

BUTEO VULGARIS.

Common Buzzard.

- Falco buteo*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 127.
— *communis fuscus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 270.
— *cinereus*, Gmel. ib., p. 267.
— *variegatus*, Gmel. ib., p. 267.
— *versicolor*, Gmel. ib., p. 267.
— *obsoletus*, Gmel. ib., p. 268.
— *glaucopis*, Merr. Beytr., ii. p. 7.
— *pojana*, Savi, Orn. Tosc., tom. i. p. 29.
— *mutans*, Vieill. Faun. Franç., p. 17, pl. 8. fig. 2.
— *fasciatus*, Vieill. ib., pl. 8. fig. 1.
Buteo vulgaris, Bechst., Flem. Brit. Anim., vol. i. p. 54.
— *cinereus*, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom. i. p. 18, *Buteo*, sp. 1.
— *communis*, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 78.
— *fuscus*, Macgill. Hist. of Brit. Birds, vol. iii. p. 183.
— *variabilis*, Bailly, Orn. Sav., tom. i. p. 127.
Accipiter buteo, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 406.

THOSE who have travelled through Germany, France, and the central parts of Europe must have frequently seen a large heavy-looking bird perched on a dead stump, or on an exposed branch of a tree by the roadside or in a neighbouring field. This is the Common Buzzard, which eighty or a hundred years ago, before our forests had been enclosed or crossed by the fire-king, when every journey had to be made on horseback, daily met the gaze of the traveller in every English county; for the bird was then plentiful, from the Land's End to John o' Groats. At the present moment it is rarely, if ever, seen; in fact it has so nearly departed from among us, that it may almost be considered as a bird of the past, for it is only in great woods like the New Forest, the more thickly timbered parts of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland that it may be looked for with any certainty of its being found. Twice have I seen it sailing over the great woods of Tregothnan in Cornwall, the seat of Viscount Falmouth: but these I suspect were only chance visitants; for the keeper was alert, and intended a closer acquaintance the first spare moment he had to devote to them. This is the line of conduct of all keepers—a class of men assiduously devoted to the interests of their employers in the preservation of their game, but in many cases profoundly ignorant of the highly important offices our English birds are destined to fulfil. It is surprising that the buoyant and elegant evolutions of the larger Raptorial birds should not be regarded by them with interest and pleasure; but this is never the case, and I fear they are the most deadly enemies our birds have to encounter, their greatest pride being a well-stored larder of Hawks, Jays, and Pies, and a wood full of Pheasants.

The Buzzard has but few friends; his stealthy, prowling habits are against him. A leveret is never safe in a field overshadowed by his huge wings; a rabbit, a young pheasant, or other game-bird is equally acceptable; so that he really is a troublesome fellow. One would like, nevertheless, that even this vagrant among the *Falconidae* should not be entirely struck out from the Birds of Great Britain. I fear, however, that such will soon be the case.

The Common Buzzard is subject to so many variations, both in size and colour, that it is very difficult to find two examples precisely alike. It not unfrequently happens that while one may be of a nearly uniform purplish black, others are narrowly rayed with brownish white on their breast and thighs, and others, again, have light breasts, richly blotched and guttated with brown. These differences do not appear to be regular stages in the change of plumage, but to be variations subject to no fixed law. Some of these varieties may be seen among the individuals in the menagerie of the Zoological Society. The finest pair I have ever seen are now living at Berry Hill, the seat of John Noble, Esq., at Taplow, in Buckinghamshire. It is from this pair that Mr. Wolf made the fine drawing copied on the accompanying Plate; and my thanks are due to Mr. Noble for his kindness in permitting them to be figured in the present work: they have been tenants of a large cage for three or four years, and are fully adult; they appear to be of different sexes, and, as will be seen, are very light in the colouring of the breast. The chocolate-coloured bird represented in the reduced figure was killed at Somerleyton, and is, I believe, a bird of the year, and an unusually dark variety.

As my friend, Sir William Jardine, has written a very characteristic sketch of the Buzzard in his 'British Birds,' I feel it is only an act of justice to him, to quote the most important passages.