

XXXIX.—*On the Extinction in Europe of the Common Francolin* (*Francolinus vulgaris*, *Steph.*). By LORD LILFORD, F.L.S., F.Z.S.

THE game birds of Europe having always been objects of special interest to me as a sportsman, I have devoted a good deal of time and attention to the habits and history of the rarer species of that class; and my object in this paper is to throw together all the information that I have been able to collect about that most beautiful species the Common Francolin, which I have every reason to believe is now totally extinct in Europe. I notice that Dr. Bree, in his ‘Birds of Europe not observed in the British Isles’*, states that the Francolin *inhabits* the South of Europe, especially Sicily, Malta, Cyprus, Sardinia, Naples, the Grecian Archipelago, and Turkey. I propose to show that, with the exceptions of Cyprus (which can surely hardly be considered as part of Europe) and Turkey, which I take to include Asia Minor, the Francolin is no longer to be met with in any of the above localities. Let us begin with the first-named, Sicily. M. Malherbe’s account, quoted by Dr. Bree from the ‘Faune Ornithologique de la Sicile,’ is probably well known to most of the readers of ‘The Ibis’; but it is perhaps less generally known that this account is translated *verbatim* from the ‘Ornitologia Siciliana’† di Luigi Benoit, published at Messina, 1840. I have not visited the particular localities mentioned in that work as being at that time the head-quarters of the Francolin in Sicily; but after diligent inquiries in the island in 1856, amongst sportsmen, cacciatori, game-dealers, and others well acquainted with the bird, I could only arrive at the fact that not one had been seen alive, or freshly killed, during the ten previous years. A friend of mine who made a shooting expedition in 1858, in what were formerly the head-quarters of the Francolin, and who is well acquainted with the Black Partridge, as the Common Francolin is termed in India, told me that he saw several stuffed specimens in different places, but never saw one alive in Sicily, and that all the cacciatori agreed that the bird no longer existed in their shooting-grounds; although some of the veterans re-

* Vol. iii. p. 237.

† Ibid. p. 118.

membered it as formerly tolerably common, and gave a description of its habits, which exactly coincided with those of the Indian bird. The only Englishman, that I know, who has shot the Francolin in Sicily is W. S. Craig, Esq., now British Consul at Cagliari, who formerly passed several years in Sicily, but he only once met with the bird in a wild state there. That it was once common in the island there is no doubt. Olini, writing in 1622*, says, "In Sicilia vene son molti;" and gives a good figure of the female bird. Savi, who tells us that the Francolin was formerly very common in the preserves of the Tuscan princes, but is now quite extinct there, says,—"*Adesso vivono ed anche trovansi assai comunemente in Sicilia*"†: this was published in 1829. Temminck and Degland both give Sicily as a locality for the Francolin, the latter author writing in 1849. The above is all that I have been able to learn concerning the Francolin in Sicily, and I consider the fact of its extinction in that island to be well established. The only authorities I can find for the existence of this species in Malta (a most improbable locality) are Temminck and Schlegel, and I have no hesitation in stating that it does not exist there at the present moment. In Cyprus it is still tolerably common, and on careful comparison of specimens procured by Mr. Tristram, in the market at Larnaca, with some in my own possession from the Punjâb, I can discover no important difference. Temminck is the only authority for the existence of this species in Sardinia; and I can only say, after three visits to that island for the purpose of shooting, that not only have I never met with the bird alive or dead, but I have never been able to hear of its actual or former existence there. In support of this, I may state that Signor G. Cara says, in his useful little work on Sardinian Ornithology, under the head of "*Genus Perdix*," "*La prima sezione 'Francolino' manca fra noi.*"‡ This gentleman has often assured me that the Francolin had never, as far as he knew, been found in the island of Sardinia. There are several authorities for the former existence of the bird in the Neapolitan provinces; but I am assured that it was im-

* Uccellaria Romana, p. 33.

† Ornitologia Toscana, vol. ii. p. 189.

‡ Ornit. Sard. p. 106. Torino, 1842.

ported from Sicily, and strictly preserved in the royal domains, and that it is now quite extinct there. My brother, who has just returned from Italy, tells me that very few persons of whom he made inquiries had ever heard of a "Francolino;" and on one occasion a Goldfinch was brought to him, its possessor insisting that it was the only real, genuine, and indivisible Francolin. In the Grecian Archipelago I cannot discover that the species now exists, though it appears to have been common formerly in Mitylene, Samos, and Rhodes; but, again, are we to consider these islands as belonging to Europe? Turkey is so very wide a term that, till I know to what portion of that empire Dr. Bree refers, I will content myself with saying that the only part of European Turkey in which I can hear of Francolins within the memory of man is the shores of the Gulf of Salonica, and none are to be found there at present. I hope that Dr. Bree, if he does me the honour to read this paper, will perceive that the real question at issue between us is his authority for the use of the present tense of the verb "inhabit" as applied to the Francolin in Europe, and I shall be most happy if he, "or any other man," can prove that it still exists on our continent or its islands.

It is remarkable that neither Temminck, Degland, nor Schlegel should cite Spain as a locality for our bird, as, though now extinct in that country, it was formerly common in certain favourable localities, especially the neighbourhood of the Lake of Albufera, near Valencia: *vide* 'Catalogo de las Aves de la Albufera,' by Vidal, who, referring to the work published by Escolano, on the fauna of the province of Valencia, in 1722, says of the Francolin,—“Muy abundante en la Dehesa en tiempo de aquel escritor, no se encuentra ya en semejante localidad.” I saw specimens from the above-mentioned “Dehesa” (a sandy strip of land between the Lake of Albufera and the sea) in the Museum at Valencia in 1856, which had been killed many years previously; but during a long day spent in wandering about the shores of the Albufera, gun in hand, and after inquiries amongst the fishermen and cazadores of the place, I could only discover that, to use a Spanish proverb, the Francolins were “idos y muertos y no tienen amigos.” Olina, to whom I have before referred,

mentions the abundance of Francolins in Spain in his time, and tells us that they particularly affected plains overgrown with "ramerino e spigo." I have been assured that Francolins were common many years ago near Tangiers; but I may as well mention that I have heard the name of "Francolino" applied in different parts of Europe to the following birds—*Otis tetrao*, *Pterocles arenarius*, *Pterocles setarius*, *Perdix gambra*, *Lagopus alpinus*, and *Ædicnemus crepitans*; and I am by no means certain that the name is not occasionally applied to *Tetrao bonasia*. To revert to Barbary: I observe that a writer in 'The Field,' of May 3rd, 1862, includes "the Francolin, *Arabicè* Boozerat," in a list of the game of the district of Mogador and Saffi. Qu., is this our species? It is not included by Captain Loche in his catalogue of the birds of Algeria; and though it is mentioned by our old friend Olina as especially abundant in the neighbourhood of Tunis, I have every reason to believe it to be quite extinct in that regency. I may here mention that I met a gentleman in the Zoological Gardens at Marseilles (where there were several living Francolins from Syria), who assured me that he had once, and only once, met with and shot a pair of Francolins near Philippeville in Algeria. My own belief is, that the Ἀττάγας of Aristotle, Pliny, Celian, Varno, Aristophanes, and others, as quoted by Buffon*, was the Francolin, though the latter author is quite confused between his Attagas, or Attagen, and our *Tetrao scoticus*, which surely never existed in Egypt, Samos, Cyprus, and Barbary.

Having done my best to show where the Francolin is not to be met with, I may now state the very little I know as to where it is found. A friend, who killed many Francolins in the south of the island of Cyprus, told me that they were very abundant in the Vale of Maratassa, near Baffa (the ancient Paphos); that they are found in sandy spots with good cover, near streams and ponds; that they lie pretty close, and will keep running before a dog, at last springing perpendicularly into the air, with a great outcry, and darting off with a flight much like that of our common Partridge: he considers them easy to shoot, and most delicious food. The discrepancy between this latter statement and that of Captain Irby may, I think, be reconciled by bearing in mind that, as a rule, the hotter the climate the worse

* Oiseaux, vol. iii. p. 264.

the flesh, fish, and fowl. May not, therefore, the cook have had something to do with it? That the fathers did not agree with Captain Irby is abundantly proved. Olina quotes St. Jerome, who, rebuking some hypocrite's pretence of abstemious living, says, "Tu Attagenem eructas, et de comesto ansere gloriaris." Whilst I write, I receive a letter from a friend formerly resident at Naples, who tells me that, during six and a half years' constant shooting over the Terra di Lavoro, he never even heard the name of Francolino : he also says,—“Prince Piguatelli informed me that he once killed a Francolin near Palermo, about the beginning of this century ; and such was even then the rarity of the bird, that his having done so was considered an extraordinary exploit by all the cacciatori.”

Sicily has now fallen into the hands of Victor Emmanuel, who adds to his many other merits that of being a first-rate sportsman ; and as His Majesty is titular King of Cyprus, and, no doubt, possesses his proper influence with his brother of Turkey, let us hope that the Francolins may again be established in their former haunts in "*Trinacria*," and thence, by degrees, find their way into the preserves of Italy's best foreign friends, the gentlemen of England. I have no doubt whatever that they would thrive in many parts of Great Britain. There could be no great difficulty in importing them from Beyrout, in the neighbourhood of which town they are not uncommon (the Arabs take them with trained Goshawks); and I think I may venture to say that our Editor would give them a reception as warm as necessary in the Regent's Park. The Francolin is a bird in every way worthy of the attention of the Acclimatization Society ; and should they ever import any, and be at a loss for a home for them, I can only say that I should, at any time, be most happy to receive and give them every necessary attention. But I discover that I am advertising ; so I will merely add, that I shall feel much honoured if Dr. Bree will take up the amicable glove I have thrown down, and if he can prove the present existence of a Francolin in a wild state in any part of Europe (properly speaking), I shall retire from the field vanquished, but delighted. I am of a hopeful temperament, and I do not despair of seeing the day when Francolins shall be as common in England as Red-legged Partridges or Chinese Ring-necked Pheasants.



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