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BAR-TAILED GODWIT.

Limosa rufa, *Briss.*

La Barge rousse.

NOTWITHSTANDING multitudes of this bird visit our island during their vernal and autumnal migrations, we possess no authenticated instance of its having remained and bred with us, nor even, indeed, is the colour of its eggs satisfactorily ascertained. Like many others of the same tribe, they appear to make our island a resting-place during their periodical flights only: we should observe, however, that a limited number sojourn with us during the winter, the number being increased in spring by large flocks which have wandered further southwards; the whole then return to their northern home. That Iceland, Lapland, and the regions within the arctic circle are the summer abode of the Bar-tailed Godwit, is a fact not to be questioned; and from thence they retire in autumn divested of that richly coloured livery with which they are adorned at their departure from the South in spring. Large flocks of the young also pass over at the time of the arrival of the adults, or soon after: these are the progeny of the past summer, and are to be distinguished by a more spotted and streaky plumage, and by their having the feathers of the whole of the upper surface margined with a lighter colour; the breast is then of a dull fawn yellow strongly streaked with brown.

With regard to the adult birds, few species present a more decided contrast in the colours of their summer and winter plumage; from which circumstance has arisen much confusion and a perplexing list of synonyms in the works of various writers; indeed, both the males and the females, as well as the young, have been characterized as distinct species, nor was it until very lately that these errors were corrected.

The places most frequented by the Bar-tailed Godwit during its residence in our island are the low muddy shores of the sea, the borders of creeks and inlets, saline marshes along the coast, and the mouths of large rivers: here, with other Waders, they may be observed in small flocks busily searching for their food, which consists of aquatic insects, worms, and mollusca. They run with great facility over the oozy ground, and fly, when roused, to a considerable distance, uttering as they rise on the wing a hoarse deep note. Their visits to the Continental districts take place at the same time as in our island. In Holland and the level parts of France, which afford them a congenial residence, they abound much more than in England, and, like the Black-tailed Godwit, are annually killed in great numbers and forwarded to the London markets.

Both sexes assume the red plumage in spring, but it is much deeper and more conspicuous in the male: the female is, however, considerably larger in size, as we have seen is the case with its near ally and many others of its family.

In summer the crown of the head and back of the neck are rufous, streaked longitudinally with blackish brown; the whole of the upper surface blackish brown mottled with rufous; quills dark brown; throat and under surface deep rufous; rump white; tail barred with reddish white and black; feet and legs dark olive; bill reddish yellow at the base and dark brown at the point.

All the parts which are red in summer are greyish white in winter, and the dark markings of the upper surface are exchanged for more obscure tints of brown.

The Plate represents two birds, one in the summer and the other in the winter plumage, of the natural size.



Gould, John. 1837. "Bar-tailed Godwit. *Limosa rufa*, Briss. La Barge rousse. [Pl. 306]." *The Birds of Europe* 4, <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.317488>.

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