

Genus ANAS, *Linn.*

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* longer than the head, depressed through its whole length, broad, straight from before the nostrils to the tip, nearly equal in breadth throughout; mandibles dentato-laminate, with the laminæ of the upper mandible scarcely projecting beyond the margin. *Nostrils* lateral, oval, situated near the base of the bill. *Wings* of mean length, acuminate. *Tail* short, slightly wedge-shaped; the middle feathers curling upwards in some species. *Feet* with four toes, three before and one behind; the front ones webbed, the hind toe small and free.

COMMON WILD DUCK.

Anas Boschas, Linn.

Le Canard ordinaire.

THE circumstances attending the domestication of the Duck, like that of many other reclaimed animals, are buried in obscurity; and it is impossible to decide whether the attention of man was directed to it in consequence of the superiority of its flesh as an article of food, or whether of all the Duck tribe he found it most naturally inclined to submit to the arts of domestication. It is almost unnecessary for us to state that the present well-known species is the origin of our many domestic varieties.

The range of the Common Wild Duck extends over the whole of the temperate portion of the globe; and although we believe it is scarcely ever found in a wild state south of the equator, its extreme limits approach within a few degrees of the meridian. It is dispersed throughout this vast extent of country, and everywhere shows the same instinct, and the same disposition to become domestic and familiar. In our own island and the adjacent parts of the Continent, numbers remain to breed wherever they can find congenial situations; these numbers are greatly augmented in spring and autumn by an influx of visitors on their journey from north to south and back again. Great quantities proceed to the northern regions, where they continue in greater safety among the vast morasses of those countries. From the nature of its food, which consists almost exclusively of vegetables, its flesh furnishes a wholesome and nutritious diet, and is peculiarly tender and well flavoured. In the districts around its breeding-haunts, the young, before their primaries are fully grown, are known by the name of flappers, and from the richness of their flesh are in great requisition. So much has already been written respecting the wholesale mode of capturing the Wild Duck in decoys in the counties of Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, that it would be superfluous to say anything more on the subject.

In this country the Common Wild Duck commences breeding early in spring, pairing in the months of February and March, and selecting a secluded spot near the water's edge, where the female deposits her bluish white eggs and rears her progeny. After the young are able to shift for themselves, the parents separate from them and congregate in distinct flocks, and it is asserted that the sexes form separate bands. The young males do not attain their full plumage until the following spring.

The colouring of the adult male, or mallard, is peculiarly elegant.

The whole of the head and half the neck are of a deep metallic green; the middle of the neck is encircled by a ring of white; the chest is very deep chestnut; the centre of the back is brown, each feather having a lighter margin; the scapularies and flanks are greyish white, beautifully barred with fine zigzag pencillings of black; shoulders greyish brown; speculum rich changeable purplish green passing into velvety black, bounded both before and behind by bands of white; quills dark brown; rump and upper tail-coverts greenish black, the two longest or middle tail-feathers curling upwards, tail-feathers greyish white; under tail-coverts greyish black; bill olive yellow; legs orange.

The general plumage of the female is tawny brown, numerously marked about the head and neck with dusky spots; the feathers of the back, sides, and under surface having their centres of a deeper tint; the speculum of the wing resembles that of the male but occupies a smaller space.

The Plate represents a male and female rather less than the natural size.