

BEAN GOOSE.

Anser segetum, Steph.

L'Oie vulgaire ou sauvage.

IN the temperate portions of Europe, and particularly on the British Islands, the Bean Goose is rather a winter visitor than a permanent resident : after passing the summer within the arctic circle, it migrates early in the autumn to more southern latitudes ; hence in October and November considerable flocks arrive in the northern counties of England, and afterwards disperse themselves over the greater portion of our island. Like the other members of its family it is extremely shy and difficult of approach, cautiously avoiding danger by resorting to wild and open parts of the country. These birds feed principally by day, when they resort to stubble lands, and not unfrequently to grounds lately sown with peas, beans, and pulse, and they have been known to commit considerable havoc on young wheat. Extensive marshes and fenny districts also form a place of favourite resort, the large sheets of water which there abound affording them a safe retreat in cases of danger, and to which they frequently retire for the night. From the delicate quality of their food, the flesh of the Bean Goose is well flavoured, hence it is highly esteemed for the table, and numbers are annually sent to our markets, where they may be frequently observed exposed for sale, accompanied by their near ally the Grey Lag. On the approach of spring they commence their migrations northward ; and notwithstanding the assertions made by some authors, that they remain and breed in our western and northern islands, we feel confident that the greater number make the high northern latitudes the place of general rendezvous.

The power of flight of the Bean Goose is very great, and when at a considerable elevation, with a favourable breeze, the rate at which it passes through the air has been estimated at from 60 to 80 miles an hour at least.

From the great similarity which exists between the Bean Goose and the Grey Lag, the two species have been often confounded ; on a close examination, however, we cannot but observe the great difference which exists in the form and colour of their bills, as well as other peculiarities, which will be found in comparing the descriptions of the two birds. In size the Grey Lag has the advantage of the present species, although in this respect the male of the latter often exceeds in weight the female of the former. The black colour and diminutive bill of the Bean Goose, when opposed to the robust and flesh-coloured bill of the Grey Lag, forms perhaps the best and readiest mark of distinction between the two species.

The sexes are so nearly alike in the colour of their plumage that one description will serve for both ; nor does there appear to be any perceptible change in their plumage at opposite seasons.

It is said to breed in low marshy situations, the female laying from eight to twelve white eggs.

The whole of the bill is black, with the exception of a band of pinky yellow (sometimes inclining to red) which surrounds both mandibles near the point ; irides and orbits brown ; top of the head and back of the neck brown, the latter having longitudinal furrows, giving this part the appearance of being marked with dark lines ; the whole of the back, wings, flanks, and tail dark clove brown tinged with grey, each feather being tipped with white ; breast and abdomen greyish brown ; vent, under tail-coverts, and rump white ; legs and webs orange.

The Plate represents an adult male about a third less than the natural size.