

three males, who seem earnestly contending for her favours. From the time of her appearance, till after the middle of summer, the nests of the birds selected to receive her egg are to be found in great abundance; but, like other migrating birds, she does not begin to lay till some weeks after her arrival. I never could procure an egg till after the middle of May, tho' probably an early coming cuckoo may produce one sooner.^a

The cuckoo makes choice of the nests of a variety of small birds. I have known its egg intrusted to the care of the hedge-sparrow, the water-wagtail, the tit lark, the yellow-hammer, the green-linet, and the winchat. Among these it generally selects the three former; but shews a much greater partiality to the hedge-sparrow than to any of the rest: therefore, for the purpose of avoiding confusion, this bird only, in the following account, will be considered as the foster-parent of the cuckoo, except in instances which are particularly specified.

The hedge-sparrow commonly takes up four or five days in laying her eggs. During this time (generally after she has laid one or two) the cuckoo contrives to deposit her egg among the rest, leaving the future care of it entirely to the hedge-sparrow. This intrusion often occasions some discomposure; for the old hedge-sparrow at intervals, whilst she is sitting, not unfrequently throws out some of her own eggs; and sometimes injures them in such a way that they become addle; so that it more frequently happens, that only two or three hedge-sparrow's eggs are hatched with the cuckoo's than otherwise; but whether this be the case or not, she sits the same length of time as if no foreign egg had been introduced, the cuckoo's egg requiring no longer incubation than her own. However, I have never seen an instance where the hedge-sparrow has either thrown out or injured the egg of the cuckoo.

When the hedge-sparrow has sat her usual time, and disengaged the young cuckoo and some of her own offspring from the shell,^b her own young ones, and any

of her eggs that remain unhatched, are soon turned out, the young cuckoo remaining possessor of the nest, and sole object of her future care. The young birds are not previously killed, nor are the eggs demolished; but all are left to perish together, either entangled about the bush which contains the nest, or lying on the ground under it.

The early fate of the young hedge sparrows is a circumstance that has been noticed by others, but attributed to wrong causes. A variety of conjectures have been formed upon it. Some have supposed the parent cuckoo to be the author of their destruction; while others, as erroneously, have pronounced them smothered by the disproportionate size of their fellow nestling. Now the cuckoo's egg being not much larger than the hedge-sparrow's (as I shall more fully point out hereafter) it necessarily follows, that at first there can be no great difference in the size of the birds just burst from the shell. (Of the fallacy of the former assertion also I was some years ago convinced, by having found that many cuckoo's eggs were hatched in the nests of other birds after the old cuckoo had disappeared; and by seeing the same fate attend the nestling sparrows as during the appearance of the old cuckoo in this country. But, before I proceed to the facts relating to the death of the young sparrows, it will be proper to lay before you some examples of the incubation of the egg, and the rearing of the young cuckoo; since even the well known fact, that this business is intrusted to the care of other birds, has been controverted by an author who has lately written on this subject; and since, as it is a fact so much out of the common course of nature, it may still probably be disbelieved by others.

Example I.

The Titlark is frequently selected by the cuckoo to take charge of its young one; but as it is a bird less familiar than many that I have mentioned, its nest is not so often discovered. I have, nevertheless, had several cuckoo's eggs brought to me that were found in titlarks nests; and had one opportunity of seeing a young cuckoo in the nest of this bird: I saw the old birds feed it repeatedly, and, to satisfy myself that they were really titlarks, shot them both; and found them to be so.

Example II.

A cuckoo laid her egg in a water-wagtail's nest in the thatch of an old cottage. The wagtail sat her usual time; and then

^a What is meant by an early-coming cuckoo, I shall more fully explain in a paper I intend to lay before you on the Migration of birds; but it may be necessary to mention here, that Migrating birds of the same species arrive in succession. Cuckoos, for example, appear in greater numbers on the second than on the first week of their arrival, and they disappear in the same gradual manner.

^b The young cuckoo is commonly hatched first,

^c The Hen, Daines Barrington.