EOPHRON PERCNOPTERUS.

Egyptian Vulture.

Vultur percnopterus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 123.

—— stercorarius, Lapeyr. Neue Schwed. Abhandl., tom. iii. p. 100.

—— leucocephalus, Briss. Orn., tom. i. p. 466. — fuscus, Bodd. Tab. Pl. Enl., p. 28.

— albus, Daud. Traité d'Orn., tom. ii. p. 20.

—— albicans, Meissner.

Cathartes percnopterus, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1815, p. 5.

Percnopterus ægyptiacus, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 7.

Neophron percnopterus, Savig. Descr. de l'Egypte, Hist. Nat., p. 16.

As might be supposed, the British Islands are not a favourite place of resort for any of the Vultures, their peculiar habits and modes of life being more especially adapted for the southern countries of Europe, Asia, and Africa; but that the present species has undoubted claims to a place in the avifauna of Great Britain cannot be questioned, inasmuch as, according to Selby and Yarrell, a specimen was shot near Kilve, in Somersetshire, in October, 1825, which "when first discovered was feeding upon the carcass of a dead sheep, and had so gorged itself with the carrion as to be unable or unwilling to fly to any great distance at a time, and was therefore approached and shot without much difficulty. Another bird, similar to it in appearance, was seen at the same time upon the wing at no great distance; it remained in the neighbourhood a few days, and was supposed to be the mate of the one killed. The state and colour of the plumage of this individual, judging from the description of M. Temminck and others, indicate a young bird, probably of the first or, at the furthest, of the second year."

Much more recently, namely in 1868, the acquisition of a second example is thus recorded by Dr. Bree in the 'Zoologist' for that year.

"On the 28th of September last the labourer who had charge of an off-hand farm of Mr. Woodward, of Stanway Hall situated at Peldon, in Essex, had been killing his Michaelmas geese: on going some time after into the yard he saw a strange bird feeding upon the blood. The bird flew away, and the man loaded his gun. Presently it came again and hovered over the spot in hopes of another spell at the blood; but his fate was sealed, and he fell dead to the labourer's shot. I saw the bird next day at the house of Mr. Ambrose, to whom it had been sent for preservation. As far as I know, this is only the second instance of the capture of Vultur percnopterus in Great Britain. It is quite possible that it has more frequently visited our shores, though not captured; for Mr. Laver, of Colchester, informs me that many years ago his father, who lived near Burnham, further up the Essex coast than Peldon, had a flock of Vultures for several days among the large trees on his farm. They were known by their bare heads, and were most probably the Egyptian. At all events this bird must now, I think, be ranked without doubt among the strangers which occasionally visit our shores. The specimen now shot was in immature plumage."

Respecting the two British-killed examples above mentioned, Mr. J. H. Gurney, jun., has favoured me with the following note: -- "Mr. Yarrell was in error when he stated that the first-mentioned specimen was in the possession of the Rev. A. Mathew. Such is not the case; it belongs to the Rev. Mr. Mathew, of Chalvey, who informs me that it was obtained on the cliffs bordering the British Channel, about half a mile from Kilve." Through the intercession of my friend Dr. Bree, Mr. Woodward was so obliging as to send his bird to London for my inspection. It was from this specimen that the reduced figure in my Plate was taken; and I would here tend my acknowledgments to both gentlemen for an act of courtesy whereby

the interest of my delineation of the species has been much enhanced.

The nearest countries to our own where this bird is common are Southern France and Spain: there it is tolerably abundant, as it also is in all the more eastern parts of Europe; but it is in Turkey and Egypt, and particularly in the Nile district, that it is more numerous than elsewhere.

Not having had opportunities of observing this bird in a state of nature, I must now avail myself of

observations of those who have written respecting it.

"The Egyptian Vulture," says Yarrell, "does not live in flocks like other Vultures, although, when attracted by a carcass, eight or ten may be seen assembled. At other times it is rare to see more than two together. The male and female seldom separate. In the districts which it inhabits, every group of the The birds roost on the trees in the vicinity, or on the natives has a pair of these Vultures attached to it.