THE HUDSONIAN CURLEW.

†NUMENIUS HUDSONICUS, *Lath.*

PLATE CCCLVI.—MALE.

The habits of this species, which until a few years ago was always confounded with the Esquimaux Curlew, *Numenius borealis*, are yet in a great measure unknown. Every person who writes on American birds repeats, that it arrives at Hudson's Bay, breeds farther north, &c.; but none has yet given any of those details so necessary to enable the student of nature to judge in what respects this species resembles, or differs from others, at the season of reproduction. During my visit to Labrador, I made diligent inquiry respecting it and the Esquimaux Curlew, but I obtained no information farther than that the latter is extremely abundant for a few weeks in early autumn, and that the present species was entirely unknown. Even Mr. JONES and his sons, who had probably killed thousands of the species just mentioned, had never seen it in the course of their long residence at Bras d'Or. Nor is our information respecting their winter retreats much better, for scarcely any of them are ever seen in the colder months within the limits of the United States, and their movements during their migrations are more rapid than those of most water birds. In short, I am unable to present you with such an account of them as I could have wished.

I have found this species abundant on the shores of New Jersey in the month of May, and there they remain a few weeks. I once saw a large flock of them near Charleston, in the month of December, and I have found them in the Boston market in September. None were ever seen by me in any part of the interior, where, indeed, it is probable they very seldom make their appearance. As I have nothing of any importance to add, I shall present you with a few extracts from WILSON and NUTTALL, both of whom have had opportunities of observing this species.

"The Short-billed Curlew," says the former, "arrives in large flocks on the sea-coast of New Jersey early in May, from the south, frequents the salt-marshes, muddy shores, and inlets, feeding on small worms and minute shell-fish. They are most commonly seen on mud-flats at low water, in company with various other waders; and at high water roam along the marshes. They fly high, and with great rapidity. A few are seen in June, and as late as the beginning of July, when they generally move off toward the north. Their

Hudsonian Curlew.

Male

appearance on these occasions is very interesting: they collect together from the marshes as if by premeditated design, rise to a great height in the air, usually an hour before sunset, and, forming in one vast line, keep up a constant whistling on their way to the north, as if conversing with one another to render the journey more agreeable. Their flight is then more slow and regular, that the feeblest may keep up with the line of march; while the glittering of their beautifully speckled wings, sparkling in the sun, produces altogether a very pleasing spectacle.

"In the month of June, while the dewberries are ripe, these birds sometimes frequent the fields, in company with the Long-billed Curlews, where brambles abound; soon get very fat, and are at that time excellent eating."

Nuttall says, "From the middle of August to the beginning of September, they arrive in the vicinity of Massachusetts' Bay, and other parts of New England, frequenting the pastures as well as marshes, and fatten on grasshoppers and berries, till the time of their departure, about the close of September; and they wholly disappear from New Jersey, on their way to the south, early in the month of November."

I have only to add, that, having compared specimens of the present species with the Whimbrel of Europe, *Numenius Phæopus*, I am satisfied that they are perfectly distinct.

ESQUIMAUX CURLEW, *Scolopax borealis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. vii. p. 92.

NUMENIUS HUDSONICUS, Bonap. Syn., p. 314.

NUMENIUS HUDSONICUS, *Hudsonian Curlew*, Swains. and Rich., F. Bor. Amer., vol. ii. p. 377.

ESQUIMAUX CURLEW, *Numenius hudsonicus*, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 97.

HUDSONIAN CURLEW, *Numenius hudsonicus*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 283; vol. v. p. 589.

Male, 18, 33.

Passes from Texas northward, returning in autumn. Abundant in the middle districts at both periods. Breeds at Hudson's Bay, and farther north.

Adult Male.

Bill much longer than the head, very slender, sub-cylindrical, compressed, slightly arched. Upper mandible with the dorsal line slightly arched, the sides, excepting at the base, rounded, and marked with a narrow groove extending more than two-thirds of its length, the ridge rather flattened at the base, convex and narrower towards the end, the edges rather obtuse. Nostrils basal, lateral, longitudinal, linear. Lower mandible with the dorsal line arched, or nearly parallel to that of the upper, the angle extremely narrow and extended to near the end, the sides at the base nearly erect with a shallow groove close to the rather obtuse edge; the tips obtuse, and about equal in length.

Head rather small, oblong, compressed. Neck rather long, slender. Body rather full. Feet of moderate length, slender. Tibia bare a considerable way above the joint; tarsus with numerous anterior scutella, excepting in its upper fourth, where, and on the sides, it is reticulated. Toes small, scutellate above; first very small, second and fourth about equal, third considerably longer; the anterior toes marginate, and connected at the base by short webs, of which the outer is larger. Claws small, compressed, obtuse, that of middle toe much larger, curved outwards, with a sharp dilated inner edge.

Plumage soft and blended, on the fore part of the head very short; the feathers in general small, oblong or ovate and rounded. Wings rather long, very acute, narrow, the primaries tapering, the first longest, the second a little shorter, the rest regularly and rapidly graduated; secondaries short, incurved, rounded, excepting some of the inner, which are greatly elongated and tapering. Tail short, rounded, of twelve rounded feathers.

Bill brownish-black, the basal half of lower mandible flesh-colour. Iris dark brown. Feet greyish-blue, claws black. The upper part of the head is deep brown, with a central longitudinal line of white, and a broader lateral one of the same over each eye; a brown line from the bill to the eye, and another extending behind the latter. The neck all round is pale yellowish-grey, longitudinally streaked with brown, excepting the chin or upper part of the throat, which is greyish-white. The upper parts in general are blackish-brown, marked with numerous spots of brownish-white, there being several along the margins of each feather; the wings and rump are lighter, the upper tail-coverts and tail barred with brown and yellowish-grey, the latter tipped with white. Primaries and their coverts brownish-black, the outer unspotted on their outer web; all with transverse light markings on the inner; the secondaries like the smaller coverts. Breast and abdomen greyish-white, the sides tinged with cream-colour, and barred with pale greyish-brown; the outer lower tail-coverts with a few brown marks.

Length to end of tail 19 inches, to end of wings 18, to end of claws 21; wing from flexure $9\frac{1}{4}$; tail 4; extent of wings 33; bill along the back $4\frac{1}{4}$, along the edge of lower mandible $4\frac{1}{2}$; tarsus $2\frac{4}{12}$, middle toe $1\frac{5}{12}$, its claw $3\frac{1}{12}$. Weight 1 lb. $1\frac{1}{4}$ oz.

The Female resembles the male.

The bill varies greatly in length: in a specimen now before me, it is $2\frac{10}{12}$, in another $2\frac{9}{12}$, while in the individual figured it was $4\frac{1}{4}$.

Dimensions of a male:—From point of bill to end of tail 18 inches, to end of wings 18, to end of claws $19\frac{2}{12}$; extent of wings 33; bill $3\frac{7}{12}$, along the edge of lower mandible $3\frac{7}{12}$; bare part of tibia $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches; tarsus $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches, hind toe 5 twelfths, its claw 3 twelfths; second toe $1\frac{1}{12}$, its claw $\frac{3}{12}$; third

toe $1\frac{4\frac{1}{2}}{12}$, its claw $\frac{4}{12}$; fourth toe $1\frac{2\frac{3}{4}}{12}$, its claw $2\frac{3}{4}$ twelfths; wing from flexure $9\frac{3}{4}$; tail $3\frac{11}{12}$.

The heart and liver are very large, as in the other species, the right lobe of the latter passes under and beyond the stomach, and is 3 inches in length, the left lobe 1 inch 9 twelfths. The mouth is in all respects as in the preceding species, as is the tongue, which is 1 inch long. The œsophagus is 7 inches long, at the upper part 8 twelfths in width, afterwards uniformly 5 twelfths; the proventriculus large, 8 twelfths in width. The stomach is of moderate size, roundish, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, 1 inch 5 twelfths in breadth; its muscles of moderate thickness; the epithelium thick, horny, with two broad longitudinal plates on each side. Its contents are small crabs. Intestine 30 inches long, its width in the duodenal portion 4 twelfths, and nearly the same throughout, but at the distance of 10 inches from the end enlarging to 6 twelfths. Cœca $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the extremity, 1 inch 9 twelfths long, $1\frac{1}{4}$ twelfths in width, with the tip slender as in the other species.

Trachea $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, $3\frac{1}{4}$ twelfths broad at the top, 2 twelfths at the lower part, very little flattened; the rings firm, 122, with 2 dimidiate rings. Bronchi moderately wide, of about 18 half rings. Lateral muscles of moderate strength; the sterno-tracheales come off at the distance of 5 twelfths from the extremity; there is a very slender slip of muscle on each side going to the first bronchial ring.

ESQUIMAUX CURLEW.

+NUMENIUS BOREALIS, *Lath.*

PLATE CCCLVII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

I regret that I am unable to present a complete history of the Esquimaux Curlew. It is true I might somewhat enlarge my account of its habits, were I to borrow from others, but as I have resolved to confine myself to the results of my own observation, unless in certain cases, in which I always take care to give my authorities, I hope you will be pleased with the little which I have to offer.

Previous to my voyage to Labrador, I had seen only a single bird of this

Hudsonian Curlew.

Male

Audubon, John James. 1843. "The Hudsonian Curlew, *Numenius hudsonicus*, Lath. [Pl. 356]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 6, 42–45. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319470>.

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