SMEW.

Mergus albellus, *Linn.*

La Piette.

This bird interests us more by the purity and contrast of its colours, than by its brilliancy or variety; the snowy whiteness of its plumage, broken by irregular markings of a jet black, in conjunction with the neatness of its general figure, producing an extremely pleasing effect.

The Smew is the smallest of the genus *Mergus*, and offers considerable deviation in some points from the typical form: the body is less compressed and elongated, the beak shorter, with feet of diminished size; which peculiarities, conjoined with the dark colour of the latter, evince a departure from the usual characteristics of this genus, and would seem to indicate an approximation to the more true *Anatidæ* or Duck tribe. Still however it must be conceded that it retains many prominent features of the genus, its habits and manners being in all respects the same; visiting us during inclement winters, at which time it is found in small numbers on the coasts and inland lakes of these Islands, and in much greater abundance in the more extensive waters of Holland and Germany; but, as far as observation goes, it has never been known to breed with us. The arctic regions of both continents seem to be selected for its summer residence and breeding place. The bill is shorter than the head, and tapers suddenly as it approaches the point; its general colour, as well as that of the feet and legs, is a blueish lead, the webs more dusky; irides dark hazel. The head is ornamented with a snowy pendent crest; a large greenish-black circle surrounds the eye; the occiput, over which hang the drooping feathers of the crest, is also black, with green reflections; the neck pure white, as is also the chest, on the sides of which two crescent-shaped lines of black bend forward, continued from the back, which is black, becoming grey towards the rump and tail. The scapulars are white, marked with oblique lines of black; the lesser coverts white, forming a broad band across the wing; secondaries and greater wing-coverts black, with white edges producing two smaller white bands; quills blackish-brown; tertiaries light blueish-grey; under parts pure white.

The trachea of this species differs from those of its congeners in having no enlargement of the tube, which is formed by a series of firm rings gradually increasing in size from the larynx to the labyrinth, the latter being small and irregular in its figure; the tongue also is rather more rounded, and in form approaches to that of the Ducks.

The female is smaller, and, although a pleasing bird, does not present the contrast of colouring so attractive in the male. The beak and legs are lead-coloured; the crest, as usual throughout the females of the genus, ferruginous-brown; a black oval spot below the brown extends from the base of the bill, covers the cheek, and surrounds the eye,—a marking which seems to have been entirely overlooked by European ornithologists. The occiput and neck are dusky-white; the chest light-grey, faintly clouded with obscure bars of a darker colour; the back, rump and tail deep greyish-brown; the wings, as in the male, are distinguished by a broad band and two lines of white; shoulders, quills, and tertiaries brownish-black; the under surface of the body white.

The young birds, both male and female, during their first winter are alike in plumage, but both want the black circle round the eye which distinguishes the adult female. Its weight is about twenty-four ounces; its length is from fifteen to sixteen inches: its food consists of marine insects, molluscæ, small fish, and water plants.

The annexed Plate represents an adult male and female in their winter dress, two thirds of their natural size.