THE YELLOWSHANK TATLER.

+TOTANUS FLAVIPES, *Lath.*

PLATE CCCXLIV.—MALE.

The Yellowshank is much more abundant in the interior, or to the westward of the Alleghany Mountains than along our Atlantic coast, although it is also met with in the whole extent of the latter, from Florida to Maine. It exceeds the Tell-tale Godwit in numbers on the shores of the Ohio, as well as on the margins of the numerous ponds and lakes in the vicinity of the Mississippi, from the mouth of the river just mentioned to New Orleans, and beyond that city southward. In early autumn, when the sand-bars of the Ohio are left uncovered, these active birds are seen upon them in small flocks, formed each apparently of a single family, busily employed in searching for food, and wading in the water up to the feathered part of their legs. When the water is high, they resort to ponds and damp meadows intersected by small rivulets. In the Carolinas and the Floridas they are pretty numerous, in the former betaking themselves to the rice-fields, and in the latter to the wet savannahs. They are equally fond of frequenting the shores of our estuaries that are bordered by salt marshes, on the muddy edges of which they find their food. I have also met with them on the margins of clear streams in the interior of the States, and indeed should hardly be able to mention a district in which the species is not to be seen, from the beginning of September until May, when the greater number retire northward, although some remain and breed, even in our Middle States, as NUTTALL says they are seen in the neighbourhood of Boston in the middle of June. I found a few on the coast of Labrador, but did not succeed in discovering their nests, which was the more surprising as these birds, according to my friend THOMAS MACCULLOCH, breed in considerable numbers about Pictou. He describes the nest as placed among the grass on the edges of the rivers and large ponds of the interior.

The flight of the Yellowshank is very similar to that of the Tell-tale Godwit. They generally run to some distance before they take to wing, stop as if to discover your intention, vibrate their body backwards and forwards, intimate by their cries the knowledge they have of the nature of the weapon you carry, and, as if convinced that you are bent on mischief, spring up, rise obliquely to some height, emit louder notes, and with continued flappings

pass around you, or remove to some distant place. Their long yellow legs, which are stretched out behind, are quite conspicuous when they are on wing. Should you bring one to the ground wounded, it walks off leisurely, vibrates its body, and emits plaintive cries; and should one fall into the water under similar circumstances, it paddles its way towards the nearest shore with considerable speed. If you approach it, it may immerse its head, but it cannot dive to any depth.

In very dry weather, I have observed this species on the uplands searching for grasshoppers and insects. It has been alleged that when one is wounded, its companions hover around so as to be easily shot; but this I have never observed, for although they are perhaps less shy than the Tell-tales, on such occasions, I never found one of them to remain; they seemed, on the contrary, to be well aware of the danger, and would fly quite out of sight, rising high in the air, and pursuing a direct course, emitting cries at intervals.

Along the shores of the sea, they are now and then seen in company with other species, although they cannot be said actually to associate with them. In autumn they become fat, and by many are considered good eating, although they always have a kind of fishy taste not at all agreeable to my palate. Their food consists of diminutive fishes, shrimps, worms, and aquatic insects.

I have represented one of these birds on the fore ground of a little piece of water a few miles distant from Charleston in South Carolina, on the borders of which, in the company of my kind friend JOHN BACHMAN and others, I have spent many a pleasant hour, while resting after fatiguing rambles in the surrounding woods.

YELLOWSHANKS SNIPE, *Scolopax flavipes*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. vii. p. 55.

TOTANUS FLAVIPES, Bonap. Syn., p. 324.

TOTANUS FLAVIPES, *Yellowshanks Tatler*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 390.

YELLOWSHANKS TATLER, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 152.

YELLOWSHANK, *Totanus flavipes*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 573; vol. v. p. 586.

Male, $10\frac{3}{4}$, 20.

From Texas to Maine, in autumn and spring. Very abundant at the same seasons throughout the interior. Breeds in the Fur Countries, up to the highest northern latitudes.

Adult Male in summer.

Bill a little longer than the head, very slender, sub-cylindrical, straight, flexible, compressed at the base, the point rather depressed and obtuse. Upper mandible with the dorsal line straight, the ridge convex, broader at the base, slightly depressed towards the end, the sides sloping, towards the

end convex, the edges soft and obtuse, the tip slightly deflected. Nasal groove long and narrow, extending to a little beyond the middle of the bill; nostrils basal, linear, pervious. Lower mandible with the angle very long and extremely narrow, the dorsal line straight, the sides convex, with a slight groove in their basal half.

Head small, oblong, anteriorly narrowed. Eyes large. Neck rather long and slender. Body slender. Feet very long, slender; tibia bare for half its length, scutellate before and behind; tarsus also scutellate before and behind; hind toe very small and elevated; fore toes of moderate length, very slender, connected at the base by webs, of which the outer is much larger; second or inner toe considerably shorter than fourth, third longest; all scutellate above, flat and marginate beneath. Claws small, slightly arched, much compressed, obtuse, that of middle toe much larger, with the inner edge enlarged.

Plumage very soft, blended, on the fore part of the head very short. Wings long, narrow, pointed; primaries narrow and tapering, first longest, second a little shorter, the rest rapidly graduated; secondaries short, broad, incurved, obliquely rounded, the inner elongated and tapering. Tail short, rounded, of twelve rounded feathers.

Bill black. Iris dark brown; edges of eyelids dark grey. Feet bright yellow, claws brownish-black. Upper part of the head, lores, cheeks, neck, and sides of the neck deep brownish-grey, the edges of the feathers greyish-white; a white line from the bill to the eye and over it; upper part of throat white; fore-neck greyish-white, streaked with brownish-grey, as are the sides, the rest of the lower parts white, the lower tail-coverts slightly marked with grey. The general colour of the back and scapulars is olivaceous-brown, tinged with grey, the feathers edged with small dusky and white spots. The wing-coverts and inner secondary quills are similar, the marginal spots on the latter forming bands; primary quills blackish-brown, the shaft of the outer brownish-white, of the rest dark brown, the edges of the inner, and of the middle secondaries white; hind part of back grey, upper tail-coverts white, the larger obscurely barred with grey.

Length to end of tail $10\frac{3}{8}$ inches, to end of wings $11\frac{2}{12}$, to end of claws $13\frac{2}{12}$, extent of wings 20; wing from flexure $6\frac{9}{12}$; tail $2\frac{1}{2}$; bill along the back $1\frac{5}{12}$, along the edge of lower mandible $1\frac{5}{12}$; bare part of tibia $1\frac{4}{12}$; tarsus $1\frac{11}{12}$; middle toe $1\frac{2}{12}$, its claw $\frac{2\frac{1}{2}}{12}$. Weight $2\frac{1}{2}$ oz.

Two series of papillæ on the anterior part of the roof of the mouth. Tongue $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, emarginate and papillate at the base, as deep as broad, channelled above, tapering to a narrow but obtuse horny point. Œsophagus $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, 3 twelfths in width; proventriculus $3\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths. Stomach rather small, elliptical, 8 twelfths long, 6 twelfths broad; the lateral muscles rather strong; epithelium dense, rather thin, with numerous longi-

tudinal rugæ, and of a dark red colour. Intestine 18 inches long, its greatest width in the duodenal part $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths, the smallest toward the rectum 1 twelfth. Cæca 1 inch 2 twelfths long, 1 twelfth wide, $1\frac{1}{3}$ inches distant from the extremity. Cloaca obovate, 5 twelfths in width. Trachea 3 inches 2 twelfths in length, from $2\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths to $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in width; rings 130, extremely narrow, and cartilaginous. Bronchial half rings. Muscles as in the last species.

TELL-TALE GODWIT.—TELL-TALE TATLER.

†TOTANUS VOCIFERUS, *Wils.*

PLATE CCCXLV.—MALE AND FEMALE IN WINTER.

It is my opinion that they who have given so much importance to the cry of this bird, as to believe it to be mainly instrumental in ensuring the safety of other species, and in particular of Ducks, have called in the aid of their imagination to increase the interest of what requires no such illustration. A person unacquainted with this Godwit would believe, on reading its history as recorded in books, that the safety of these birds depends on the friendly warning of their long-billed and long-tongued neighbour. And yet it is at no season more noisy or more vigilant than the Kildeer Plover, nor ever half so much so as the Semipalmated species, the reiterated vociferations of which are so annoying. It is true that the Tell-tale is quite loquacious enough; nay, you, reader, and I, may admit that it is a cunning and watchful bird, ever willing to admonish you or me, or any other person whom it may observe advancing towards it with no good intent, that it has all along watched us. But then, when one has observed the habits of this bird for a considerable time, in different situations, and when no other feathered creatures are in sight, he will be convinced that the Tell-tale merely intends by its cries to preserve itself, and not generously to warn others of their danger. So you may safely banish from your mind the apprehension, which the reading of books may have caused, that duck-shooting in the marshes of our Middle Districts, is as hopeless a pursuit as “a wild goose chase.”

The Tell-tale Godwit has a great range in the United States, where, in-

6 P.

Yellow-crowned Night Heron.
Male, Summer Plumage.
VIEW IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Yellowshank Tatler, Totanus flavipes, Lath. [Pl. 344]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 5, 313–316. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319457>.

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