

HOODED MERGANSER.

Mergus cucullatus, Linn.

L'Harle couronné.

THE native locality of the Hooded Merganser appears to be the United States and the higher latitudes of North America. It is also found on the north and north-western coasts of Europe. We are indebted to that distinguished Ornithologist, Mr. Selby, of Northumberland, for a knowledge of the occurrence of this rare and beautiful species in England, and its consequent claims to a place in the Fauna of Great Britain. It is however but an accidental visitant, as this solitary instance only is on record of its having been taken in this country.—The following is the account given by that gentleman in the “Transactions of the Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle,” vol. 1. p. 292.

“ The other (alluding to the present bird), which we may claim as an acquisition, is the *Mergus cucullatus* (Hooded Merganser), upon the authority of a specimen killed at Yarmouth, in Norfolk, in the winter of 1829. The skin of this individual was lately sent to me by my esteemed correspondent Mr. Elton, of Redland near Bristol, to whom it was presented by a friend, who purchased it as a rare variety in a *fresh state* from the person who actually shot it. From the state of its plumage it appears to be a young female, the crest not being so full or large, and the white upon the secondary quills less extended than in the skin of an adult female compared with it.” We have not, it is true, examined the specimen from which Mr. Selby’s figure and description were taken; nevertheless we are inclined to believe, from an inspection of the beautiful drawing which illustrates his work, that the bird in question is not a young female as Mr. Selby supposes, but an immature male, which in certain stages closely resembles the female in plumage, but may be distinguished by the larger and more rounded crest, which in the latter is long and thin.

In size the Hooded Merganser is intermediate between the Red-breasted Merganser and Smew, and partakes strongly of all the characters which are peculiar to the genus. The irides are golden; the bill elongated, narrow, and of a dull red; the head ornamented with a double row of long silky feathers, forming a beautiful compressed hood, which commences from the base of the beak, and when elevated forms a bold arch ending at the occiput. The head and its hood are of a glossy greenish black, with the exception on the latter of a large triangular fan-shaped spot of white the apex of which is situated just behind the eye, from which it diverges outwards, having its external edge bordered by a margin of black continued from the surrounding colour; the neck and back black; the chest white, with two beautiful crescent-shaped lines proceeding from the back and arching forward in a point near the centre of the chest; wings dark, with four alternate bars of black and white; quill-feathers brown; tertials consisting of elongated slender and pointed white feathers, with a broad black border, hanging gracefully over the wings; rump and tail dark umber; sides ferruginous brown, marked with minute undulating transverse lines of a darker colour; under surface white; feet and webs flesh-coloured.

The description of the female of a single species applies more or less to the same sex throughout the whole of the genus; as will be readily perceived in the present instance. Bill and feet as in the male; the head furnished with a small crest of slight hair-like feathers, of a dull ferruginous brown; the neck dusky brown, slightly barred towards the chest with white; the whole of the upper surface of a deep and rich umber; the wings bearing traces of the white bars, which are distinct in the male; the under parts white.

We have figured a male and female, two thirds of their natural size.