PHYLLOPNOUS TROCHILUS.
Owls of the greatest charms of our country is the well-defined character of the seasons of spring and autumn. Separated as our island is from the European continent, it is never so dry or so heated by the sun; on the other hand, the warm currents of the Gulf-stream which have our western shores tend to diminish the severity of the winter months. In this favoured land, migration is rife to its fullest extent: when autumn approaches, vast numbers both of land- and water-birds arrive from the north to winter in our more genial climate, and return home in spring, at which period their place here is supplied by fresh accessions from the south, which, in like manner, leave us again in autumn; and thus, what with these migrants and the species which are stationary, bird-life is well represented in the British Islands. Among our spring visitants, the Willow-Wren is one of the earliest: how welcome is its note, when it first regales our ears at the commencement of April! and with what pleasure does the ornithologist roam abroad to listen to the pleasing sound, and hail the presage of approaching summer, of which this bird is the forerunner!

There is perhaps no one of our summer migrants that is so generally dispersed over the whole of the British Islands as the Willow-Wren; it may be found from the Land’s End to John o’ Groats, wherever the country is of a sylvan character. In Ireland and Scotland it is equally abundant, perhaps even more so in the latter country than in England. On the continent of Europe, its eastward range appears to terminate in Turkey and the Crimea; from thence, including the intervening countries of Greece, Italy, Spain, and France, to Russia, Sweden, Norway, and Lapland, it is a summer visitant. My notes on the birds I observed during a tour through Norway testify that it was not only seen in the lower parts of that country, but that it was frequently met with in the most elevated districts, as high, indeed, as the willow and the birch can live; and Mr. Wolley is my authority for stating that it also occurs in Lapland. In several works lately published, I am made to state that this bird is found in India; now I do not deny having made such an assertion; but if I have, I must have been deceived, for I have no positive evidence of its having been found there. The Himalayas and the Peninsula of India, however, are inhabited by several very closely allied species. The very pretty and appropriate name of Leuc/o-warblers has been given to the birds of this form; and I would have adopted this trivial appellation, had I thought it commendable to do so; but the three birds, viz. P. trochilus, P. rufa, and P. sibilatrix, are so well known by the names of the Willow-Wren, Chiff-chaff, and Wood-Wren, that I feared the consequence of any innovation.

That a bird so delicate in structure, and with such limited powers of flight, should be able to cross over seas from land to land, or from Spain to England, is a matter of surprise to every one; yet, as regularly as the seasons resolve, the first of April or a few days earlier or later brings us back the Willow-Wren from its winter quarters in Africa. Seldom, however, is it seen performing its sea-passage, which is the more extraordinary from the many thousands that must make the journey. On a genial sunny day, about the time I have mentioned, the whole of the southern and midland counties of England become peopled with this bird, so generally as almost to induce the belief that they had dropped from the clouds. That these migrations are performed during the night I think we have many proofs. Numbers are often found dead on our shores in the early morning: and not a few are annually killed by flying against the glasses of the light-houses, which had been fatally attractive to these little rovers.

The localities affected by the Willow-Wren are large woods, sides of rivers, patches of furze, plantations of young trees, and especially, as its name implies, the various species of willow. Among the leafy branches of all these trees it displays great activity and elegance of action, flitting from branch to branch, prying into every bud, and scrutinizing every leaf, for such newly-hatched insects as the genial warmth of spring or
summer may have brought forth. Its motions are all effected very quietly; and so closely does the colouring of the bird assimilate to that of the leaves of the trees, that it would be almost impossible to detect it, were it not for its movement and the utterance of its pretty but subdued song, which is poured forth on the wing as well as from some high tree. "It consists," says Mr. Macgillivray, "of a repetition of the syllable 'tweet' ten or more times, the first notes being prolonged, the rest gradually falling and becoming shorter. It may be heard at a distance of as much as six hundred yards or more, and is continued till the middle or end of July; after which time it begins to wane in strength, though repeated during fine weather till the last. It begins with the highest note, and gradually goes lower, dwelling on each several times; in all, five whole notes of music. It is wont also, particularly in the early summer months, to emit a small-and rather shrill cheep. When warbling its sweet and melodious lay, the throat is somewhat swollen, and the whole body thrills with the effort." (Morris's Hist. Brit. Birds, vol. lii. p. 243.)

The nidification of the Willow-Wren takes place soon after its arrival; the nest is placed on the ground, and so artificially concealed that it is often most difficult of detection. In some instances I have known a covered passage through the grass of a foot in length, before the nest was reached.

A nest with eggs taken near the Holt at Preston Hall, near Maidstone in Kent, on the 29th of May, 1858, was secreted among thick herbage on the shelf of a bank; it was of a partially domed form, outwardly constructed of moss, leaves, and dried stalks of grasses, and warmly lined with at least two hundred pheasant-feathers.

Another nest, taken at Formosa, near Cookham in Buckinghamshire, was of a deep cup-shaped form, roughly built of moss, dried leaves, and very fine straws, and thickly and warmly lined with soft downy feathers. It contained six eggs of a dull pinky white, plentifully sprinkled with coarse blotches of light red; when blown, the ground-colour became opaque.

During the sojourn of the bird in this country, from April to September, two broods are reared. The young, on leaving the nest, assume the colouring of the adult; the whole of the feathers, however, are more suffused with yellow, particularly those of the under surface; at this age, therefore, the bird bears a richer livery than when adult. Before leaving this country, a perfect moult takes place in the old birds; and the sexes closely assimilate both in tint and size; after the moult, they are more yellow than when they arrive in spring, but are not so uniform or so fine in colour as the young.

All the upper surface yellowish olive; wings and tail brown, margined with yellowish olive; over the eye a stripe of yellow; mark before and behind the eye brown; under surface white, suffused with yellow on the sides of the neck, breast, flanks, and under tail-coverts; upper mandible light olive-brown; under mandible flesh-colour; irides brownish black; legs and feet light brown; the under part of the tarsi and the soles of the feet inclining to flesh-colour.

The figures represent a male and female of the size of life, on a species of willow gathered on the banks of the Thames in the month of April.

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