ENNEOCTONUS RUFUS.

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Woodchat.

Lanius rufus, Briss. Orn., tom. ii. p. 147.

—— *rutilus*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. i. p. 70.

—— *Pomeranus*, Sparr. Mus. Carls., fasc. i. tab. 1.

—— *Collurio*, var. *γ. rufus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 301.

—— *ruficeps*, Bechst. Orn. Taschenb., vol. i. p. 101.

—— *castaneus*, Risso.

—— *ruficapillus*, Baill. Orn. de la Savoye, tom. ii. p. 32.

Enneoctonus rufus, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom. . p. 362, *Enneoctonus*, sp. 2.

—— *pomeranus*, Cab. Mus. Hein., Theil i. p. 73.

WHY the Woodchat should not be as common in England as in the opposite countries of France and Belgium, I cannot conjecture; yet it is not: neither does it, I believe, visit Denmark, Sweden, or Norway. We may consequently infer that it is a much more southern species than its near ally, the Red-backed Shrike; indeed, we know that it is particularly common in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, and Asia Minor; but its range over Africa appears to be less extensive than was formerly supposed. If it be necessary to state what claim the Woodchat has to a place in the fauna of Great Britain, I may mention that Mr. Rodd, in his List of Birds observed in Cornwall, states that "an adult bird was caught in a boat, near Scilly; and that, in the autumn of 1849, several examples of the young of the year were captured on the Scilly Isles, apparently driven there by a strong east wind which intercepted their migratory movement southwards:" this, adds Mr. Rodd, "may be regarded as an important fact, as offering good grounds for believing that they were bred in the British Isles." The late Mr. Hoy mentions an instance of one being killed near Canterbury, and another in the neighbourhood of Swaffham in Norfolk; while a male and a female, forming part of the late Rev. Francis Henson's collection, were said to have been killed in Suffolk. Mr. Joseph Clarke, a gentleman well versed in our native birds, informed Mr. Yarrell that Mr. Adams, of Gorleston, in Norfolk, has in his collection a Woodchat shot by himself; later still, Mr. Frederick Bond, of Kingsbury, but yesterday (July 30, 1862) sent me the following note:—"The Woodchat has, to my knowledge, been several times found in the Isle of Wight. In the summer of 1856 a pair made a nest there, but unfortunately it was taken before the eggs were laid. In the September of the same year a fine young bird was shot by Mr. H. Rogers; it is now in my possession. In the following year the old birds returned, and the same gentleman sent me the nest and five eggs; he has since observed another nest and eggs, which are now in the collection of my friend, the Rev. Mr. Braikenridge. I must mention that I requested Mr. Rogers not to shoot the old birds."

The visits of the Woodchat to England are few and far between; and neither in Scotland nor in Ireland has it yet made its appearance; at least, no instance of its capture has been recorded. Its trivial name would indicate that the bird differs somewhat in its economy from the Red-backed Shrike; and we find that such is the case; for, in his papers published in the 'Magazine of Natural History,' the late Mr. Hoy says, "It differs from *Lanius Collurio* in the choice of situation for its nest, placing it invariably on trees, and preferring the oak. The nest is fixed in the fork of a projecting branch, and is composed, on the outside, of sticks and wool, mixed with white moss from the bodies of the trees, and lined with fine grass and wool. The eggs are four or five in number, rather smaller than those of the Red-backed Shrike, and varying much in their markings—the ground-colour being pale blue in some, in others a dirty white, surrounded near the larger end with a zone of rust-coloured spots; in some, again, the markings and spots are of a paler colour, and more dispersed over the egg. It is not a wild bird, often building close to houses and public roads. It is abundant in some parts of the Netherlands, and arrives and departs about the same time as *Lanius Collurio*."

Lord Lilford states that it is "very abundant in all the Ionian Islands, arriving about the end of April, and breeding in the olive-groves." (*Ibis*, vol. ii. p. 135.)

A fine nest of this bird, brought by myself from Malta, was a thick-walled, cup-shaped structure, composed of the stems and flowering heads of some creeping and odoriferous plants, and lined with a few extremely fine roots.

The eggs are stone-white, with large blotches of olive and grey, those of the latter colour appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell; the spots, too, are not so much disposed in the form of a zone as in *E. Collurio*. I have two eggs in which the ground-colour is buffy, instead of stone-white; and it is very probable that they were of a delicate salmon hue before they were blown, like those of *E. Collurio*.

As we have had so few opportunities of observing this bird in a state of nature, I cannot perhaps do better than give a free translation of some interesting passages respecting it in the 'Ornithologie de la Savoye,' by J. B. Bailly.

"The Red-headed Shrike is abundant in Switzerland and Savoy during the four most beautiful months of the year. Towards the 20th or 25th of April it is seen in pairs on the outskirts of the woods on our hills, and in other places furnished with underwood, in the woods of chestnut- and walnut-trees, in the poplars and willows which border the roads and fields, in the midst of fields planted with trees, and, lastly, in parks and orchards. It is in these situations that it lives and breeds during the time it remains in our climate. It resorts to the large trees on the borders and in the midst of marshy ground for the purpose of nidification, and towards the end of July betakes itself to the marshes in company with *Lanius minor*, and continues to associate with that species until they depart. Both sexes assist in constructing the nest, taking it in turns to bring and employ the materials—the male bringing them, and the female disposing of them, and *vice versa*. The nest is attached by means of stringy plants to the branches of trees or underwood, and is outwardly composed of lichens, roots, mosses, and small twigs compactly bound together with fibrous filaments; the interior is composed of bits of very fine plants and morsels of wool. Towards the 15th of May the female deposits four or five eggs, of a light-greenish white, sprinkled with various-sized spots of greyish ash-colour, particularly at the larger end, where they form a zone. While sitting, the female is carefully attended by her mate, who brings her worms, small reptiles, and occasionally a beakful of insects. She sits with so much assiduity as to allow herself to be taken by the hand. Two days after the hatching, the parents may be seen feeding their young ones with worms, small slugs, smooth and hairy caterpillars. One of the parents keeps them warm under its wings until the other undertakes the same duty. Their constant goings and comings, as well as their want of suspicion, during this epoch, are often the cause of their progeny becoming the prey of birdsnesters, shepherds especially; these last, indeed, are in the habit of marking, during the nesting-season, all the trees and bushes where they may see these birds stop. After the young have left the nest, the male and the female still consort with their family until their migration, which commences about the 25th of August for the more advanced flocks, and from the 1st to the 15th of September for the others. Before this period, families not yet disunited are seen following one another in short flights over the hedges and trees which border the roads, streams, or fields—perching from time to time on the summits of the dead or more isolated branches, from which they utter their harsh and short cries. They wage war with beetles, caterpillars, frogs, small lizards, mice, and occasionally weakly birds. When these kinds of food are wanting, they have recourse to fruits, especially to those of the small cherry, plum, mulberry, and fig trees."

Having a number of specimens of this bird now before me from various countries wide apart, I cannot but notice that they differ considerably in size, and to some extent in their markings—those from Tangier being very much smaller than the examples from Smyrna, Trebizond, and Italy, having the band crossing the forehead much narrower, and the white of the lores more extensive. The depth of the buff colouring of the flanks differs greatly in all of them, probably in consequence of their having been more or less exposed to the influence of light. In freshly-moulted birds the buffy hue shows very conspicuously, but would seem to be evanescent.

In the male, the lores are creamy white; band across the forehead, line above and below the eye, and a broad mark posterior to it down the side of the neck black; behind the eye a narrow mark of white; crown of the head, nape, and back of the neck rich reddish chestnut; upper part of the back or mantle black, each feather slightly edged with rufous; scapularies white; lower part of the back grey; rump and upper tail-coverts white; wings brown, the coverts narrowly edged with pale brown; at the base of the primaries a patch of white; secondaries narrowly edged and more broadly tipped with white; under surface creamy white, washed with buff on the flanks; central tail-feathers black; the lateral feathers white at the base, crossed near the tip by a broad oblique mark of black, which occupies the inner web only of the outer feather, the exterior web of that feather and the tips of all the lateral ones being white; irides hazel; bill, legs, and feet black.

"When the young quit the nest," says M. Bailly, "about the end of August, they may be recognized by the dusky red of the upper parts, with the exception of the head, which is adorned with a mixture of white and grey, and the rump, which is marked with brown; the under surface dirty white, with crescents of grey. After their first moult, the upper part of the head, the neck, and the scapularies are varied with white, red, brown, and black; the back is brown; the rump greyish white, transversely rayed with a blackish colour; the white of the wing is shaded with russet; and the primaries are brown, tipped with white or reddish."

The Plate represents a male and a female of the size of life.

Gould, John. 1873. "Woodchat, *Enneoctonus rufus* [Pl. 16]." *The birds of Great Britain* 2, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323831>.

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