

Genus RHYNCHASPIS, *Leach*.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* long, its base unarmed, semi-cylindric, the tip dilated, somewhat spoon-shaped, with a small incurved nail; the sides of the mandibles with pectinated lamellæ. *Nostrils* medial, oval, basal. *Tail* short, simple, furnished mostly with fourteen feathers.

SHOVELLER DUCK.

*Rhynchaspis clypeata*, *Steph.*

*Anas clypeata*, *Linn.*

Le Canard Souchet, ou le Rouge.

THE singular spoon-shaped bill bordered with numerous delicate laminae, which characterizes several species of this interesting family, has been considered of sufficient importance to constitute the distinctive characters of a group, to which the name of *Rhynchaspis* has been applied by Dr. Leach, and that of *Spathulea* by Dr. Fleming, while Mr. Swainson retains the title of *Anas* to this group, as from the peculiar structure of its beak, he considers the Shoveller to be the type of the true grass-feeding ducks: we have restricted the term *Anas*, however, to the group comprehending the Common Wild Duck; and having been so employed by ourselves, and the term *Spathulea* having scarcely been adopted, we prefer the generic title of *Rhynchaspis*.

This group consists of several species, which are almost universally though sparingly distributed. The range of the present species extends throughout the temperate portions of Europe, the northern regions of Africa, and nearly the whole of India: in our island it appears to be somewhat limited; doubtless a few breed annually in our marshes, and Mr. Selby informs us that he has a male in his collection killed in the month of July, at which period it undergoes that transition of plumage which assimilates it to the female, a change the utility of which has not as yet been philosophically explained. As we have observed that this change is common to the males of those species that more especially breed in marshes, among reeds, &c., and as it generally takes place at the period of incubation, may it not serve as a protection to the species by rendering the fostering parent less conspicuous at this critical period than he would be were he to retain the gay nuptial dress, which would present so strong a contrast to the sombre-tinted vegetation among which it is necessary for him to remain, until the young are able to provide for themselves?

It is said to prefer lakes and inland waters to the sea and saline marshes, a circumstance to be accounted for by the peculiar nature of its food, which consists of the larvæ of insects, and freshwater vegetables, such as grasses and chickweed: from this kind of food its flesh, as might be expected, is both delicate and tender, and in high esteem for the table.

Its mode of nidification is very like that of the Common Wild Duck, the nest being constructed among coarse herbage in the central parts of marshes, and the eggs, being from ten to twelve in number, of a pale green colour.

The sexes differ considerably in their colouring, the male being adorned in spring and summer with a rich and delicate plumage; while the female is of a more uniform and sombre tint.

The male has the head and upper part of the neck deep brown glossed with green; lower part of the neck, breast, scapulars, and sides of the rump white; back blackish brown, each feather margined with grey and tinged with green; lesser wing-coverts and outer webs of some of the scapularies greyish blue; tips of the larger coverts white forming a bar across the wing; speculum rich green; tertials rich purplish black with a streak of white down the centre; middle tail-feathers brown edged with white, outer ones entirely white; upper and under tail-coverts black tinged with green; under surface yellowish brown with zigzag lines of black upon the flanks and vent; bill blackish brown.

The female has the whole of the upper surface deep brown, each feather barred and margined with reddish white.

We have figured a male and female, rather less than the natural size.