

KING DUCK.

Anas spectabilis, Linn.

Somateria spectabilis, Leach.

Le Canard à tête grise.

THIS magnificent species has, with the Eider Duck, to which it bears a strong resemblance, been very properly formed into a distinct genus by Dr. Leach; which, although it contains only these two species, as far as known, is yet marked by well-defined characters. The habits, manners, and localities of the King Duck closely resemble those of the Eider, excepting that it seldom visits, like the latter, our more temperate latitudes, but confines itself more exclusively to the seas of the Arctic circle. Its claims to the rank of a British species rest upon its occasional capture upon our coast; it is, however, stated in Dr. Latham's "General History of Birds," that Mr. Bullock discovered it breeding in Papawestra, one of the Orkney Islands, in the latter end of June; but such an occurrence we suspect could only have been accidental, as we are not aware of a similar circumstance being recorded. It is not uncommon in Norway, the coasts of the Baltic, the arctic shores of Siberia, and it even extends to Kamschatka. It is very abundant in Greenland, where its flesh is eaten by the natives, and its skin sewn together to form warm garments. It is also dispersed in equal abundance along the same latitudes of the American coasts. The process of incubation is strictly the same as that of the Eider, and the nest undergoes the same system of plunder. Its eggs are rather less in size, and of an olive colour.

Mr. Sabine, in his history of the Birds of Greenland, informs us, that the male is four years in acquiring its perfect plumage. The sexual differences in this species present the same features as are found to occur in the Eider; the female being of a dull sober brown, while the male is as remarkable for a gaudy and strongly contrasted livery.

The beak of the male bird differs from that of the male Eider in having two lateral cartilaginous projections which rise from the base, inclosing the forehead nearly as far as the eye; the colour of its crest, as also that of the beak and legs, is of a beautiful rich vermilion; a narrow line of black velvet-like feathers forms the outline of the upper mandible; beneath the throat are arrow-shaped lines of the same colour pointed towards the base of the beak; the top of the head and the occiput are of a beautiful blueish grey; cheeks white, with a delicate tint of fine sea-green; neck and upper part of the back white, gradually assuming a delicate salmon colour at the breast; the other parts of the plumage, both above and below, deep blackish brown, with the exception of a white spot in the centre of the wing, and another of the same colour behind the thigh; the secondaries are sickle-shaped, and bend gracefully over the quill-feathers.

So closely does the female of this species resemble the female Eider, that it is almost impossible to distinguish them, being of a uniform rusty brown with irregular bars and arrow-shaped markings of black.

We have figured a male and female three fourths of their natural size.