

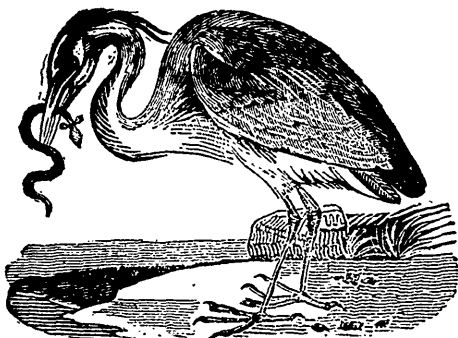
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NATURAL HISTORY.



THE COMMON HERON.

To enter into any description of the plumage of this bird is superfluous, as it is almost universally well known. By the lower orders it is most frequently denominated crane, although the latter is a totally different species, now extinct in Britain.

There is no bird better entitled "to claim the protection of the admirers of nature and picturesque scenery, from the striking efforts its presence can produce in the solitary haunts in which it delights, and where it is most commonly found" When seen, it is usually standing immovable in the shallows of rivers, on a stone on the edge of a pond, or on the bank recently deserted by the ebbing of the tide, its neck bent and drawn in between its shoulders, watching attentively the motions of its sinny prey, upon which, when once within its reach, it darts with unerring aim, transfixing it by a single stroke of its sharp bill. So motionless does the heron remain when watching for its prey, (its eye intently fixed

on the water below, eagerly seeking the slightest ripple on the surface, or other indication of the vicinity of its victim,) that it is not unfrequently taken for the stump or root of an old tree. So wary is it when fishing, that it is seldom or never seen with its back to the sun, by which a shadow would be thrown on the water, and affright the fish—but on the contrary, always places itself, when possible, in such an attitude that it resembles rather something inanimate.

Its food consists principally of fish, but it will eagerly devour frogs and other reptiles, and occasionally young water-rats and mice, &c.

A few years ago, when fishing on one of the small rivers in the county of Antrim, I was rather alarmed by one of these birds. The day was remarkably fine, and at the time I speak of, scarcely a cloud was to be seen; I was standing on the bank of the stream, shaded from the sun by a small planting, and was