservation should be its motto is certain; for it has no friend to depend upon, and hence its numbers are pretty well kept down, more than a single pair being seldom found to breed in the same district; still it is sufficiently numerous for it to be characterized as common. The female, which is nearly twice the size of the male, has no red colour on the breast and flanks until she has attained at least her third year: her back is then blue-grey, and her under surface beautifully barred with brown. During the first year, the breast is longitudinally blotched with brown, while the feathers of the back are brown, with a crescent of tawny at the tip. A similar character of plumage also distinguishes the little male at the same age. A lengthened middle toe is a distinguishing feature of all true Accipiters; for although most of the species of the allied genus *Astur* have a similar style of colouring, their middle toe is much shorter, and a preponderance of strength is given to the hinder one—a feature which clearly indicates that it is fitted for a different mode of life, as we find to be the case; for it is upon the smaller quadrupeds and birds that it is destined to prey, while the Sparrow-hawk attacks almost exclusively the feathered race. The female Sparrow-hawk is much more formidable than the male, and is as destructive to Partridges, Pigeons, and other birds of that size as her little mate is to the Sparrow and the Greenfinch. She is also said now and then to kill leverets, young rabbits, and other small animals. To give some idea of the impetuosity of the flight and stoop of the Sparrow-hawk, I shall here insert a note on the subject, transmitted to me by W. Oxenden Hammond, Esq., of St. Alban's Court, near Wingham, in Kent.

"I once witnessed a circumstance wholly at variance with the creed of all falconers, who affirm that the true Falcons only *stoop* and *strike* their prey, while the short-winged Hawks *chase* and *clutch*. Three or four years since I was driving towards Dover, when suddenly a Sparrow-hawk, with a stoop like a Falcon's, struck a Lark close to my horse's head. The Lark fell as a Grouse or a Partridge will fall to a Falcon or