COLUMBA ŒNAS, Linn.

Stock-Dove.

Columba œnas, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 75.

Palumbœna columbella, Bonap. in Parz. Cat. des Ois. d'Eur., p. 9. sp. 311.

IN form, size, and colouring, the Stock-Dove is directly intermediate between the Ring-Dove and the Rock-Dove, and it is equally so in its economy, particularly in its habit of flocking together during the months of autumn and winter, as well as in its mode of breeding, or rather the situations chosen for its nest; for while the Ring-Dove almost invariably places its light nest on the flat branches of trees, that of the Rock-Dove is constructed in caverns and holes in the rocks; the Stock-Dove, on the other hand, usually nestles in holes of pollard trees or on their tops, near the bole or in a fork formed by the bifurcation of two branches: but, as will be seen below, it has been stated to lay in other situations; these, however, must be regarded as exceptional.

British ornithologists are somewhat divided in their belief as to whether this bird is a migratory or a stationary species. It may be both; for the bird is certainly found here in winter as well as in summer, but I believe I have certain evidence of great numbers arriving in our island from the south during the months of spring. It appears to be as plentiful in all the central parts of the European continent as it is with us. Bailly states that it is abundant in Savoy during its spring and autumn migrations; Mr. Wright informs us that it visits Malta at the same seasons, but does not remain to breed; Captain Loche enumerates it among the birds of Algeria; and examples were sent to the Zoological Society from Persia. I have never seen an example from India, and Mr. Jerdon does not include it in his work on the birds of that country. It evidently does not go far north; for Macgillivray states that it is never found in Scotland, and it is not mentioned in Thompson's 'Natural History of Ireland;' yet M. Nilsson includes it among the birds of Sweden. In England it is very generally dispersed over the central parts of the country, from the New Forest to the great rabbit-warrens of Suffolk and Norfolk. Among other situations near London in which this bird annually breeds, I may state, on the authority of Mr. Jesse, that a few pairs take possession of the old oak-pollards in Richmond Park; and I have myself observed it similarly engaged in the fine woods at Cliefden, Hedsor, and Taplow, and I have no doubt that it is equally numerous in all such situations in Middlesex, Essex, and the other neighbouring counties. In a very interesting letter from Mr. Alfred Newton, who some years ago kindly sent me several examples of this bird as studies for this work, that gentleman says, "With us these birds generally breed in the rabbit-burrows; and it is a very enjoyable sight to watch a pair at the mouth of a burrow on a fine afternoon in early spring, the sun warmly lighting up the bright yellow sand so as to make it contrast beautifully with their sober-coloured plumage. The male, with his neck inflated almost to the size of his body, with his wings drooping, and his tail out spread, walks with hurried steps backward and forward on the short rabbit-cropped turf above the hole, at the same time rolling out his loud rumbling love-story to his mate as she lies lazily on the loose dry sand. Crouching down behind a bank and gazing around, we find nothing to break the horizon save a ragged fern-stalk or the ears of a rabbit nibbling the lawn-like grass: a male Wheatear may, perhaps, suddenly spring up, perform his odd series of gesticulations, and sing; but there is little else to enliven the scene, and all one's attention is directed to the principal objects in it—the happy pair of Stock-Doves. When they return to the burrow after having been out to feed, and are about to alight, the male performs the same evolutions that the male tame Pigeon does, soaring round in circles and smiting his wings. One can generally recognize the bird at any distance by this peculiarity."

Mr. Harting informs me that this bird sometimes breeds in rocks, and, in his letter on the subject, says—

"During the nesting-season of 1865, I spent a fortnight on the Dorsetshire coast, and explored the cliffs between St. Aldham's Head and Weymouth, in order to ascertain what birds were breeding in that locality. I had been told that I should find the Rock-Dove (*Columba livia*) there, and should have little difficulty in procuring examples of the bird and its eggs: although I was out from morning to night, I did not even see the bird; but I found another Pigeon breeding among the cliffs in limited numbers. This, even at a glance, could not be mistaken for the true Rock-Dove, as it had not the white rump, nor the double bar on the wing, peculiar to that species. I did not suspect it to be the Stock-Dove, because most authors state that that bird 'never breeds in rocks and cliffs like its congener the Rock-Dove;' I therefore supposed it might be a cross between the Stock-Dove and some escaped Dove-cote Pigeons. In order to settle the point I obtained two young birds from a nest in the cliffs and brought them home with me. One of them by an accident escaped; the other I have still in my aviary. It is now in fine plumage, and last

week I submitted it to the inspection of Mr. Tegetmeier, an authority respecting Pigeons, who decided that it was undoubtedly a Stock-Dove, and added that the fact of this species resorting to cliffs to breed, not accidentally, but in small numbers, was interesting and hitherto unknown."

"Although far less numerous, and more locally distributed than the Ring-Dove," says Mr. Stevenson in his 'Birds of Norfolk,' "the Stock-Dove is plentiful at certain times of the year and in certain parts of the country, particularly the north-eastern and south-western districts. In the latter, with the exception of about four months (from the middle of September to the middle of January, or even later if the winter be much prolonged), it is found, if not in great abundance, yet in sufficient numbers to be one of the most characteristic birds of that part of that open country. During the latter part of the autumn and beginning of winter, though not, perhaps, absolutely absent, yet it only occasionally appears, and then generally flocked with Ring-Doves. That accurate naturalist, the late Mr. Salmon, states that the Stock-Dove, which in all 'works upon natural history is stated to be only an inhabitant of woods, abounds in this neighbourhood during the spring and summer months, upon our rabbit-warrens and heaths, to which it annually resorts for the purpose of nidification, and it is in general the first that arrives in the district for that purpose. The situation which it selects for its nest differs materially from that chosen by its congeners, the Ring- and Turtle Doves, the nests of which are always placed upon trees or bushes; this species, on the contrary, occupies the deserted rabbit-burrows upon warrens, and places its pair of eggs about a yard from the entrance, generally upon the bare sand, sometimes using a small quantity of dried roots, &c., barely sufficient to keep the eggs from the ground. Besides such situations, on the heaths it nestles under the thick furze bushes (*Ulex europæa*), which are impervious to rain, in consequence of the sheep and rabbits eating off the young and tender shoots as they grow, always preferring those bushes that have a small opening made by the rabbits near the ground. A few pairs occasionally breed in the holes of decayed trees. It generally commences breeding by the end of March, or the beginning of April, the young ones, which are very much esteemed, being ready for the table by the commencement of June." Mr. Alfred Newton tells me that the young Stock-Doves, being a perquisite of the warreners, are a source of not inconsiderable profit, as they sell them for from eighteen pence to two shillings a couple, and that almost every warrener keeps a "dow-dawg," *i. e.* a dog regularly trained to discover the burrows in which the doves breed. Mr. Scales, of Beechamwells, adds that "when the warreners find them in a burrow, they fix sticks at the mouth of the hole in such a manner as to prevent the escape of the young, but to allow the old birds to feed them." Mr. Newton, however, informs me that this precaution is thought unnecessary; for the more experienced warreners, from long practice, know to a day (after once seeing the nestlings) when they will be fit to take. Along the extensive range of sandhills in the neighbourhood of Hunstanton also, the Stock-Doves may be found breeding in considerable numbers, and likewise on Holt Heath and other similar localities; indeed I have no doubt that with careful observation a few pairs might be found in summer in many rough furze-covered spots where rabbits are preserved; but this peculiarity in the habits of the Stock-Dove is by no means generally known. In 1863, a friend of mine, whilst ferreting on Mr. George's farm, at Eaton, near Norwich, was not a little surprised at seeing a pigeon flutter out of a rabbit's hole (half hidden by thick gorse, in the steep side of a sandpit) into which he had just previously turned his ferret: the bird was caught by a terrier before it could take flight, and proved to be an old Stock-Dove; but on a subsequent examination of the burrow no eggs or young were found. I may add that in that neighbourhood the bird is by no means common. This species, however, in certain districts, also breeds in our woods and plantations with the common Ring-Dove, but in such situations it nests either in the holes of old trees, using only a few sticks by way of lining, in the stocks of old oak-pollards (from which circumstance, according to Yarrell, it has acquired the name of Stock-Dove), or, as my friend Mr. Edwards informs me, in any faggot-stacks left in the plantations for the summer, the nest being generally placed at the bottom should sufficient space remain for the purpose. Mr. Newton has also found a pair of eggs of this bird at Elveden, near Thetford, "laid on a very thick bushy bough of a Scotch fir tree, about twelve feet from the ground, without any nest." Mr. Samuel Bligh, who has studied the habits of this species during the breeding-season at Framingham Earl, says that their actions are occasionally anything but *dove-like*, as they fight most desperately, till one or both fall to the ground. He has shot them in the very act."

The sexes are very similar in outward appearance; but the female is rather smaller than the male, and is a trifle less brilliant in colour, particularly in the glossy hues of the green and purple metallic tints which adorn the sides of the neck.

The eggs are white, oblong in form, and very similar to those of the common Ring-Dove.

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

Gould, John. 1873. "Stock-Dove, Columba ænas [Pl. 2]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323963>.

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