



ICELAND GULL.
Larus Islandicus, (Edmonstone.)

Drawn from Nature & coloured by J. & E. Gould.

Printed by C. Macmillan.

ICELAND GULL.

Larus Islandicus, Edmonston.

Larus glaucoïdes, Temm.

La Mouette d'Icelande.

THE occurrence of this beautiful species of Gull on our coast is more frequent than is generally supposed; but it appears to have escaped observation in consequence of its close resemblance to the *Larus glaucus*, which resemblance is even more striking in the young birds, and it is seldom that any but immature birds of either species are captured in any of the temperate portions of Europe.

The northern regions constitute the native habitat of this Gull, whence it is driven southward by the extreme severity of the weather; the young, as is usually the case in migratory birds, wandering to the greatest distance from home. Considerable confusion, it would appear, has existed respecting the nomenclature of this species, but this has been so carefully cleared up by Mr. Selby, that we have taken the liberty of quoting in full his observations. "In Mr. Edmonston's first notice of the *Glaucous Gull*, under the name of *Larus Islandicus*, a suspicion is started, from the difference of size existing between individuals of the newly observed kind, that there might be two species, having such a relation to each other as that between the Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*L. marinus* and *L. fuscus*). This upon further investigation was found to be actually the case; and some interesting remarks upon the new species, by the same gentleman, were afterwards published in the latter part of the fourth volume of the Wernerian Society's Memoirs, where he has appropriated to it the specific title of *Islandicus*, having then ascertained that the larger species previously noticed, and to which he had applied the term, was already recorded, and generally known by the name of *Larus glaucus*. In point of priority, therefore, this name ought to be adopted for the present species, in preference to that of *Larus arcticus* given to it by Mr. Macgillivray, or that of *L. leucopterus*, under which it is described by Richardson and Swainson in the Fauna Boreali-Americana, and by the Prince of Musignano in his Synopsis. Captain Sabine in his memoir on the Birds of Greenland, in the twelfth volume of the Linnean Transactions, has described the same bird under the title of *Larus argentatus*, and this in deference to the opinion of M. Temminck, who at that time considered it as a variety of the *Herring Gull*, occasioned by the rigours of a polar climate. The fact, however, of the true *L. argentatus* having been found with its characteristic markings unchanged in those regions, together with the perfect and undeviating whiteness of the wings of the other bird, and the difference of proportions, observable in the bills of the two species, might justly have made the former author hesitate, before yielding even to the authority of a naturalist so deservedly eminent. The present species, in all its states of plumage from adolescence to maturity, bears the closest resemblance to the Glaucous Gull, and can only be distinguished by its striking inferiority of size, and by the greater length of its wings, which reach, when closed, upwards of an inch beyond the end of the tail; whereas in the other bird they scarcely reach that part. Like its prototype it is a winter visitant to the Shetland Isles and the northern parts of Scotland, and a few occasionally stray as far southward as the Northumbrian coast, where I have obtained three or four specimens, but all in the immature plumage. Its habits are stated by Mr. Edmonston to be more lively than those of the Glaucous Gull, and it displays more elegance of form. It is a common species in the arctic regions, and is mentioned by Sabine and Richardson as being plentiful in Baffin's Bay, Davis's Straits, and Melville Island. It is also common on the Iceland coast, to which it is probable many of those that winter with us, and in similar latitudes, retire to breed. It feeds upon fish, the flesh of whales, and other carrion, and when upon our shores is sometimes seen in company with the Black-backed Gull."

In summer the adults have the head, neck, tail, and under surface pure white; the mantle and wing-coverts pale grey; the shafts and tips of the quills pure white; bill pale reddish flesh-colour at the base, and black at the tip; feet pale flesh-colour; irides pale yellowish grey.

In winter the head and neck are streaked with grey.

The young have the entire plumage pale yellowish grey barred and mottled with pale brown; the quills greyish white tinged with brown; and the tail dull brown marbled with white.

We have figured an adult male rather less than the natural size.



Gould, John. 1837. "Iceland Gull. *Larus Islandicus*, Edm. La Mouette d'Icelande. [Pl. 433]." *The Birds of Europe* 5, <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.317617>.

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