

The Museum.

THE second volume of Mr. Darwin's great work on "The Descent of Man" relates chiefly to the interesting subject of sexual selection. He argues that the sexes have mutually a great influence on the development of each other. The desire of the males to please the females has produced among animals, and especially among birds, the superior beauty of the male; and his superior strength, size, courage, pugnacity, and his natural weapons, such as horns and spurs, are attributed to the same influence. Almost all male birds are extremely pugnacious, using their beaks, wings, and legs for fighting together. We see this every spring with our robins and sparrows. The smallest of all birds—namely, the humming-bird—is one of the most quarrelsome. Mr. Gosse describes a battle in which a pair of humming-birds seized hold of each other's beaks, and whirled round and round till they almost fell to the ground; and M. Montes de Oca, in speaking of another genus, says that two males rarely meet without a fierce aerial encounter. When kept in cages, "their fighting has mostly ended in the splitting of the tongue of one of the two, which then surely dies from being unable to feed." With waders, the males of the common water-hen, "when pairing, fight violently for the females; they stand nearly upright in the water, and strike with their feet." Two were seen to be thus engaged for half an hour, until one got hold of the head of the other, which would have been killed, had not the observer interfered; the female all the time looking on as a quiet spectator. The

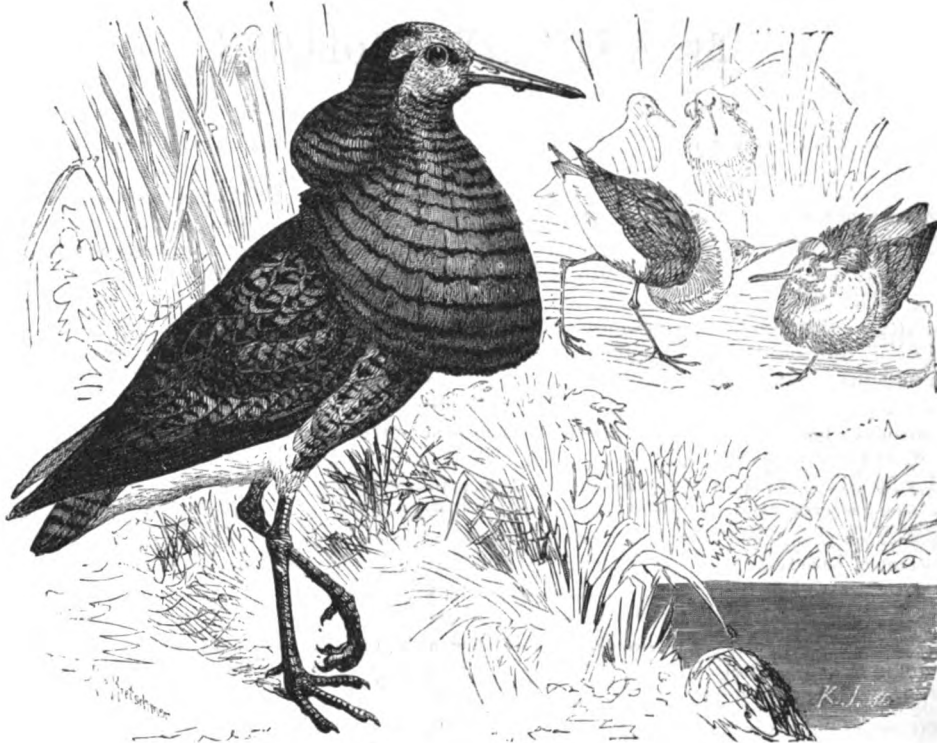
males of an allied bird (*Gallinax cristatus*) are one-third larger than the females, and are so pugnacious during the breeding-season that they are kept by the natives of Eastern Bengal for the sake of fighting. Various other birds are kept in India for the same purpose—for instance, the bulbuls, which “fight with great spirit.”

The polygamous ruff, of which we give an illustration, is notorious for his extreme pugnacity; and in the spring the males, which are considerably larger than the females, congregate day after day at a particular spot, where the females propose to lay their eggs. The fowlers discover these spots by the turf being

trampled somewhat bare. Here they fight very much like game-cocks, seizing each other with their beaks, and striking with their wings. The great ruff of feathers round the neck is

then erected, and, according to Colonel Montagu, “sweeps the ground as a shield to defend the more tender parts;” and this is the only instance known, in the

case of birds, of any structure serving as a shield. The ruff of feathers, however, from its varied and rich colors, probably serves in chief part as an ornament. Like most pugnacious birds, they seem always ready to fight, and, when closely confined, often kill each other; but Montagu observed that their pugnacity becomes greater during the spring, when the long feathers on their necks are fully developed, and at this period the least movement by any one bird provokes a general battle.



The Ruff or Macnetes Pugnax (from Brehm's "Thierleben.")

CONTENTS OF NO. 107, APRIL 15, 1871.

A NIGHT SCENE ON THE HUDSON. (Illustration.).....	PAGE 421	UNDERSONG. By L. Bruce Moore.....	PAGE 441
MORTON HOUSE: Chapters IX. and X. By the author of "Vale- rie Aylmer.".....	422	TABLE-TALK.....	442
THE DUCHESS DE BERRI. From the German.....	427	LITERARY NOTES.....	443
JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER. (With Portrait.) By R. H. Stod- dard.....	431	SCIENTIFIC NOTES.....	443
THE SCENERY OF THE MOON. (Illustrated.) By Charles B. Boyle..	434	FOREIGN ITEMS.....	444
OUR BOY. By A. Jones.....	440	MISCELLANY.....	445
SUPPLEMENT.....		VARIETIES.....	447
		THE MUSEUM. (Illustrated.).....	447
		“Ralph the Heir.” By Anthony Trollope.	

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