

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER.

Mergus serrator.

Le Harle huppé.

THE Red-breasted Merganser appears to be the only species of this genus which occasionally breeds with us, remaining the whole year in the Orkneys and about some of the inland lakes of North Britain, building its nest, which consists of dried bents, grass, &c., on any elevated situation, as a rocky bank near the water's edge ; and laying from eight to twelve cream-coloured eggs.

The British Islands appear to be the most southern limits of its summer abode ; but it is found in plenty on both continents within the arctic circle,—regions more congenial to its habits and more abundantly supplying its wants.

Its powers of swimming and diving equal if not exceed those of the other species of this genus ; its food is in all respects the same, and its flesh is equally rank and disagreeable.

The Red-breasted Merganser is one third less than the Goosander, which it resembles in its habits and manners, but differs from it extremely in colour. The beak is very long and slender, the sides red, separated by an upper line of black ; the head furnished with a crest of long, slender, recurved feathers, the whole of which, with a third of the neck, is of a dark glossy green ; below this a broad white band encircles the neck, gradually losing itself in the colour of the breast, which is of a chestnut-red, longitudinally blotched with dashes of black. The back and tertials are of a deep glossy black. On each side of the chest, overhanging the shoulders, is situated a singular tuft of broad and peculiarly formed feathers, the centre of each of which is occupied by a large white triangular spot, surrounded with a border of black ; the whole presenting a beautiful chequered appearance. The centre of the wing is white partly crossed with two slender bars of black. The quills are blackish brown. The sides and rump light grey elegantly marked with zigzag lines of black. Tail dark grey. The under surface of the body of a dirty white. The irides, legs, and feet, of an orange-red ; the webs darker.

During the period of incubation, however, the male undergoes a considerable change in plumage, losing the rich glossy green of his head and neck, which degenerates into an obscure brown, and the fine chestnut colour of his breast entirely disappears.

The female is rather less than the male, and exhibits in the rufous brown of the head, crest, and neck, one of the peculiarities of the genus. The beak and legs are duller than in the male ; the back and sides are grey ; the chest barred with obscure transverse spots ; the middle of the wings white, with a dark bar. The under surface of a dirty white.

The young male of the year resembles the female in colour, but possesses the characteristic conformation of trachea peculiar to the males.

We have figured an adult male and female, two thirds of the natural size.