BRANTA RUFINA.

Red-crested Duck.

Anas rufina, Pall. Reise, tom. ii. p. 713.

Branta rufina, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 564.

Fuligula rufina, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 188, pl. 54.

Callichen ruficeps, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 922.

——— *rufinus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 924, tab. 42. fig. 4.

Netta rufina, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 102.

Mergoides rufina, Eyton, Cat. of Brit. Birds, p. 57.

Aythya rufina, Macgill. Man. Nat. Hist., Orn., vol. ii. p. 191.

So many instances are on record of the occurrence of this fine Duck in England, that I have no hesitation in following my contemporaries in giving it a place in our avifauna, and a figure of it in the present work. It must, however, be regarded as a southern and eastern rather than a northern species, and consequently as an accidental visitor to our islands. That it is tolerably common in North Africa is certain, since the late Captain Loche states, in his 'Catalogue des Mammifères et des Oiseaux observés en Algérie' that it is abundant on all the great lakes of that country; and Mr. Salvin, in his 'Five Months' Birds'-nesting in the Eastern Atlas,' states that he frequently saw several pairs in the open pools at the upper end of the marsh of Zana; where two nests were obtained, one of which contained seven eggs, of a most brilliant fresh green colour while unblown, but which, when the contents were expelled and the shells had become dry, were sadly diminished in beauty. As we might reasonably infer, its range extends in an easterly direction from this country to India; for we learn, from Mr. Jerdon's work on the birds of that country, that it is there found throughout the greater part of the peninsula, but is more rare in the south. It chiefly frequents the larger tanks and jheels, generally keeps to the middle part of the water, and is a wary bird, not usually allowing a near approach. Its flesh is juicy, tender, and high-flavoured, and by some persons is considered the finest Duck for the table. A writer in the 'India Sporting Review' remarks that "during the day the Red-crested Ducks are constantly on the move, now pursuing one another, now screaming, all up at once, then down again." I have received specimens from the Himalayas; and Colonel Sykes includes it in the 'Birds of the Deccan,' but observes that it is rare in that part of India. According to Dr. Latham, it inhabits the vast lakes of the desert of Tartary, and is sometimes seen on the great lakes lying on the east side the Uralian Mountains, but not elsewhere in Siberia.

The *Branta rufina* is included in works on the birds of Germany, is mentioned by Necker in his notice of the birds of Geneva, has been observed at Genoa; Savi includes it in his 'Ornithology of Italy;' and "it will be recollected," says Mr. Yarrell, "that our celebrated countryman Willughby obtained this duck in the market at Rome." Bailly states that it is rare in Savoy, and, when it occurs, generally arrives towards the end of winter or the beginning of spring, sometimes in couples, at others in small parties of from three to six in number; and he adds that in Switzerland, where it is more numerous, it arrives about the same time. According to Degland it is found on the shores of the Black Sea and in various parts throughout France. Benoit, in his 'Ornitologia Siciliana,' states that it is common and stationary, especially during winter and spring, in some parts of Sicily, but that large accessions are seen to arrive from the eastward. Mr. H. E. Dresser informs me that the bird is not uncommon at a lake called "Albufueras," near Valencia, in Spain, and is often to be bought in the market of that city. He was told by a person who lives close to the lake that it breeds there, but he knew nothing of its habits. Lord Lilford found it common at Butrinto during the first winter he passed at Corfu, but saw very few the succeeding one. Temminck states that the Red-crested Duck inhabits the countries of North-eastern Europe, and migrates periodically over the Caspian Sea to Hungary, Austria, and Turkey, less regularly to the great lakes of Switzerland, but never resorts to the shores of the Ocean: that it also visits Holland is certain; for I have myself found the bird in the flesh in our London market, among a great mass of ducks sent to us from that country. This brings us nearly home to England, where, as before stated, it has several times been killed.

"I had the pleasure," says Mr. Yarrell, "of first noticing this handsome Duck as an occasional visitor to this country in January 1826, when a male was shot near Boston while feeding in fresh water in company with some Widgeons. Though a well-known species, it had not previously been recorded to have been killed in England. During the same winter several others were obtained; more than one occurred in the London markets, and were eagerly purchased for collectors. Since then a specimen has been killed at Yarmouth, another at Colchester; and the female figured by Mr. Gould, in his 'Birds of Europe,' was killed out of a flock of eighteen on the Thames, near Erith, in Kent."

The food consists of mollusks, fish, worms, and aquatic plants.

Mr. Blyth assures me that the crest is capable of erection to the extent I have represented, and that in this state it forms a most beautiful appendage, and adds greatly to the beauty of the bird, especially in the breeding-season, when the bill becomes of a bright orange-red.

On reference to the opposite Plate, it will at once be seen how greatly the two sexes differ in colour and ornamentation, the female having the crest less developed and being devoid of the body-tints which render the male so conspicuous.

Could I have furnished a more detailed account of this bird, I should have had much pleasure in so doing; but unfortunately the peculiarities of its habits and economy seem to be entirely unknown. Mr. Eyton appears to have considered it to be allied to the Mergansers, and therefore proposed for it the generic name of *Mergoides*; and certainly the form of the bill and crest would induce most persons to entertain the same opinion; but a further examination of the structure of the bird would show that it does not belong to the *Merginæ*.

The following descriptions of the two sexes are from the pen of Mr. Jerdon, a gentleman who has had ample opportunities of observing the bird in a state of nature—an advantage I have not enjoyed.

“Male:—head, cheeks, throat, and upper part of the neck reddish bay; the feathers on the crown elongated and of a silky texture, forming a crest somewhat paler than the rest of the head; back, wings, and tail yellowish brown; the bend of the wing, a large spot on each side of the back, the speculum, the base of the primary quills, and the flanks white; lower part of the neck, breast, and abdomen deep black; bill bright vermilion-red, the tip white; irides red; legs orange-red.

“The female has the upper parts yellowish brown, darker on the head and neck, and the crest less developed; half of the speculum greyish white, the other pale-brown; base of the quills white, tinged with brown; breast and flanks yellowish brown; belly grey; bill and feet reddish brown.”

The Plate represents the two sexes, of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Red-crested Duck, *Branta rufina* [Pl. 22]." *The birds of Great Britain* 5, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324066>.

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