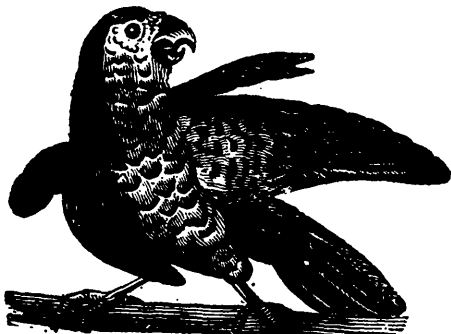


NATURAL HISTORY.



THE GYR-FALCON.

In size this bird exceeds all other falcons, for he approaches nearly to the magnitude of the eagle. He is courageous and fierce, nor fears even the eagle himself; but he chiefly flies at the stork, the heron and the crane. He is most found in the colder regions of the north, but loses neither his strength nor his courage when brought into milder climates.

Falconry, which is now so much disused among us, was the principal amusement of our ancestors. A person of rank scarcely stirred out without his hawk on his hand, which in old paintings is the criterion of mobility. The expense which attended this sport was very great; among the old Welch princes the king's falconer was the fourth officer in the state; but, notwithstanding all his honors, he was forbidden to take more than three draughts of beer from his horn, lest he should get drunk and neglect his duty. In the reign of James I. Sir Thomas Monson is said to have given a thousand pounds for a cast of hawks - and such was their value in general, that it was made felony in the reign of Edward III. to steal a hawk. To take its eggs, even in a person's own ground, was punishable with imprisonment for a year and a day, together with a fine at the king's pleasure.

Of many of the ancient falcons used for this purpose, we at this time know only the

names. Of those in use at present, both here and in other countries, are the gyrfalcon, the falcon, the lanner, the sacre, the hobby, the kestrel, and the merlin. These are called the long winged hawks, to distinguish them from the goss hawk, the sparrow hawk, the kite and the buzzard, that are of shorter wing, and either too slow, too cowardly, too indolent, or too obstinate, to be serviceable in falconry.

The common falcon is a bird of such spirit, that, like a conqueror in a country, he keeps all birds in awe and in subjection to his prowess. When he is seen flying wild, the birds of every kind fly with screams at his most distant appearance.

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