

*A Letter from Mr. Ray, Fellow of the R. S. to
Dr. Robinson ; concerning the French Macreuse.*

Sir,

I Had no sooner seen the Cases of the Male, and Female *Macreuse*, which you sent me, but instantly I found that the *Macreuse* was no stranger to me, though unknown by that name: I was very much pleased to be so suddenly rid of my long continued scruples about it, and not a little surprized, when I found it to be another kind of Bird then I imagined; a particular description of the Cock, you may find in Mr. *Willughby's Ornithology* pag. 366. of the English Edition, among the Sea-Ducks, to which kind this Bird belongs, and not to the *Divers* or *Duckers* (*Mergi* or *Colymbi*.) as I falsely fancied to my self. The first knowledge of this Bird, we had from Mr. *Jessop*, who sent us the skins of this among others stuf, from *Sheffield* in *Yorkshire*, by the name of *Scoter* as it seems they call it thereabouts; whether from the dark or black colour of it, or (which is more likely,) from *Scotland*, whence they might suppose it to come. Afterwards the Cock of this kind was found in the Market at *Chester*, by the then Bishop *Wilkin's* his Steward, who bought it; and brought it home to the Pallace, where I then hapned to be, and saw and described it. Last of all Sr. *Thomas Brown* of *Norwich*, sent among many others, the picture of this Duck; and Mr. *Johnson* of *Brignal* near *Greta Bridge* in *Yorkshire* the Description, as I have related in the Book, and Page fore-quoted. I need not tell you how I distinguish the Sea-Ducks from the shallow or Plash-Ducks, because I have done it already in the place mentioned.

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Mr.

Mr. *Graindorge's* Description, which you sent me a Breviat of from *Paris*, I find upon attent reading and comparing with the case of the Bird, and mine own Description, to be very faithfull, and sufficient to lead into the knowledge of it, one, that had not been prepossessed with a strong opinion, that it was of another kind: had there been but one word added, that it was of the *Duck-kind*, I should then presently have apprehended what Bird it was; and yet there was enough in the Description to determine its *Genus*, at least to exclude it from those of the *Mergi* and *Colymbi*, and that was, that it had a flat bill, a note common to no other Birds that I know of, but the Goose and Duck-kinds. Notwithstanding what he saith of the debility of its feet, unfit for walking on land, I see not but that it may march as well as the rest of its kind, all which have but short and weak legs in proportion to the Bulk of their bodys, and those also situate very backward. What he saith of the smallness and weakness of the Wings, and shortness of their feathers, is common to many Sea-fowl, *viz.* the *Tridactyle* and *Mergi*, which yet by the nimble agitation of them, fly very swiftly and strongly. What he saith of the mobility of the upper mandible of the Jaw, I shall not be too hasty to believe, as in a former letter, I remember to have written to you.

Now though this Bird hapned to be known to me by another name, yet it is so rare and uncommon, that I take it not to have been described by any that have written the History of Birds before; though (as I remember,) the name of *Macreuse* is mentioned by *Gesner* or *Aldrovand*, or both; why they of the Church of *Rome*, should allow this Bird to be eaten in Lent, and upon other fasting days, more then others of this kind, but especially the *Tridactyle*, I see no reason; the flesh of these last, which live only or chiefly by preying upon fish properly so called, tasting stronger of fish, then that of any Duck,
which

which feed upon shell fish; many Birds of the Duck-kind, which (as I said,) all feed partly at least upon shell-fish (as Monsieur *Graindorge* found the *Macreuse* also to do,) have a delicate and well tasted flesh, as for example, the common Mallard and Teal: whereas the flesh of all those kinds that feed wholly or chiefly upon fish properly so called, is of a Rank, ferine and piscose taste, as for example, that of the Soland Goose, the English Puffin; and those of the tridactylous kind, so that only the young ones of those kinds are admitted to our Table. I observed in this Bird, and in some others of the Sea-Ducks that are much under water, that they want that Vessel or *Ampulla* situate in the very Angle of the divarication of the Wind-pipe, which for want of a better and fitter name, we are wont to call the *Labyrinth* of the *Trachea*; which though being common also to the *Colymbi*, which of all Birds dive most, and continue longest under water, we may very probably from thence conclude, that the *Labyrinth* doth not serve them for a Reservoir of *Air*, to enable them to continue the longer under water, as I sometimes conjectured; but for the intending and modulating of the Voice, seeing in the Plash-Duck, the females want it: but I am somewhat to seek about the use of this Vessel, and I think it were worth the while, to examine what sorts of Birds have it, what want it; whether the Males only, or in some the females also. I observed it in the *Mergus cirratus longiroster major* or the *Dun-diver*, and that very large, and extended by very strong bones, and yet I thought my self to have sufficient reason to Judge that bird to be the female of the *Merganser*: but I dare not be confident that it is a female because of this *Labyrinth*.

And now because I am writing of Birds, I propose it to your Consideration, whether that sort of Bird mentioned by the learned Dr. *Plot*, to be often heard in *Woodstock Park* (from the noise it makes commonly called the

Woodcracker,) be not the lesser sort of *Picus Martius Varius*, for since the publishing of Mr. *Willughby's Ornithology*, I have observed that Bird sitting on the top of an Oaken Tree, making with her Bill such a cracking or snapping noise, as we heard a long way off; the severall snaps or cracks succeeding one another with that extraordinary swiftness, that we could not but wonder at it: but how she made the noise, whether by the nimble Agitation of her bill too and fro in a rift of the bough, or by the swift striking of the Mandibles one against another, as the Stork doth, I could not clearly discern: but an intelligent Gentleman, who was very diligent in observing the same Bird, said it was the former way.

I am

Sir, Your Very

Humble Servant

JOHN RAY.