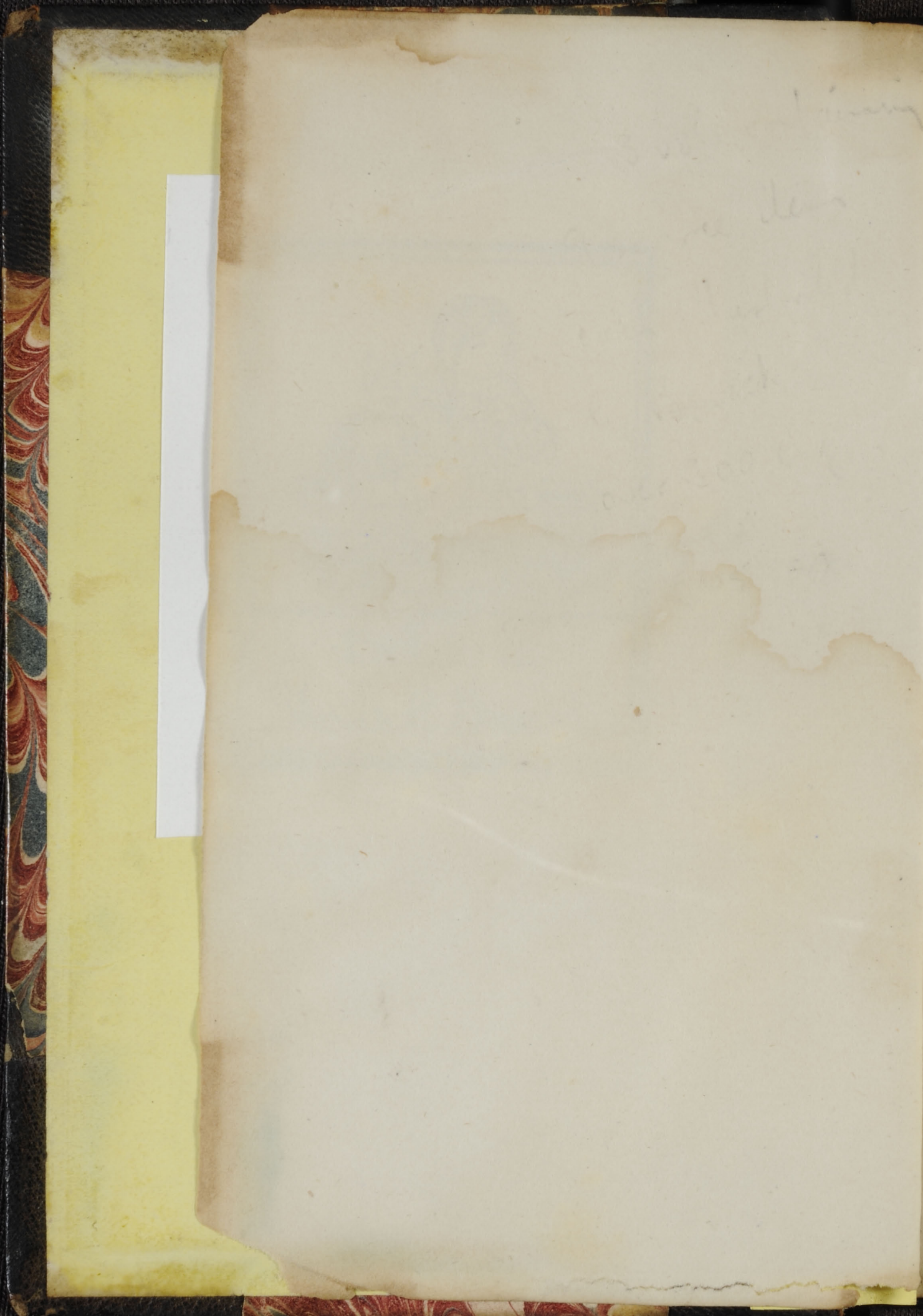
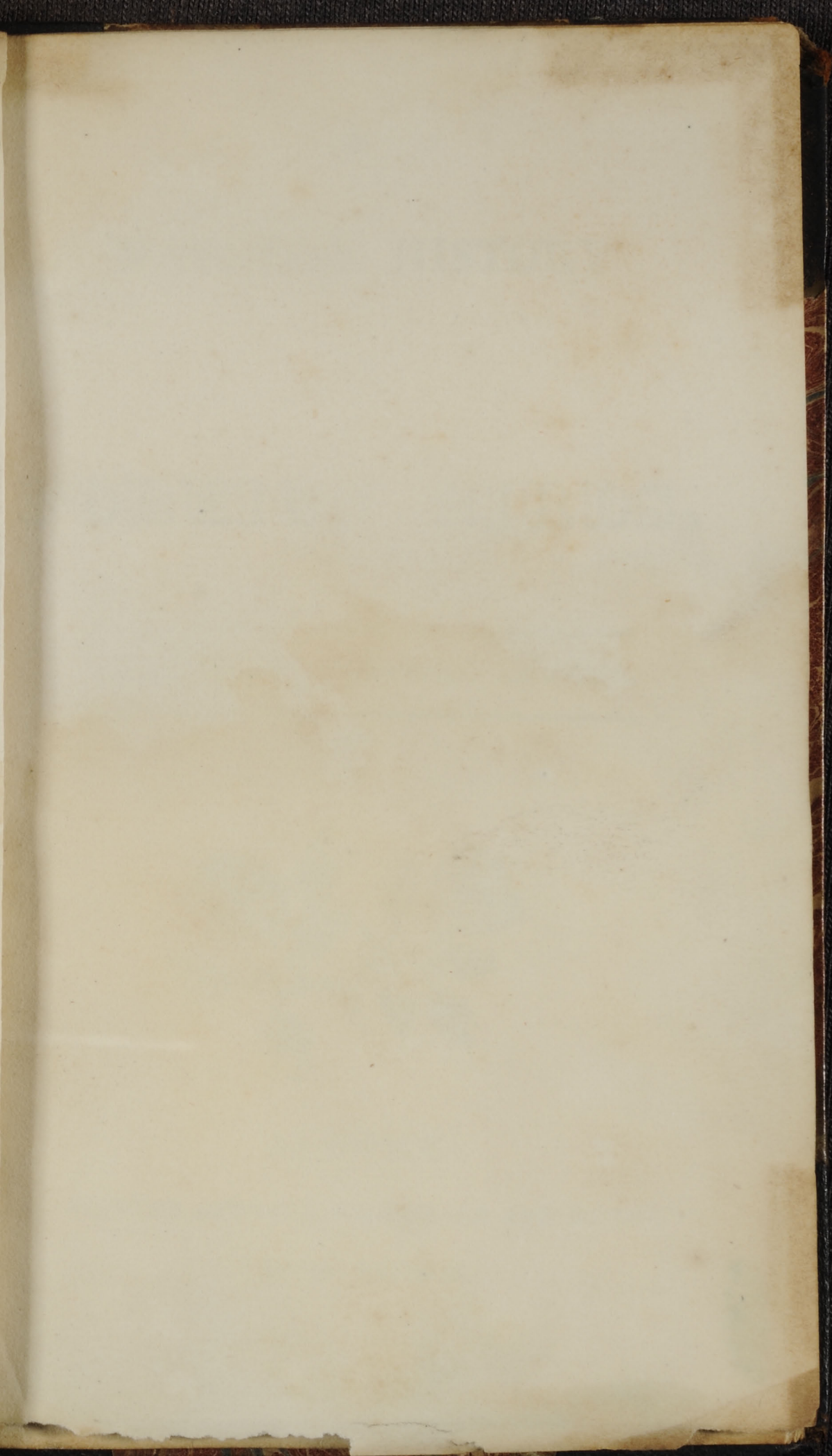




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Sheila R. Bourke









A

NATURAL HISTORY

OF

FOREIGN BIRDS.

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THIRTY-FOUR ENGRAVINGS ON WOOD.  
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ALNWICK:

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FOREIGN BIRDS.



THE OSTRICH.

THIS singular bird, whose elegant plumage is so often used in the attire of our most fashionable ladies, appears, in some measure, to connect the class of quadrupeds and birds. In its general figure it has some resemblance to the camel, and is almost as tall; it is covered with a plumage more

nearly resembling hair than feathers, and even its internal parts bear as great a similitude to those of the quadruped as of the bird.

The ostrich is certainly the largest of all birds. It is usually seven feet from the top of its head to the ground. The plumage of the ostrich is generally a mixture of black and white, though in some varieties it is observed to be grey. All the feathers are of a kind peculiar to this bird; being as soft as down, absolutely unfit to help the animal in flight, and still less adapted for defence against external injury.

The female lays from forty to fifty eggs at a time; and, though in the warm climates which she inhabits it is unnecessary to sit continually on them, she does not leave them to be hatched by the sun's heat, as has been a general tradition in every age.

It inhabits the torrid regions of Africa and Asia only, and has never been known to breed out of the country where it was first produced. It seems perfectly adapted to the sandy and burning deserts of those continents; and delights in wild solitary tracts, where few vegetables adorn the face of nature, and where the rain seldom descends to refresh it. Indeed it is asserted that the ostrich never drinks, and the place of its habitation seems to give a sanction to this opinion. They feed indiscriminately on every thing eatable, nor are they likely to be at a loss for provisions as long as even the sterile sand on which they walk remains.



THE CASSOWARY.

THE cassowary is next in size to the ostrich, but of a different nature. His wings are hardly perceptible, being very short, and entirely concealed under the plumage. The general tint of his feathers is brown, with some spots of vermilion red; his head is small and depressed, with a horny crown; the head and neck are deprived of feathers, and only set with a kind of hairy down. The cassowary eats indiscriminately whatever comes in his way, and does not seem to have any sort of predilection for any kind of food. He is a native of the southern parts of India.



THE DODO.

THIS creature strikes the imagination as one of the most unwieldy and inactive in nature. Its round and massive body is barely supported upon two short thick legs, like pillars; while its neck and head rise from it in a manner truly grotesque. The bill is of an extraordinary length, of a bluish white colour, and resembling, in its formation, two pointed spoons laid together by the backs. From all this results a stupid and voracious aspect, still further increased by a border of feathers round the beak, which forms a sort of hood, and completes this picture of stupid deformity. It is a native of the Isle of France. The Dutch, who first discovered it, called it the nauseous bird from its disgusting figure, and the bad taste of its flesh.



THE VULTURE.

THIS cruel, unclean, and indolent bird, though totally unknown in England, is common in many parts of Europe; and in Egypt, Arabia, and many other kingdoms of Africa and Asia, vultures are found in great abundance. In Egypt, and particularly in Grand Cairo, there are great flocks of them, which render a most important service to the inhabitants, by devouring all the filth and carrion which might otherwise render the air pestilential. Vultures make their nests in the most remote and inaccessible rocks, and produce but once a year.



THE FALCON.

THIS is a very elegant bird. Its bill is much hooked, and yellow; the iris is dusky; the throat is white, as is likewise the general colour of the plumage, but spotted with brown; the legs are of a pale blue, and feathered below the knee. Next to the eagle, it is found to be the most formidable, the most active, and the most intrepid, of all voracious birds, and is the dearest, and most esteemed for falconry, which was long the favourite amusement of our hardy ancestors, and a person of rank seldom stirred out without his hawk on his hand. This bird is a native of the cold and dreary climates of the north, and is found in Russia, Norway, and Iceland. It is never seen in warm, and seldom in temperate climates: it is found but rarely in Scotland and the Orkneys. Of this species there are several varieties.



THE PEACOCK.

PEACOCKS were first introduced into Europe from the Asiatic Indies; and in several parts of those extensive regions they are still found wild in prodigious flocks. The beautiful feathers of this bird were the cause of its being reduced to slavery; and the peculiar qualities of its body have given rise to the observation, that it possesses the plumage of an angel, the voice of a demon, and the appetite of a thief. They were exhibited as public curiosities by the Greeks; and served up as the highest dainty of the table, and the greatest ornament of the feast. The head, neck, and fore part of the peacock's breast, are of a deep shining blue: on the crown is a tuft of green feathers; and they display, with all the vanity of a conceited beauty, their starry tail, which may be said to vie in splendour with the rainbow.



THE TURKEY.

THIS fowl, which is now perfectly naturalized among us, was unknown before the discovery of America, to which quarter of the world it was indigenous. It is only in North America that they are found wild. They are there twice the size of our turkeys, and are frequently met with by hundreds in a flock. The savages hunt them with dogs, which for a time they far outstrip; but being soon run down, they take shelter in the tallest trees, where they are either knocked down with clubs or shot. Turkeys are furious among themselves, but extremely weak and timid among animals of a different species. Even the common cock generally makes the turkey keep his distance, yet the latter is insolent and vain, and, even when baffled, returns to his females strutting in all the pride of victory. The female lays about twenty eggs, and is assiduous in providing her young with insects, which they prefer to all other food.



THE GOLDEN PHEASANT.

THE extraordinary beauty of this bird has produced an attention to its propagation in the phezandries of Europe. The prevailing colours in its plumage are red, a golden yellow, and blue. Its head is adorned with long feathers of uncommon brilliancy, which it can raise at pleasure in the manner of a crest. The iris, bill, feet, and claws, are yellow; the tail, which is much longer in proportion than that of the common pheasant, is more variegated, and in general the plumage is more brilliant.

The hen of the golden pheasant is not quite so large as the male; her tail is shorter, the colours of her feathers are ordinary, and not so handsome as those of the common pheasant. She, however, in general becomes as beautiful as the cock. This change of colour takes place when she is about four years old, at which time the male begins to shew a dislike to her, and to abuse her.



THE SILVER PHEASANT.

THIS pheasant is of the size of the former, with a dusky yellow bill, from the base of which, along the upper part of the head, there is a curious crest of black feathers, which hang down the hinder part of the neck. The eyes are surrounded with a streak of white feathers, and that with a fine scarlet circle, speckled with a dark red: this is continued from the bill to the hinder part of the head. The back, neck, and wings, are white, interspersed with a few dark spots and shades; but the breast and under part of the belly are black, as well as the thighs, and the feet are scarlet, with black claws.

Of pheasants, which are not naturalized in this kingdom, but only kept in aviaries, there are many varieties; all eminently distinguished by their beauty and general elegance of form.



THE PINTADA.

THE pintada, or Guinea hen, is about the size of a common hen, but, being supported on longer legs, it looks much larger. The head is covered with a kind of helmet; the back is round; and the tail turned downward, like that of a partridge. The whole plumage is black, or dark grey, diversified with white spots; and the wattles, proceeding from the upper chap, give it a very peculiar aspect.

In many parts of Africa, these birds are seen in numerous flocks, feeding their young, or leading them in quest of food. All their habits resemble those of the poultry kind, and they agree in every other respect, except that the male and female can only be distinguished by the colour of their wattles; those of the cock being of a bluish cast, while in the hen they are more inclining to red. In our climate the females lay but five or six eggs in a season; but in their native regions they are far more prolific.



THE BUSTARD.

THIS bird is considerably larger than the turkey, the male generally weighing from twenty-five to twenty-seven pounds. They are found in Egypt, Greece, and Spain, and sometimes on the heaths of Sussex and Cambridgeshire. Their food consists of the berries that grow among the heath, and the large earth-worms that appear on the downs before sun-rising in summer. The female makes her nest upon the ground, by merely scraping a hole, and lining it with a little straw or long grass. She lays two eggs; and the young ones run about as soon as they are hatched.



THE QUAIL.

THIS bird is much smaller than any of the former, being not above half the size of the partridge. The feathers on the head are black, edged with rusty brown; the breast is of a yellowish red, spotted with black; and the plumage on the back is marked with lines of pale yellow. Its form is exactly that of the partridge; and it resembles the generality of the poultry kind in its nature and habits. Quails are almost universally diffused throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa; they are birds of passage, and are seen in immense flocks traversing the Mediterranean sea, from Europe to the shores of Africa, in the autumn, and returning again in the spring, frequently alighting in their passage on many of the islands of the Archipelago, which they almost cover with their numbers. The female makes her nest like the partridge, and lays to the number of six or seven eggs of a greyish colour, speckled with brown.



THE RAVEN.

THE raven is the largest of the crow kind. Its length is upwards of two feet, and the expansion of its wings more than four. The whole colour is a fine glossy black, tinged with blue, except on the belly, where it is dusky. This bird is found in every region of the globe, and is apparently uninfluenced by the changes of the weather. Sometimes, indeed, it is seen perfectly white, which may probably be the effect of the rigorous climates of the north; but in all situations it appears active and healthy. In a wild state the raven is a most voracious plunderer. It preys equally on the living and the dead. The raven generally builds a nest in trees, and lays five or six eggs at a time. It is not fond of the vicinity of towns, but prefers the most unfrequented places.



THE ROLLER.

THIS rare bird is distinguished by a plumage of most exquisite beauty; it vies with the parrot in an assemblage of the finest shades of blue and green, mixed with white, and heightened by the contrast of graver colours, from which perhaps it has been called the German parrot, although in every other respect it differs from that bird, and seems rather to claim affinity with the crow kind, to which we have made it an appendage. It is about the size of the jay. Its bill is black, sharp, and somewhat hooked. The head is of a sordid green, mingled with blue; of which colour is also the throat, with white lines in the middle of each feather; the breast and belly are of a pale blue, like those of a pigeon. This is the only species of its kind found in Europe. It is very common in some parts of Germany, but is extremely rare in this country.



THE HOOPOE.

THE length of this bird is twelve inches, and the breadth nineteen. The head is ornamented with a crest, consisting of a double row of feathers, of a pale orange colour, tipped with black, the highest about two inches in length; the neck is of a pale reddish brown; and the breast and belly are white. The female is said to have two or three broods in the year. She makes no nest, but lays her eggs in the hollow of a tree, and sometimes in a hole in a wall, or even on the ground. It is a solitary bird, two of them being seldom seen together. In Egypt, where they are very common, they are seen only in small flocks. It is found in various parts of Europe and Africa. The Swedes consider its appearance as ominous of war. In our own country, likewise, it was formerly deemed the harbinger of some calamity.



THE BIRD OF PARADISE.

THE bird of paradise has probably been so called, on account of its being generally seen on the wing, and flying in the tropic zone at a small distance from the land. Its appearance being most welcome to the tired sailor and longing passenger, generally causes much happiness by its foretelling the vicinity of Terra firma. The head, the throat, and the neck, are of a pale gold colour. The body and wings are chiefly covered with beautiful brown, purple, and gold feathers. But what chiefly excites curiosity are two long feathers, which spring from the upper part of the rump, and which are generally about three feet long.



MAGNIFICENT BIRD OF PARADISE

THIS bird is distinguished by two plumes of feathers, situated at the beginning of the neck behind. The two filaments of the tail are likewise another characteristic mark of this bird: they are about a foot long and one line in breadth, of a blue, changing to a bright green colour. Thus far they greatly resemble the filaments of the preceding species, but they differ in their form, terminating in a point, and having feathers only at the middle of the interior side. These birds are natives of the Molucca islands. They live in large flocks, and at night generally perch upon the same tree. They are called by some, the swallow of Ternate, from their being continually on the wing in pursuit of insects, their usual prey.



THE CUCKOO.

THIS singular bird is nearly of the size of a pigeon, shaped somewhat like a magpie, and distinguished from all other birds by its round prominent nostrils. The arrival of the cuckoo is considered, at least in this country, as the harbinger of spring. The note of this bird is so uniform, that its name in every language is derived from it. Neither here nor in other countries does it ever make a nest of its own; but deposits its eggs in that of some other bird, to which it leaves the care of hatching them, and rearing the young. A hedge-sparrow frequently officiates as nurse to the young cuckoos; and, when they are sufficiently fledged, they quit their foster-parent, to pursue their native propensities. What becomes of the family in winter is as little known as the retreat of the swallow. They probably migrate to warmer climates; for it is certain that they cannot exist during the winter in this country.



THE PARROT.

THE parrot is the best known among us of a foreign birds, as it unites the most beautiful plumage with the greatest docility. Their voice also is more like a man's than that of any other bird. They do not only articulate words, but also sing verses of songs, and their memory is astonishing. But their agreeable qualities are counterbalanced by the mischievous inclination they have to gnaw whatever they can reach. Parrots are very numerous in the East and West Indies, where they assemble in companies, like rooks, and build in the hollows of trees. The female lays two or three eggs, marked with little specks, like those of the partridge. They never breed in our climate, and yet live here to a great age. They feed on vegetables, but, when tamed, are fond of eggs.



THE COCKATOO.

THE cockatoo belongs to the same family of birds as the parrot; but is distinguished from them, and all others, by a beautiful crest, composed of a tuft of elegant feathers, which it can raise or depress at pleasure, giving it a most striking and fine appearance. We meet with some of a beautiful white plumage, and the inside feathers of the crest of a pleasing yellow colour, with a spot of the same under each eye, and one upon the breast. This bird often repeats the word from which it received its name, and, like the rest of the parrot kind, it is capable of uttering sea-phrases and sentences with equal propriety of tone and volubility. This bird, when angered, not only raises the crest, but the feathers on each side of the head. It is a native of the Molucca islands and other parts of the East Indies, where it is frequently known to build on the tops of houses.



THE MACAW.

THE macaw is the largest of the parrot kind, and painted with the finest colour Nature can bestow. The beak is uncommonly strong; and the tail is proportionally longer than that of any parrot. Its voice is fierce and tremendous, and seems to utter the word "Arara," which occasioned its going by that name in its native countries. The macaw of St. Domingo, and other islands in the West Indies, has the head, neck, belly, and upper part of the back, of a fiery red colour; and the wings are a mixture of yellow, blue, and crimson feathers. The tail is entirely red, and a foot and a half long. It lives upon seeds and fruits, and sometimes feeds upon machineel apples, which is a deadly poison to all other animals. The male and the female always keep together, and make a hole in a tree for the female to lay her eggs in, which they line with a few feathers. She only lays two eggs, about the size of those of a pigeon, and spotted like those of a partridge.



THE FIELDFARE.

THE fieldfare is a well-known bird in this country. The head is ash-coloured, and spotted with black; the back and coverts of the wings are of a chesnut colour. They are only visitants in England, making their appearance about the beginning of October in order to avoid the rigorous winters of the north, whence they sometimes come in great flocks, according to the severity of the season, and leave us about the latter end of February, or the beginning of March, and retire to Russia, Sweden, Norway, and as far as Siberia and Kamtschatka. During the winter they feed on the fruit of the hawthorn and other berries; they likewise eat worms, snails, and slugs. It is said to be one of the musical race in some countries: here, however, it does not entertain us with its melody.



THE STARLING.

THE length of this bird is somewhat less than nine inches. The bill is straight, sharp-pointed, and of a deep yellow; the whole plumage is dark, glossed with green, blue, purple, and copper, but each feather is marked at the end with a pale yellow spot. Few birds are more generally known than this, it being an inhabitant of almost every climate; and as it is a familiar bird, and easily trained in a state of captivity, its habits have been more frequently observed than those of most other birds. The female makes an artless nest in the hollows of trees, rocks, or old walls, and sometimes in cliffs overhanging the sea: she lays four or five eggs of a pale greenish ash colour: the young birds are of a dusky brown colour till the first moult. In the winter season these birds fly in vast flocks.



THE CANARY BIRD.

THIS bird is now become so common, and has continued so long in a domestic state, that its native habits, as well as its native country, seem almost forgotten. Though by the name it appears that these birds came originally from the Canary Islands, yet we have them only from Germany, where they are bred up in great numbers; and sold in different parts of Europe.

In its native islands, a region no less distinguished for the beauty of its landscapes than the harmony of its groves, this bird is of a dusky grey colour, and so different from those usually seen in Europe, that some have even doubted whether it be the same species. With us they have that variety of colouring usual in all domestic fowls; but they are more esteemed for their note than their beauty.



THE HUMMING BIRD.

THESE birds are found to vary in size from that of a small wren to that of a humble-bee, and consequently are the smallest of the feathered race. They live only in warm countries, as the East Indies and America, where the flowers are always growing. Their colours are more beautiful than can well be imagined; they are extremely brilliant and shining; many seem spangled with gold and precious stones; and some have little crests on their heads. At sun-rising the humming birds of different kinds flutter about the flowers, their wings moving very quickly, and continuing perpetually in motion. They fly like butterflies from flower to flower, and, with their little tongues, which are tubular and forked at the end, suck the honey, their only food. The time of brooding is twelve days, and the young are no larger than a great blue fly.



THE CRANE.

THIS is a tall, slender bird, of little elegance or beauty in its external appearance. They are very social birds, and seldom seen alone: they generally fly or sit in flocks of fifty or sixty together; and while a part feed, the rest stand like sentinels upon duty. They for the most part subsist upon vegetables; and are known in every country of Europe, except our own. As they are birds of passage, they are seen to depart and return regularly at those seasons when their provision invites or repels them. The young ones may be easily domesticated, which experience has proved.



THE STORK.

THE stork is a larger bird than the common heron but its neck is shorter and thicker. The head, neck, breast, belly, and tail, are white; and the rump and exterior feathers of the wings are black. Storks are birds of passage, as it is supposed although we cannot yet ascertain where they migrate. When leaving Europe, they assemble together on some particular day, and all take their flight at night. This is a fact, but what remains to be explained is, by what instinct or means they are convoked together. They feed on frogs, lizards, serpents, and other noxious creatures. The stork much resembles the crane in its conformation. The former lays four eggs, whereas the other lays but two.



THE BALEARIC CRANE.

THE balearic crane is nearly of the shape and size of the common crane, with long legs and a long neck, like others of the kind ; but the bill is shorter, and the colour of the feathers is of a dark greenish grey. On its head is a thick round crest, made of bristles, which spreads every way, and which resembles rays standing out in every different direction. This bird is a native of Africa and the Cape de Verd Islands. When they are disposed to rest, they search out some high wall, on which they perch in the manner of a peacock. Indeed, they so much resemble that bird in manners and disposition, that some have described them by the name of the sea-peacock.



THE SPOONBILL.

THE most remarkable peculiarity of this bird is its bill, from the shape of which it derives its appellation. This part is of a shining black colour, and has its upper surface waved with dotted protuberances. It is about the size of the crane, but not quite so tall. The common colour of those of Europe is a dirty white, but in America they are seen of a beautiful rose colour or a delightful crimson. It feeds among waters; its toes are divided; and it seems to possess the natural dispositions of the crane. The female lays from three to five eggs, and in Europe its nest is usually found in high trees, near that of the heron, and constructed of the same materials.



THE SHOVELER.

THE shoveler chiefly feeds upon frogs, toads, and serpents; of which, particularly at the Cape of Good Hope, they destroy great numbers: the inhabitants of that country hold them in as much esteem as the ancient Egyptians did the ibis: the shoveler runs tamely about their houses; and they are content with its society, as a useful though a homely companion. They are never killed; and indeed they are good for nothing when they are dead.

This bird breeds in Europe, in company with the heron, in high trees; and in a nest formed of the same materials. The inhabitants who claim the trees they build in, furnish themselves with a long pole hooked at the end, with which they shake out the young ones; but sometimes the nest and all tumble down together. It lays from three to five eggs; white, and powdered with a few sanguine or pale spots.



THE FLAMINGO.

THE flamingo is the tallest, largest, and most beautiful bird of the crane kind. The body, which is of a vivid scarlet, is about the size of that of a swan; but the legs and neck are of such extraordinary length, that, when it stands erect, it is upwards of six feet high. Its magnitude, its beauty, and the peculiar delicacy of its flesh when young have afforded so many incitements for its destruction, that it has long abandoned the shores frequented by man, and taken refuge where he seldom intrudes. The female lays about two eggs. The young ones are for a long time incapable of flying, but they are said to run with amazing celerity. They are chiefly found in America, and some parts of Africa.



THE PELICAN.

THE pelican is in bigness nearly equal to the swan; the colour of the body is white, inclining to a pink hue; the beak is straight and long, with a sharp hook at the end; the gullet or skin of the lower mandible is so capable of distension that it may be dilated so as to contain fish to a great weight, and, some say, fifteen quarts of water. The legs are black and the four toes palmated. It is a very indolent, inactive, and inelegant bird, that often sits whole days and nights on rocks or branches of trees, motionless and in a melancholy posture, till the resistless stimulus of hunger spurs it away. It is a native of Africa, and its flesh is coarse and ill-tasted. It is easily tamed, and does not seem to suffer much from the difference between its native climate and ours.



THE ALBATROSS.

THE albatross is one of the largest and most formidable of all the tribes of aquatic fowl. It abounds in the Southern Ocean, particularly about the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn. The body is large; and the wings, when extended, measure ten feet from tip to tip. The bill, which is six inches long, is yellowish, and terminates in a crooked point. The top of the head is of a bright brown, the back is darker, and the belly is white. It preys when on the wing, and devours not only a large quantity of fish, but also such water-fowl as it is able to take by surprise.

FINIS.