



LARUS ISLANDICUS, Edm.

John W. Wood del. & lith.

W. Wood sculp.



# LARUS ISLANDICUS, *Edm.*

## Iceland Gull.

- Larus leucopterus*, Faber, Prodr. isl. Orn., p. 91.  
—— *argentatus*, Sabine, Trans. Linn. Soc., vol. xii. p. 546.  
—— *glaucoides*, Temm.  
—— *islandicus*, Edmondst. Trans. Wern. Soc., vol. iv. p. 500.  
—— *arcticus*, Macg. Trans. Wern. Soc., vol. v. p. 268.  
—— *minor*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 736.
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ACCORDING to the law of priority, now so generally followed by naturalists, I ought not to have adopted Edmonston's name of *islandicus* for this species, inasmuch as that of *leucopterus* had long previously been assigned to it by Faber; but this latter term being equally descriptive of the white-winged *Larus glaucus*, it appeared to me so inappropriate that I did not feel justified in employing it. The Glaucous and the Iceland Gull are in all particulars so much alike, except in size, that one description would serve for both. What the Lesser Black-backed Gull is to the Greater, such is the present bird to the Glaucous. This circumstance has not failed to call forth remarks from some of the authors who have written on the genus *Larus*, questioning the propriety of separating them; still, I imagine, there is scarcely a living ornithologist who would think of regarding the Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls as the same, or the Glaucous and the Iceland species as identical. In a state of nature they have never been known to mix or breed with each other, although they frequent similar latitudes and countries. The white-winged Gulls are the Arctic representatives of the more southerly Black-backed Gulls. In winter, when the severity of the weather in Baffin's Bay and other polar regions is at its height, the white-winged birds beat a retreat to the shores of the British Islands; and hence at that season all four of the birds above-mentioned may be found in our seas, and in some instances intermingle for a short time.

As regards the habits and economy of the Iceland Gull, what has been written respecting those of the preceding species (*Larus glaucus*) is equally descriptive of those of the present bird, save and except that the larger and stronger bird will prey upon living animals of a larger size than his weakly congener. From what we have been able to gather on their nidification and the number and colouring of their eggs, a great similarity exists; and in the changes of plumage between youth and maturity they are as nearly identical as possible.

"The present species," says Selby, "in all its stages 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 they scarcely reach that part. Like its prototype it is a winter visitant to the Shetland Isles and the northern part of Scotland; and a few stray as far as the Northumberland coast, where I have obtained three or four specimens, but all in the immature plumage. Its habits are stated by Edmonston to be more lively and active than those of the Glaucous Gull; and it displays more elegance of form. It is common on the Iceland coast, to which, it is probable, many of those who winter with us and in similar latitudes retire to breed. It feeds upon fish, the flesh of whales, and other carrion."

The only remark I need make on the above passage is that, upon the authority of Professor Newton, the Iceland Gull does not appear to breed in Iceland, but is a winter visitant, only arriving, according to Faber, towards the end of September, and mostly leaving by the end of April; and I may add that it migrates much further south than the shores of Northumberland. Mr. Rodd speaks of a very fine nearly adult example which was obtained on the Scilly Islands; and there are many other recorded instances of its having been procured in various parts of England.

Mr. R. Gray thus writes respecting this bird in his 'Birds of the West of Scotland':—"Although the Iceland Gull is by no means a common bird on our Scottish coasts, it has been frequently met with both on the eastern and western shores. From Shetland to Berwickshire immature birds are seen or killed almost every winter; and the same may be said of its appearance from the coast of Skye to the south of Ayrshire. The late Mr. Thompson mentions, in his 'Birds of Ireland,' that he had procured two specimens from Ballantrae, on the borders of Wigtownshire, where they are seen every winter, and that his friend, Mr. Sinclair, had also seen six or eight of these birds in the Island of Arran. The species, indeed, appears to be a regular visitor to the Clyde and the shores of Ayrshire, as I have observed it for years in succession

near Girvan. The keeper on Ailsa Craig has seen three or four at a time frequenting that rock : they were of indolent habits, in the day-time especially ; but late in the afternoon they set out seawards, returning to their quarters unseen after dark. This was at a time before all the other seafowl had congregated ; consequently the keeper was attracted to them as strangers, and as having *no black tips to their wings*. Frequently, at the gloaming, I have seen what I believed to be a pair of these birds hovering over the water of Girvan, about a mile from the sea, and dipping their bills into the river as if picking up small fry.

“Mr. Elwes informs me that the Iceland Gull is a rare winter visitor to Islay ; but I have not heard of its occurrence at any time on the outer islands.”

The White-winged Silvery Gull : I find the following note about this bird in ‘Ornithological Biography,’ Audubon, vol. iii. p. 553 :—“I have not met with this species further south than the Bay of New York. During the winter it is not rare about Boston and further eastward. At the approach of summer, before the pairing of the Herring-Gull (*Larus argentatus*), the White-winged Gulls collect in flocks, and set out for the distant north, where they breed.

“The flight of this species so much resembles that of the Herring-Gull, that, were it not for its smaller size and the different colour of its wings, it could not be distinguished from the other. It is less shy, however, proceeds further up the rivers and salt-water creeks, and alights oftener on the water, as well as on the salt meadows, than that species. While at Portland, in Maine, I observed a good number of these Gulls flying over the inner harbour close to the shores, descending towards the water, and picking up garbage in the manner of the Herring-Gulls, with which they associated. Their notes were not so loud, nor so often heard.

“I was surprised to find but very few on the coast of Labrador ; and these did not seem to be breeding ; for although we carefully watched them, we did not succeed in finding any nests.”

The principal figure in the accompanying Plate is about two thirds of the natural size.





Gould, John. 1873. "Iceland Gull, *Larus islandicus* [Pl. 58]." *The birds of Great Britain* 5, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324102>.

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