SERINUS HORTULANUS.

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Serin Finch.

- Fringilla serinus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 320.
Serinus meridionalis, Brehm, Vog. Deutschl., p. 255.
Pyrrhula (Dryospiza) serinus, Keys. et Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 41.
Serinus flavesceus, Gould, Birds of Eur., vol. iii. pl. 195.
Pyrrhula serinus, Degl.
Dryospiza serinus, Cab. in Ersch und Gruber's Ency., p. 217.
Serinus islandicus, Bonap.
—— *hortulanus*, Koch, Syst. Baier. Zool., p. 229.
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So many instances of the occurrence of the Serin Finch in England have now been recorded in 'The Ibis,' the 'Zoologist,' and other journals, that I cannot refrain from including it among our accidental visitors. It is not a regular migrant; yet I suspect that its visits to the southern parts of our island have been far more frequent than is generally imagined, but that it had previously escaped detection, or been mistaken for its near ally the Siskin, which it greatly resembles, especially when seen among trees.

The first notice of its occurrence in England was forwarded to the 'Zoologist,' in 1860, by Mr. Bond, who states that it was caught at Brighton, in a clap-net, on the 20th of June, 1859. In some notes kindly communicated to me by this gentleman, he says:—"I saw another fine male, which had been captured near London, in the autumn of the same year. I also heard of two others having been taken near London." In 'The Ibis' for 1861, Mr. George Dawson Rowley mentions that three specimens had been caught near Brighton, and cast aside from ignorance of their value, the bird having been previously supposed to be a mule of some kind escaped from confinement. In 'The Ibis' for 1866, this gentleman records another example, which had been sent to Mr. Swaysland, of Brighton, to be mounted, by Mr. Henry Byne, who, in reply to some inquiries respecting it, stated that it was killed in the last week of January, 1866, by William Gorett, Esq., in a small garden surrounded by trees, in Bridge Street, North Town, Taunton. Mr. Byne, in whose possession this specimen remains, kindly sent it up for my inspection; and I can therefore testify that it is a veritable Serin Finch. In the 'Zoologist' for 1869 is a notice copied from the 'Field,' that "a very fine example of this rare English visitant was shot at Worthing, on the 4th of May" of that year; and in the 'Zoologist' for 1870 Mr. Bond says:—"I have seen a fine specimen, killed in April 1869. There have now been so many examples taken in this country that I think we should consider it a British bird."

Those who may wish to become minutely acquainted with the habits and economy of this charming little songster, must refer to the works of the various Continental ornithologists; but as these are not always accessible, I cannot perhaps do better than transcribe, nearly in his own words, the interesting account (derived from these and other sources) published by my friend Dr. Bree in his 'History of the Birds of Europe not observed in the British Isles.'

"The Serin Finch is found plentifully in Spain, the south of France, in Italy, and the neighbouring part of Switzerland, in Central Germany, the north of France, and in Holland, more rarely in the south and south-west of Germany, but not in the northern part of that country. According to Faber, it has been killed between 66° and 67° N. lat. It has been found in the Hartz Mountains, and is often seen in Thuringia. It is an autumn visitor at Malta, is common in Sicily, and very numerous in Smyrna. It is said to be plentiful in the neighbourhood of Heidelberg and Offenbach, but to be rare in the intermediate country. It is very common in Greece, is included among the birds of Algeria, and is stated to be numerous about the olive-groves of Sousa, in the neighbourhood of Tunis, but rare in the more elevated and mountainous parts of the Eastern Atlas.

"The Serin Finch is generally a migratory bird, quitting its summer- and breeding-ground in October, and returning the following March; but in the mild climate of the Rhine it is said to remain all the year round.

"It lives most frequently in fruit-gardens, orchards or avenues of walnut- or nut-trees, and vineyards, and loves to dwell among willows and alders, on the banks of brooks and rivers as well as in garden-trees, in the middle of villages or near buildings. Wherever it may be, it makes itself known by its restless habits, and by its custom of always singing on the summit of the tree-tops, from which it often flies down to the roofs of buildings. In autumn it is more retiring, but remains long on the thick tree-tops.

"It seeks its food principally on the ground, never very far from trees and bushes, and still less in the open fields. In its movements it is lively and active, springing from branch to branch very much after the manner of the Siskin and Common Linnet, with which it willingly associates, particularly

the former. It is generally seen in pairs or small flocks; and the pairs do not seem to separate during the whole year, but cling to each other with the utmost affection and tenderness. If one is accidentally separated from the other, they call assiduously until they are again united.

"The male is very lively in spring, and sings continually from the tops of the trees, and delights especially in flying from one to the other, sometimes soaring, at others fluttering aloft and flying straight down again like the Tree-Pipit. In its usual flight it resembles the Siskin, moving quickly from place to place, and uttering its peculiar note, which has been compared to those of the Siskin, the Goldfinch, and the Canary. The song has much variation, and may be heard at the breeding-place all day long from March till far into August. It is a favourite cage-bird, consorting by choice with the species above-mentioned; and, like them, it may be taught many performances.

"The Serin feeds on seeds, especially those grown in gardens, and prefers the oleaginous to the farinaceous. Naumann mentions particularly cabbage-, hemp-, and poppy-, rape-, turnip-, radish- and lettuce-seed. . . The wild seeds which it seems to prefer are dandelion, hawk-cabbage, chicory, the various grasses, and, when driven to it, even oats. In autumn it seeks its food among the alders and birches.

"Its nest is much more frequently found on fruit and walnut-trees than on beech, oak, or alder. It is placed in a forked bough not very high, or on the lowest branches of dwarf fruit-trees, but not in low bushes. It sometimes resembles the nest of the Goldfinch; at others it is more like that of the Greenfinch, but is smaller, very narrow, rounded and lined with more skill than the latter. It is formed of small roots woven together with old twigs, which, however, are sometimes absent. The inside is tolerably deep, and made soft and warm with feathers and generally a large quantity of horse-hair, and single pig's-bristles, which secure a smooth resting-place for the eggs, the whole forming one of the prettiest of nests.

"The eggs are about the size of the Siskin's, but shorter and rounder, very tender-shelled, and in colour resembling the Linnet's, having a ground-colour of greenish white decorated with solitary dots and short streaks of dark blood-red or reddish brown, oftentimes forming a kind of wreath round the larger end. The duty of incubation is performed entirely by the female, who sits for fourteen days, during which the male often feeds her most tenderly from his crop."

In Bâdeker's work upon the Eggs of European birds, Brehm, speaking of the bird in South Germany, says:—"The half-bowl-formed nest is made of grass and stalks of plants, and lined with feathers and hair; in many the catkins of the willow form the under layer, whilst others are made almost entirely of rootlets, and some are built almost exclusively of the clustering blossoms of the chestnut."

The accounts of the bird as seen in Italy by Savi and Prince Charles L. Bonaparte, and in Savoy by Bailly, are all very similar to the above. The latter states in addition that "it is easily snared, soon becomes tame, and that its charming manners and sweet song render it a general favourite. The male readily pairs with the Canary; and the young which are the result are generally very fine songsters." The Rev. H. B. Tristram says:—"This exquisite little songster, the rival of the Canary in power, is much sought after in North Africa, as it is the favourite cage-bird of the Moorish ladies in Algiers."

A few notes from 'The Ibis' will complete the recorded history of the Serin Finch.

"The *Serinus hortulanus*," says Mr. F. Du Cane Godman, "is found in abundance throughout the Azores. It frequents the cultivated lands, where it feeds on the seed crops, and is especially destructive to the flax. It is often caught and tamed, and a great number are sold on board vessels which touch at the islands for provisions. In Fayal these birds congregate in great numbers about a small hill near Horta, and fly across in a body to the island of Pico; for what reason I do not know, as there is no want of trees in the neighbourhood.

In Palestine, the Rev. Mr. Tristram notes that "the pretty little Serin was only found in the winter season in the small glens and wooded districts near the sea, and never inland. Near Beyrout it is very common, but leaves for the north in March."

The opposite Plate represents a male and a female, of the natural size, on a branch of the larch. The female is distinguished by being not so yellow, darker, on the upper surface, and more spotted below.

Gould, John. 1873. "Serin Pinch, *Serinus hortulanus* [Pl. 38]." *The birds of Great Britain* 3, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323929>.

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