

XXXI.—*The Birds of Ireland.* By WM. THOMPSON, Esq.,
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[Continued from p. 38.]

THE PARTRIDGE—*Perdix cinerea*, Briss.—is common in suitable localities throughout Ireland*, but may be set down in general terms as less plentiful than in England, and the more southern portion of Scotland. This, however, is not owing to any natural causes, but to the superior cultivation of the land, and greater care bestowed upon the preservation of the species in Great Britain.

Where partridges are rigidly protected in Ireland, as on the estate of the late Earl O'Neil, I have on two or three occasions, when riding in the autumnal evenings after sunset between Randalstown and Toome, in the county of Antrim, heard their shrill, but most pleasing calls constantly uttered, and have seen a covey in almost every little field. On looking to the food contained in a few partridges, shot in different localities in the early spring, it was found to be chiefly grass, and occasionally other green vegetable matter; in one instance the tender leaves of a thistle, and a few seeds. A sportsman informs me that he has often found "clocks" (coleopterous insects) in those killed in the mountains:—the partridge not uncommonly frequents mountain-heaths contiguous to cultivated ground.

There is a singular difference in habit between the partridge of the north of Ireland and that of the opposite portion of Scotland, as is well known to sportsmen who have shot in the different countries, and which I have myself remarked with some interest. An Irish covey generally springs without uttering a call, but the Scotch covey shrieks with all its might when sprung. The Scotch birds too, even where very little molested, more knowingly take care of themselves than the Irish: their watchfulness is extraordinary. Their sense of hearing, as well as of sight, must be remarkably acute. I recollect that on one day in the month of October, an experienced sportsman and myself sprung either twenty-four or twenty-six covies (nearly all double, or containing about two dozen of birds,) in the neighbourhood of Ballantrae, when they one and all not only forbade a near approach, but, though we advanced as silently as possible, never let us into the same field with them.

THE QUAIL—*Perdix Coturnix*, Lath.—is a common species in summer throughout the cultivated districts; and great numbers winter in the island. Montagu, writing in 1802,

* Lieut. Reynolds, R.N., of the Coast Guard Service, an ardent sportsman, who was stationed at Achil in 1834, when Mr. R. Ball and I visited the island, stated that neither partridges nor quails were at that time found there. As the island is chiefly covered with heath, grouse might be supposed to be common; but they were said to be scarce, on account of the number both of "four-footed and winged vermin."

says, with respect to England, and probably alluding chiefly to the south, where he resided, that these birds are "in much less quantity than formerly." Mr. Selby in 1825 remarks, that "they now visit us in much fewer numbers than they formerly did, and their appearance in the midland and northern counties of England has of late years been a rare occurrence." In 1837, Mr. Macgillivray observes—"it is seldom that they are now met with in Scotland." It may appear singular, yet true it is, that all this while they have been increasing throughout Ireland*; and that of late years there has been a decided augmentation in the quantity remaining during winter.

In the wheat districts around Belfast, quails were always common, but in a locality well known to me, stretching towards the mountain base, where oats were always grown in quantity, they did not appear until the introduction of wheat; but, though this grain has almost ceased to be cultivated there, the birds continue in the district. J. V. Stewart, Esq., in a letter dated Rockhill, Letterkenny, Feb. 3, 1837, remarks, that "quails are only found in the most improved lowland parts of the county of Donegal; and where some years since they were very rare, are now becoming annually much more common. This is to be accounted for by the increased growth of wheat." In the year 1837, I learned from the late T. F. Neligan, Esq. of Tralee, that "within the preceding eight or ten years the quail had become much more common in the county of Kerry, within which period cultivation had much extended."

Thus, in keeping pace with the cultivation of grain in the north-west and south-west extremities of this island, it may appear extraordinary that the numbers of these birds visiting Great Britain should have so diminished in the present century, when cultivation has been so vastly improved. But the higher state of cultivation is one thing, and the introduction of grain-crops into districts in which they were before unknown is another; and though it may appear strange, yet I am disposed to believe that the slovenly system of farming in Ireland, unfortunately too general, is one source of the quails' attraction to the country, as, at all seasons, the weeds among the stubble supply these birds with abundance of food.

With respect to the quails' continuance during winter in numbers throughout Ireland, to the extreme north, I gave some details in the 4th volume of the '*Annals*' (p. 284), the purport of which was, that for many years past they have been daily, during winter,

* The following extract from '*A Brief Description of Ireland made in this yeere 1589, by Robert Payne*,' shows that quails were common at that period. "There be great store of wild swannes, cranes, phesantes, partridges, heathcocks, plouers, greene and gray, curlewes, woodcockes, rayles, quailles, and all other fowles much more plentiful than in England. You may buy a dosen of quailles for iii.d., a dosen of woodcockes for iii.d., and all other fowles ratablie."—Reprinted in *Tracts relating to Ireland*, printed for the Irish Archæological Society: Dublin, 1841.

exposed for sale in the shops*, and, that in various parts of the counties of Down and Antrim, a friend when snipe-shooting at that season always meets with them in patches of cultivated ground lying between one bog and another. In some winters he has remarked quails to be as common as they are in autumn, at the commencement of the partridge-shooting season. So many as ten brace were shot by a young sportsman during a forenoon in the winter of 1837–38, in stubble-fields adjacent to Belfast bay†. More have wintered here in the comparatively mild seasons of the last dozen years than formerly. But that quails have for a long time past remained permanently in some quantity in the counties last named, I have the testimony of a veteran sportsman, who, from meeting with them every winter for the last sixty-five years, had always looked upon them as indigenous, and not as migratory birds. In the letter from Mr. J. V. Stewart before referred to, that gentleman mentions his having met with the quail at the end of January about Letterkenny; and Mr. George Bowen, of Burt, in the north of the same county (Donegal), informs me that five or six brace can easily be obtained there in the course of a day's shooting about Christmas‡.

Over the continent of Europe, including the most southern portions, the quail is looked upon only as a summer visitant, excepting in Portugal, where it is found throughout the year, and “more numerous in winter than in summer§.” This is a highly interesting fact, considered in connection with the wintering of the species in Ireland. Thus, from its remaining permanently in the most western part of the southern portion of Continental Europe, and the most western island in a considerably higher latitude, it would seem that the influence of the Atlantic Ocean is the predisposing cause, by counteracting the severity of winter in a twofold manner, both as to the feeling of cold and the facility of procuring food. Colonel Sykes, in a most valuable memoir on the Quails and *Hemipodii* of India||, in which an ample acquaintance with these birds is manifested, coincides with Temminck in the opinion, that “quails emigrate for food, rather than to enjoy an equable climate;” in proof of which it is mentioned, that “the great changes of temperature in India do not influence the movements of this species, food being abundant at all seasons:”—the common quail of Europe is resident there. There

* Feb. 1, 1842. The chief dealer in quails in Belfast assured me that the number of these birds purchased by him in the last three months, or throughout the winter, would average about three dozen a week; on one day five dozen were brought to him. Being fat and in high condition, they were readily sold at from 8*d.* to 1*s.* a brace.

† Some details of numbers killed will be found in the communication last alluded to.

‡ Montagu states that—“In October they leave us, and return south, leaving some few (probably of a later brood) behind to brave the severity of our winter.” To this Mr. Selby is disposed to assent. In Ireland a fair proportion of adult birds of both sexes is shot throughout the winter.

§ Selby, vol. i. p. 438.

|| Transactions of the Zoological Society of London, vol. ii.; and largely quoted in Yarrell's ‘Brit. Birds.’

is so little frost in Ireland that food is generally to be procured with ease, and is so far corroborative of the view just mentioned. But I have had evidence of the evil influence of cold upon the quail, by finding it among rushes close to the sea-side (Belfast bay) in severe frost, when our indigenous birds were likewise suffering from the weather, and have known one on such an occasion to be shot on the oozy banks of the bay at low-water, a furlong from the shore*.

The call of the quail, here interpreted *wet-my-foot*†, is frequently uttered from “earliest dawn to latest eve” in spring and the more genial periods of the year‡, and during winter also may occasionally be heard in the north of Ireland. Mr. R. Davis, jun. of Clonmel, remarks, that there is “great variety in the colour of quails’ eggs; I have some nearly covered with dark spots, and others almost plain.” So late as the 24th of September 1834, a friend sprung one of these birds from its nest, and on the 9th or 10th of October in the same year, he met with two broods of young birds, some of which could not fly. Although fields of grain are the quail’s chief resort, I have known clover-fields in grain districts to be its favourite haunt in spring and summer; and in these seasons it occasionally frequents meadows. Among turnips it is not unfrequently met with in winter. Of eighteen quails shot at various times and places during winter and early spring, the greater number, on being opened, were found to contain only very small seeds of various kinds; among others, those of the noxious weed, the dock (*Rumex*); a few, the seeds of different species of vetches; still fewer, green vegetable matter, or grains of wheat; and one, large peas:—they all exhibited sand, or fragments of stone.

In the month of August 1826, I met with quails in Italy. At Malta, on the 19th of April 1841, I saw at table some which had been brought from Naples, whence, likewise, a quantity hawked about the streets was procured. It is said that a few of these birds remain permanently in the island of Malta. On the passage of H.M.S. Beacon thence to the Morea, occupying from the 21st to the 27th of April, a quail alighted on the vessel; it was the only

* Pennant states his having been assured “that these birds migrate out of the neighbouring inland counties, into the hundreds of Essex, in October, and continue there all the winter: if frost or snow drive them out of the stubble fields and marshes, they retreat to the sea-side, shelter themselves among the weeds, and live upon what they can pick up from the *algæ*, &c. between high- and low-water mark. Our friend remarks, that the time of their appearance in Essex coincides with that of their leaving the inland counties; the same observation has been made in Hampshire.”—*British Zoology*. I have not met with any allusion to this in subsequent works on British Ornithology. It would be desirable to know if such be the case at the present time.

† In some of the continental countries, and particularly in Holland, I have been surprised to see poor quails imprisoned in miserably small cages, and hung outside the windows like singing birds, apparently for their music, which consists but of the above three notes.

‡ I have notes of hearing the call in September, half an hour after sunset; indeed, of their calling and answering each other until dusk.

one seen. The great body of them had previously crossed the Mediterranean. On the 29th of that month I sprung a brace near Navarino. Mr. Wilkinson, jun. of Syra, son of the well-known and highly esteemed British consul in that island, informed me that quails are not seen on their autumnal migration at Syra when the wind is southerly, but when it is north-east they alight in great numbers from the 10th to the 30th of September. Their coming is always announced by the call of the heron, which accompanies them throughout the period of their migration. This is described to be "reddish-brown on the back and cream-coloured elsewhere," and is probably the *Ardea comata*, or Squacco heron. They never remain longer than one day. Mr. Wilkinson has been told by friends resident at Alexandria, that the earliest arrival of the quail there is about the 20th of September.

LITTLE BUSTARD, *Otis Tetrax*, Linn.—In the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London for 1835' (p. 79), I noticed, on the authority of Mr. W. S. Wall, an intelligent bird-preserver, and well acquainted with Bewick's faithful portraits of British birds, that a little bustard, sent to him by Mr. Reside to be stuffed, had been shot by that gentleman in the county of Wicklow on the 23rd of August 1833, and that another was seen at the same time. I subsequently learned from Mr. Haffield of Dublin, who was present on the occasion, that they were seen, associated with golden plover, in the bog of Killough, adjoining Powerscourt demesne, and about five miles from the sea. They proved to be less wary than the plover. The survivor remained for some time about the locality after its companion was killed. The singularity of its cry was particularly noticed by my informant*.

XXXII.—*Descriptions of three new species of the Coleopterous genus Gyriosomus, collected in Chile by T. Bridges, Esq.* By G. R. WATERHOUSE, Esq., Assistant Secretary and Curator to the Zoological Society, &c.

Section HETEROMERA.

Family NYCTELIDÆ.

Genus GYRIOSOMUS, *Guerin*.

Gyriosomus Bridgesii. Gyr. ater; elytris sutura elevata, supra lineis irregularibus (plerumque longitudinalibus), anticeque maculis parvulis, albis, ornatis. Long. $8\frac{1}{2}$ —10 lin.; lat. 5— $6\frac{1}{2}$ lin. Corpus ovatum, convexum.

Found in the vicinity of the city of Coquimbo, Chile.

This species greatly resembles the *Gyriosomus Hopei*, but is smaller, the thorax is shorter and broader, and the legs are more

* THE GREAT BUSTARD, *Otis Tarda*, Linn., was enumerated by Smith (1749) as one of the birds of the county Cork. It is long since extinct.



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