

# THE IBIS.

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## NINTH SERIES.

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No. XVII. JANUARY 1911.

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I.—*Nine Days on Grimsey and the North-east Coast of Iceland.* By MARY, DUCHESS OF BEDFORD, F.L.S., F.Z.S., H.M.B.O.U.

(Text-figures 1-4.)

HAVING heard that the Island of Grimsey was of interest to ornithologists, I decided to visit it in my yacht this summer (1910).

Though the time at my disposal was far too short to enable me to make any specially valuable contribution to what is already known of the birds of that island, the observations made during my brief visit may be of sufficient interest to be worth placing on record.

I embarked at Invergordon. Twelve hours brought me to Fair Isle, where I had spent such an extremely interesting time during the spring migration. But that island boasts of few resident birds, and I saw nothing of interest in an hour's walk except some White Wagtails, which were evidently breeding there again.

A few hours were also spent at Balta Sound and the Faroe Isles, but time did not allow of any bird-watching.

I left the Faroe Isles at 6 P.M. on the 6th of July. The voyage was uneventful, except for coming across a dead whale surrounded by hundreds of Fulmars, and for being delayed



by fog for twelve hours when we ought to have been in sight of Iceland. I afterwards noticed that during the whole of my visit this heavy belt of fog lay some miles off the north and east coasts of Iceland when the coast itself was in bright sunshine. I am of opinion that could we have gone nearer land on arrival we should have run through the fog which delayed us, but the risk of such a proceeding was too great.

There are very few birds out at sea at this time of year. Puffins were the first to shew us that we were approaching land, then Fulmars, Arctic Skuas, Arctic Terns, and Kittiwakes.

I spent a few hours at an anchorage at the entrance to Seydisfjord, and left for Grimsey at 9 P.M.

Early the following morning we were off Langanes Point, the extreme north-east point of the mainland, and had a beautifully clear view of the snow-covered mountains of Northern Iceland.

We reached the Island of Grimsey at noon on July 10th. Fortunately the wind was E.N.E., an ideal one for this anchorage. Grimsey is about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles long and 1 mile wide at the broadest part. The highest cliffs are on the north and east coasts. A narrow promontory slopes almost down to sea-level on the extreme N.W., and I imagine that a landing could be effected there in a S.E. wind. The chief landing-places are on the S.W. and W., and in the absence of a swell are perfectly easy, but on the E. and N.E. of the island landing could only be effected with the assistance of a rope. The ground is very undulating and covered with the hummocks so characteristic of Northern Iceland (see text-fig. 1, p. 3).

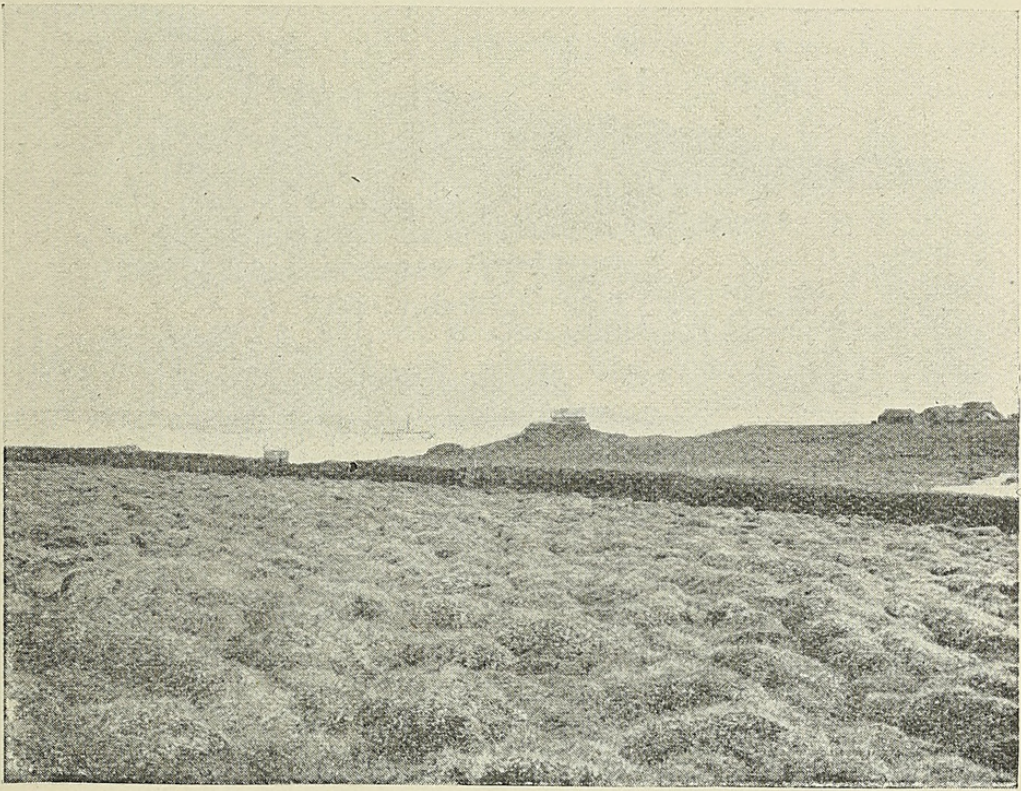
There are a number of small freshwater lochs, which should be a great attraction to passing migrants. At the time of my visit snow was still lying in drifts on the shore, but it had melted on the higher ground.

The first birds that I saw on arrival were Snow-Buntings. They are as tame and as common round the houses in Grimsey as the House-Sparrow is at home. I found one nest with



eggs in it, but most of the young birds were able to fly. Hundreds of Arctic Terns were breeding all over the island and I found both nests and eggs. Eider-Ducks were very abundant and tame. A great many of them had taken their families down to the sea, but some were still sitting, and one of the first inhabitants I spoke to was collecting down. The natives are on such good terms with the birds that they can stroke them on their nests.

Text-fig. 1.



Bird's-eye view of Grimsey, shewing typical hummocky ground.

Every little tarn is inhabited by at least one pair of Red-necked Phalaropes and often by three or four pairs.

The White Wagtail was breeding there, as I saw both adults and young birds. Dunlins and Ringed Plovers in pairs also frequented these small lochs. Unfortunately during the first day of my visit there was very thick fog, which prevented my seeing twenty yards ahead of me, but my sense of smell always told me when I was approaching the cliffs. Practically the whole of the coast-line is the resort



of thousands of sea-birds in the breeding-season, even the lower cliffs, which are easily accessible and in some places little more than banks, are tenanted by them. Fulmars, Razorbills, Black Guillemots, Kittiwakes, and Brünnich's Guillemots are the most numerous. The last are easily distinguished from their more southern relatives by the light line at the edge of the upper mandible and their blacker colour.

Text-fig. 2.



Breeding-place of the Little Auk.

In two places at least on the S.E. and S.W. of the island, where the cliffs are much lower and there are large boulders on the shore, there are breeding-places of the Little Auk. The birds look like miniature Razorbills in flight. They are much shyer than the Puffins, and, if once disturbed, it is a long time before they will settle again even if the observer remains hidden. I do not think there can be many breeding on the island, as I watched them for a long time and never saw more than six flying at one moment, and each time that I returned to the same place I saw the same number of



birds. They may have been concealed beneath the boulders, but I doubt whether they would be sitting so closely in the middle of July.

There were a great many Purple Sandpipers on the island, but, though I met with parties of them some distance from the shore, I could not see any which looked like young birds, nor did they seem to be paired. Amongst the rocks on the shore were a few Turnstones, and in a little bay a pair of Grey Phalaropes. I saw these beautiful little birds repeatedly during my visit and regretted that I could not afford the time to watch them and ascertain whether they were nesting. As, however, they were a pair and never left the bay in which I first noticed them, I think it is more than likely that at this date (July 10th) they were not passing visitors.

On the high ground Golden Plovers and Meadow-Pipits were breeding, as I found nests of both.

I also saw two male Teal on a loch, a pair of Mallards and a pair of Ravens on the cliffs. The Great Skua, Arctic Skua, Gannet, and Great Black-backed Gull were the only other birds noted during my visit.

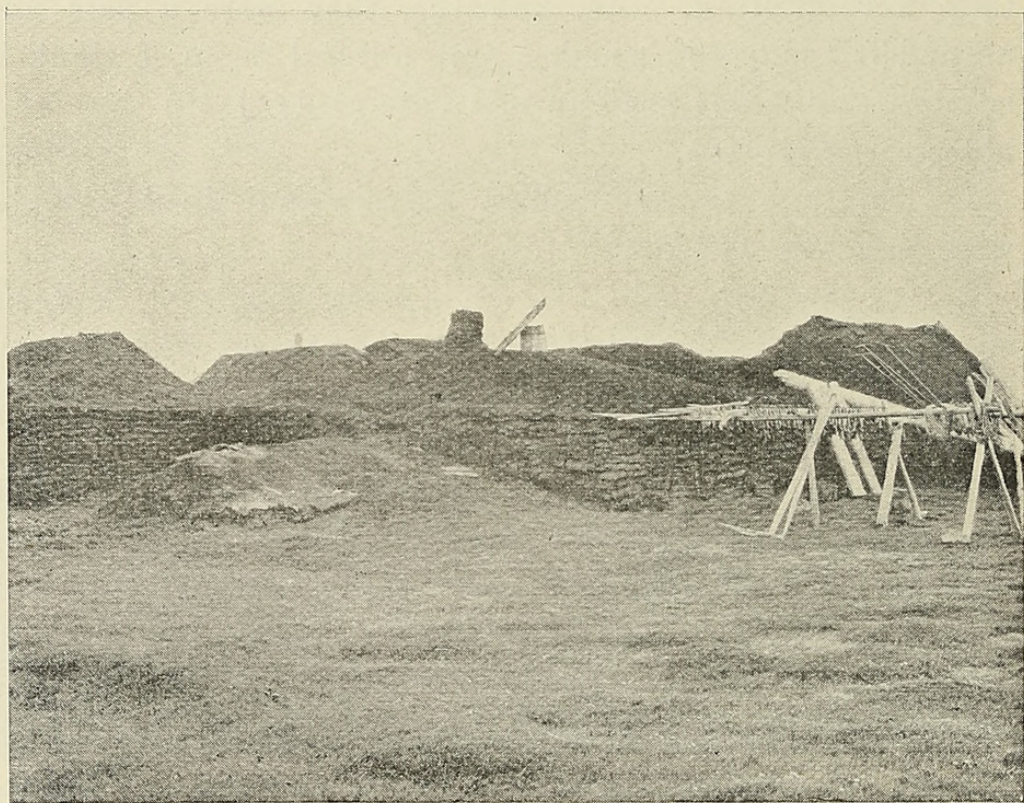
The whole island is covered with short grass and moss, and the inhabitants have no crops of any description. There are about fifteen inhabited houses, and I estimate that each contains an average of not less than six inmates. The people have a good many sheep, seven cows, and three ponies. There are two or three wooden houses, but most of them are made of turf. A few large stones are mixed with the turf, for the foundations, and the front of the main entrance is generally made of wood. I was invited into one of them, the entrance-passage of which was so dark that I had to feel my way. Probably for the sake of warmth this passage turned at right angles, and a door led into the principal living-room. It was lined with wood and was almost filled by four wooden box beds, on which was piled a great deal of disorderly bedding. The room, however, was clean, and so were the inhabitants, more or less. The remaining rooms, a pantry and what might be called by courtesy a kitchen and storeroom combined, were made entirely of turf. On the floor was lying



the prospective dinner of Puffins and Razorbills. In the outside larder, a construction of poles which appears in the photograph (text-fig. 3), was hung a supply of dried fish and mutton, the odour of which accompanied me some distance after leaving the house.

Though they bolt like rabbits into their houses on the approach of a stranger and are very shy when first spoken to, the inhabitants soon become very friendly and talkative when the ice is broken.

Text-fig. 3.



Huts on Grimsey.

There are no dogs on the island. I gathered that they had been put down, owing to a fatal complaint with which they had been wont to infect their owners. There is excellent sea-fishing.

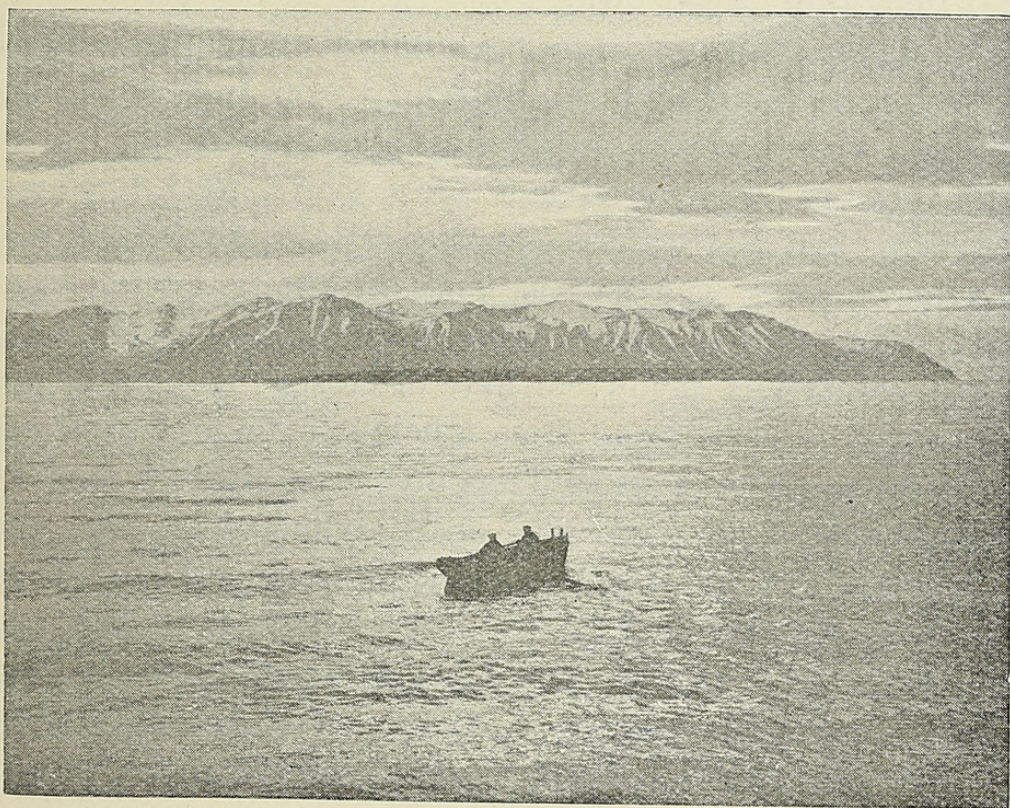
As the wind changed in the night and blew from the S.W. I was compelled to leave Grimsey after a visit of forty-eight hours, and went over to an anchorage in Eyjafjord (text-fig. 4). On a loch not far from the anchorage I saw Scaup with



young and three pairs of Slavonian Grebes. One of these birds appeared to be sitting on a nest in the grass at the edge of the loch, but the water was too deep for me to make certain.

Farther up the valley I came upon a large tract of marshy ground which was teeming with wildfowl. There were a great many Scaups and Wigeons with young, large flocks of Teal, a few Mallards, Dunlins, Red-throated Divers, Red-shanks, and, I think it would be no exaggeration to say,

Text-fig. 4.



Eyjafjord,

hundreds of Red-necked Phalaropes. I also saw two Long-tailed Ducks. On the high ground above the marsh were numbers of Whimbrel, Golden Plovers, a few Ringed Plovers, and many Wheatears. I should have said (judging from my experience in Fair Isle) that the Wheatears certainly did *not* belong to the larger race, but as I did not shoot any I am unable to prove it.



As the promontory at the extreme N.E. of Iceland promised to be interesting ground for the bird-watcher, I went next to an anchorage on the south side of it. Close to the anchorage, and separated from the sea by a bank of shingle not fifty yards wide, was a freshwater loch, on which I saw many Great Northern and Red-throated Divers, the former with young. The Eider-Duck was more abundant than in any other place that I have visited. I saw one female a long distance from any other birds with twenty-four young ones, but I think she must have been the superintendent of an Eider-Duck crèche, as I cannot believe that they were all her own.

I have often wondered why the minds of people accustomed to watch birds should be so much exercised over the problem of how young ducks which are hatched in a nest high above the water are taken down to it. Walking on a cliff here above the sea, I accidentally scattered an Eider-Duck and her brood. The mother took to flight and the little ones, which were in down, rolled over the edge on to rocks some seventy feet below. I have often seen little birds fall into water or on to grass from a height with impunity, but as these had fallen on to boulders and sharp rocks, I thought their chance of survival was small. On looking over the cliff, however, I saw them pick themselves up as if nothing had happened and run towards their mother in the sea. She obviously expected them to be alive, as she was calling loudly. Evidently they are so light and well protected by down that a voyage in an aeroplane would have no terrors for them.

I was much interested in seeing several Little Auks at this place. Grimsey is said to be their most southern breeding-place; but these birds were always flying about the part of the shore where there were boulders similar to those under which they nest in that island, and though I never saw them settle, it is rather strange that they should have been here on the 14th of July unless they were nesting.

A chain of lochs and low swampy ground extends across



the peninsula, and on one of the former I saw a flock of ten Whooper Swans and a Goosander with young. Great numbers of Dunlins and Golden Plovers frequented the stony ground above the lochs. The melancholy "wheep" of the latter became almost wearisome, but seemed in keeping with the desolate region in which they lived. Houses were few and far between, and there were no tracks, but the direction from one farm to another was marked by large cairns. These cairns, however, are so far apart that I did not find them very helpful in a fog, and deviation from the right path was only ascertained by landing in an impassable bog. I came upon a breeding-place of the Purple Sand-piper. The birds were seen singly or in pairs, and they fluttered round me with trailing wing trying to draw me away whilst I searched for nests or young. In Slater's 'Birds of Iceland,' the author says that he has never met with their nests lower than 1200 to 1500 feet above the sea, but the birds which I saw here were breeding at certainly less than 200 feet above sea-level. Red-necked Phalaropes were plentiful on the shore of Thistilfjord, and I also saw White Wagtails and Snow-Buntings with young. On a hill overlooking the anchorage I found some Rock-Ptarmigan.

As low, flat, marshy ground is often the best field for the ornithologist, I was attracted by the appearance of Heradsfloi on the chart and made this my next anchorage.

I arrived there at 8 p.m. on the 15th of July and went on shore after dinner. A more weird spot I have never been in. A stretch of land 13 to 15 miles wide and extending far inland is entirely composed of black sandy lava, the alluvial deposit of two large rivers. If the charts are to be believed (in these regions we find that they are often untrustworthy), the course of these rivers is at times well defined, but at the date of my visit, probably owing to melting snow, they had widened out into a great lake. Nothing grows on this vast expanse of sandy lava except a very coarse grass, which here and there has managed to get a hold and forms a small mound. Walking in the soft sand was a Herculean labour, and landing on the shore was attended



with much difficulty owing to the surf, though the sea was very calm. On the loch were great flocks of Red-throated Divers. I counted 69 in front of me, and there were twice that number in the distance. Very striking also was the number of Arctic Skuas, and amongst them were several Great Skuas. As many as a dozen would sit within gunshot of me at one moment. The only other inhabitants of this dreary waste were a few Great Black-backed Gulls and hundreds of Arctic Terns, on the proceeds of whose fishing the Skuas probably lived.

The following morning I landed again, hoping to explore further, but, though there was no wind, the swell had increased, and after taking a few photographs I was compelled to leave. The dinghey was half filled with water and nearly upset, but we got off with the loss of an oar, and I was sorry that the fear of rising wind deterred me from further exploring this remarkable place. The only bird added to my list of the previous evening was the Great northern Diver.

After a visit to a whaling-station I left Iceland.

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II.—*On Birds from the Northern Portion of the Malay Peninsula, including the Islands of Langkawi and Terutau; with Notes on other rare Malayan Species from the Southern Districts.* By HERBERT C. ROBINSON, C.M.Z.S., M.B.O.U., Director of Museums, Federated Malay States, and CECIL BODEN KLOSS, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U., Curator, Perak State Museum.

[Concluded from 'The Ibis,' 1910, p. 675.]

(Plate I. and Text-figs. 5 & 6.)

#### RALLIDÆ.

##### 12. RALLINA SUPERCILIARIS.

*Rallina superciliaris* (Eyton); Sharpe, Cat. Birds Brit. Mus. xxiii. p. 76 (1894).

Distinctly rare in the Peninsula and not improbably





Bedford, Mary Duchess Of. 1911. "I.– Nine Days on Grimsey and the North-east Coast of Iceland." *Ibis* 5(1), 1–10.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1474-919x.1911.tb03301.x>.

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