THE LONG-BILLED CURLEW.

+NUMENIUS LONGIROSTRIS, *Wils.*

PLATE CCCLV.—MALE AND FEMALE.

The Long-billed Curlew is a constant resident in the southern districts of the United States, whereas the other species are only autumnal and winter visitors. It is well known by the inhabitants of Charleston that it breeds on the islands on the coast of South Carolina; and my friend the Reverend JOHN BACHMAN has been at their breeding grounds. That some individuals go far north to breed, is possible enough, but we have no authentic account of such an occurrence, although many *suppositions* have been recorded. All that I have to say on this subject is, that the bird in question is quite unknown in the Magdeleine Islands, where, notwithstanding the assertions of the fishermen, they acknowledged that they had mistaken Godwits for Curlews. In Newfoundland, I met with a well-informed English gentleman, who had resided in that island upwards of twenty years, and described the Common Curlew of Europe with accuracy, but who assured me that he had observed only two species of Curlew there, one about the size of the Whimbrel—the *Numenius hudsonicus*, the other smaller—the *N. borealis*, and that only in August and the beginning of September, when they spend a few days in that country, feed on berries, and then retire southward. Mr. JONES of Labrador, and his brother-in-law, who is a Scotch gentleman, a scholar, and a sportsman, gave me the same account. None of my party observed an individual of the species in the course of our three months' stay in the country, although we saw great numbers of the true Esquimaux Curlew, *N. borealis*. Yet I would not have you to suppose that I do not give credit to the reports of some travellers, who have said that the Long-billed Curlew is found in the fur countries during summer. This may be true enough; but none of the great northern travellers, such as RICHARDSON, ROSS, PARRY, or FRANKLIN, have asserted this as a fact. Therefore if the bird of which I speak has been seen far north, it was in all probability a few stragglers that had perhaps been enticed to follow some other species. I am well aware of the propensity it has to ramble, as I have shot some in Missouri, Indiana, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Mississippi; but the birds thus obtained were rare in those districts, where the species only appears at remote periods; and in

every instance of the kind I have found the individuals much less shy than usual, and apparently more perplexed than frightened by the sight of man.

Until my learned friend, Prince CHARLES BONAPARTE, corrected the errors which had been made respecting the Curlews of North America, hardly one of these birds was known from another by any naturalist, American or European. To WILSON, however, is due the merit of having first published an account of the Long-billed Curlew as a species distinct from the Common Curlew of Europe.

This bird is the largest of the genus found in North America. The great length of its bill is of itself sufficient to distinguish it from every other. The bill, however, in all the species, differs greatly, according to the age of the individual, and in the present Curlew I have seen it in some birds nearly three inches shorter than in others, although all were full grown. In many of its habits, the Long-billed Curlew is closely allied to the smaller species of Ibis; its flight and manner of feeding are similar, and it has the same number of eggs. Unlike the Ibis, however, which always breeds on trees, and forms a large nest, the Curlew breeds on the ground, forming a scanty receptacle for its eggs; yet, according to my friend BACHMAN, the latter, like the former, places its nests "so close together, that it is almost impossible for a man to walk between them, without injuring the eggs."

The Long-billed Curlew spends the day in the sea-marshes, from which it returns at the approach of night, to the sandy beaches of the sea-shores, where it rests until dawn. As the sun sinks beneath the horizon, the Curlews rise from their feeding-grounds in small parties, seldom exceeding fifteen or twenty, and more usually composed of only five or six individuals. The flocks enlarge, however, as they proceed, and in the course of an hour or so the number of birds that collect in the place selected for their nightly retreat sometimes amounts to several thousands. As it was my good fortune to witness their departures and arrivals, in the company of my friend BACHMAN, I will here describe them.

Accompanied by several friends, I left Charleston one beautiful morning, the 10th of November, 1831, with a view to visit Cole's Island, about twenty miles distant. Our crew was good, and although our pilot knew but little of the cuttings in and out of the numerous inlets and channels in our way, we reached the island about noon. After shooting various birds, examining the island, and depositing our provisions in a small summer habitation then untenanted, we separated; some of the servants went off to fish, others to gather oysters, and the gunners placed themselves in readiness for the arrival of the Curlews. The sun at length sunk beneath the water-line that here formed the horizon; and we saw the birds making their first appearance. They were in small parties of two, three, or five, and by no means shy. These

seemed to be the birds which we had observed near the salt-marshes, as we were on our way. As the twilight became darker the number of Curlews increased, and the flocks approached in quicker succession, until they appeared to form a continuous procession, moving not in lines, one after another, but in an extended mass, and with considerable regularity, at a height of not more than thirty yards, the individuals being a few feet apart. Not a single note or cry was heard as they advanced. They moved for ten or more yards with regular flappings, and then sailed for a few seconds, as is invariably the mode of flight of this species, their long bills and legs stretched out to their full extent. They flew directly towards their place of rest, called the "Bird Banks," and were seen to alight without performing any of the evolutions which they exhibit when at their feeding-places, for they had not been disturbed that season. But when we followed them to the Bird Banks, which are sandy islands of small extent, the moment they saw us land, the congregated flocks, probably amounting to several thousand individuals all standing close together, rose at once, performed a few evolutions in perfect silence, and re-alighted as if with one accord on the extreme margins of the sand-bank close to tremendous breakers. It was now dark, and we left the place, although some flocks were still arriving. The next morning we returned a little before day; but again as we landed, they all rose a few yards in the air, separated into numerous parties, and dispersing in various directions, flew off towards their feeding-grounds, keeping low over the waters, until they reached the shores, when they ascended to the height of about a hundred yards, and soon disappeared.

Now, reader, allow me to say a few words respecting our lodgings. Fish, fowl, and oysters had been procured in abundance; and besides these delicacies, we had taken with us from Charleston some steaks of beef, and a sufficiency of good beverage. But we had no cook, save your humble servant. A blazing fire warmed and lighted our only apartment. The oysters and fish were thrown on the hot embers; the steaks we stuck on sticks in front of them; and ere long every one felt perfectly contented. It is true we had forgotten to bring salt with us; but I soon proved to my merry companions that hunters can find a good substitute in their powder-flasks. Our salt on this occasion was gunpowder, as it has been with me many a time; and to our keen appetites, the steaks thus salted were quite as savoury as any of us ever found the best cooked at home. Our fingers and mouths, no doubt, bore marks of the "villanous saltpetre," or rather of the charcoal with which it was mixed, for plates or forks we had none; but this only increased our mirth. Supper over, we spread out our blankets on the log floor, extended ourselves on them with our feet towards the fire, and our arms under our heads for pillows. I need not tell you how soundly we slept.

The Long-billed Curlews are in general easily shot, but take a good charge. So long as life remains in them, they skulk off among the thickest plants, remaining perfectly silent. Should they fall on the water, they swim towards the shore. The birds that may have been in company with a wounded one fly off uttering a few loud whistling notes. In this respect, the species differs from all the others, which commonly remain and fly about you. When on land, they are extremely wary; and unless the plants are high, and you can conceal yourself from them, it is very difficult to get near enough. Some one of the flock, acting as sentinel, raises his wings, as if about to fly, and sounds a note of alarm, on which they all raise their wings, close them again, give over feeding, and watch all your motions. At times a single step made by you beyond a certain distance is quite enough to raise them, and the moment it takes place, they all scream and fly off. You need not follow the flock. The best mode of shooting them is to watch their course for several evenings in succession; for after having chosen a resting place, they are sure to return to it by the same route, until greatly annoyed.

The food of the Long-billed Curlews consists principally of the small crabs called fiddlers, which they seize by running after them, or by pulling them out of their burrows. They probe the wet sand to the full length of their bill, in quest of sea-worms and other animals. They are also fond of small salt-water shell-fish, insects, and worms of any kind; but I have never seen them searching for berries on elevated lands, as the Esquimaux Curlews are wont to do. Their flesh is by no means so delicate as that of the species just mentioned, for it has usually a fishy taste, and is rarely tender, although many persons consider it good. They are sold at all seasons in the markets of Charleston, at about twenty-five cents the pair.

Rambling birds of this species are sometimes seen as far as the neighbourhood of Boston; for my learned friend THOMAS NUTTALL says in his Manual, that "they get so remarkably fat, at times, as to burst the skin in falling to the ground, and are then superior in flavour to almost any other game bird of the season. In the market of Boston, they are seen as early as the 8th of August." I found them rare in East Florida in winter and spring. They were there seen either on large savannahs, or along the sea-shore, mixed with marbled Godwits, Tell-tales, and other species.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW, *Numenius longirostris*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. viii. p. 23.

NUMENIUS LONGIROSTRIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 314.

NUMENIUS LONGIROSTRIS, *Long-billed Curlew*, Swains. and Rich. F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 376.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 94.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW, *Numenius longirostris*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 240; vol. v. p. 587.

Male, 26, 40.

Resident, and breeds in Texas and on the islands off South Carolina. Stragglers go far north. Columbia river. Occasionally seen in the interior.

Adult Male.

Bill excessively elongated, being more than four times the length of head, very slender, sub-cylindrical, slightly compressed, nearly straight to the middle, beyond which it is slightly curved. Upper mandible with the ridge broad and flat at the base, broad and rounded in the rest of its extent, a deep groove running from the nostrils to near the tip, which is decurved, enlarged so as to form an oblong obtuse knob, projecting beyond the point of the lower mandible, the edges rounded, the inner surface with a deep narrow groove. Nostrils basal, lateral, longitudinal, linear, pervious. Lower mandible similar in its curvature to the upper, its angle extremely narrow, and extending to near the middle, the ridge rounded, the sides with a shallow groove to near the end, the edges directly meeting those of the upper mandible, the tip obtuse.

Head rather small, oblong, compressed. Neck long and slender. Body rather slender. Feet long and rather stout. Toes rather small, scutellate above; first very small, second and fourth about equal, third considerably longer, flat beneath and broadly marginate, the three anterior connected by short webs, of which the outer is much larger. Bare part of tibia covered with transverse series of angular scales, as is the upper part of the tarsus, its lower two-thirds with scutella in front. Claws small, compressed, blunt, that of middle toe largest, curved outwards, with a sharp dilated inner edge.

Plumage soft and blended, on the fore part of the head very short. Wings long, very acute, narrow, the first quill longest, the second a little shorter, the rest rapidly graduated; secondaries of moderate length, slightly incurved, narrowly rounded, some of the inner greatly elongated and tapering. Tail short, much rounded, of twelve rounded feathers.

Upper mandible of a rich deep brown in its whole extent, as is the lower in its terminal half, its basal portion being flesh-colour, tinged with brown. Iris hazel. Feet light greyish-blue; claws dusky. The ground colour of the plumage is light yellowish-red; the head marked with oblong spots, the back with spots and bars of brownish-black. Alula and outer webs of first four quills deep brown, the rest of the quills of the general colour, barred on both webs with dark brown, as are the tail feathers. Chin or upper part of throat white, as is the lower eyelid; neck marked with longitudinal lines of brownish-black; sides barred with the same, as are the lower larger wing-coverts; the rest of the lower parts unspotted, the sides and under wing-coverts of a richer yellowish-red than the rest.

Length to end of tail 26 inches, to end of wings 25, to end of claws 29;

extent of wings 40; wing from flexure $11\frac{1}{2}$; tail $4\frac{1}{4}$; bill along the back $8\frac{1}{2}$; along the edge of lower mandible 8; bare part of tibia 2; tarsus $3\frac{7}{12}$; middle toe $1\frac{10}{12}$, its claw $\frac{3}{12}$. Weight $1\frac{3}{4}$ lbs.

Adult Female.

The female cannot be distinguished from the male by external appearance.

The bill varies in length from 7 to 9 inches. It has been remarked that the tarsus of this species is scutellate anteriorly in its whole length, whereas that of *N. arquata* is scutellate on its lower half only; but this is incorrect; for both species have transverse series of small scales on the upper third of the tarsus.

The two palatal ridges meeting anteriorly to the aperture of the nares form an elevated line in the middle, running all the way to the tip of the upper mandible, and the lower mandible has a median groove; both are internally formed by two inclined planes, which leave a vacant space when the bill is closed. The tongue is very small, triangular, narrow, flat above, pointed, horny beneath; its base sagittate and papillate; its length only 1 inch 2 twelfths, whereas that of the bill, from the opening to the tip, is 8 inches. The width of the mouth is 10 twelfths. The œsophagus, *a b c*, is $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, of the nearly uniform width of 7 twelfths, contracting to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch within the thorax; but the proventriculus, *b c*, expanded to 9 twelfths; at the top, however, it is funnel-shaped, where its greatest width at the hyoid bone is 1 inch. The stomach, *c d e f*, is a large and very strong gizzard, of a roundish or transversely elliptical form, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in breadth; its

lateral muscles very strong, the left 9 twelfths thick, the right 1 inch; the lower muscle very prominent; the tendons large and strong; the epithelium very thick, with broad longitudinal rugæ. The proventricular glands are oblong, forming a belt 9 twelfths in breadth. The contents of the stomach are remains of crustacea. The intestine, *f g h i j k*, which is $39\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 5 twelfths in width in the duodenal portion, *f g h*, 3 twelfths toward the middle, curves in the usual manner at the distance of $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, passes forward as far as the proventriculus, then turns backward to near the cloaca along the right side, again forward, backward, forward, backward, and lastly forward to above the tip of the heart, where it ends in the rectum, and sends off the cœca; the rectum is 5 twelfths long, opening by a very small aperture into a globular cloaca, *j k*, 1 inch in diameter. The cœca, *l m*, which come off at the distance of 3 inches from the extremity, are 4 inches long, $1\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths in width for $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches, then from 1 twelfth to 3 twelfths, being enlarged and contracted at intervals, the tip for $\frac{1}{2}$ inch only $\frac{3}{4}$ twelfth in width. The lobes of the liver are very unequal; the left lies beneath the proventriculus and the anterior part of the gizzard, under the lower edge of which it sends a long thin process; the right lobe is very much larger, narrow, and passes under the whole length of the stomach.

Trachea 6 inches 2 twelfths long, a little flattened, from $3\frac{1}{2}$ twelfths to $2\frac{1}{4}$ twelfths in breadth; its rings firm, 120 in number, with 2 dimidiate rings. Bronchi rather wide, of 18 half rings. Lateral muscles strong; a single pair of inferior laryngeal muscles going to the last half ring.

Dimensions of two male individuals, killed on the 26th of April, 1837, at Galveston.

Length to end of tail $20\frac{1}{4}$, $20\frac{3}{4}$ inches, to end of wings the same; to end of claws 24, $29\frac{1}{2}$; extent of wings $36\frac{3}{4}$, $38\frac{1}{2}$; weight 1 lb. 1 oz., 1 lb. 9 oz.

Long-billed Curlew
1. Male 2. Female
CITY OF CHARLESTON.

Drawn from Nature by J. Audubon F.R.S. F.L.S.

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