GREAT AUK.

†ALCA IMPENNIS, *Linn.*

PLATE CCCCLXV.—ADULT.

The only authentic account of the occurrence of this bird on our coast that I possess, was obtained from Mr. HENRY HAVELL, brother of my Engraver, who, when on his passage from New York to England, hooked a Great Auk on the banks of Newfoundland, in extremely boisterous weather. On being hauled on board, it was left at liberty on the deck. It walked very awkwardly, often tumbling over, bit every one within reach of its powerful bill, and refused food of all kinds. After continuing several days on board, it was restored to its proper element.

When I was in Labrador, many of the fishermen assured me that the "Penguin," as they name this bird, breeds on a low rocky island to the south-east of Newfoundland, where they destroy great numbers of the young for bait; but as this intelligence came to me when the season was too far advanced, I had no opportunity of ascertaining its accuracy. In Newfoundland, however, I received similar information from several individuals. An old gunner residing on Chelsea Beach, near Boston, told me that he well remembered the time when the Penguins were plentiful about Nahant and some other islands in the bay.

The egg is very large, measuring five inches in length, and three in its greatest breadth. In form it resembles that of the Common Guillemot; the shell is thick and rather rough to the touch; its colour yellowish-white, with long irregular lines and blotches of brownish-black, more numerous at the larger end.

GREAT AUK, *Alca impennis*, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 553.

GREAT AUK, *Alca impennis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iv. p. 316.

Adult, 29, 27½.

Rare and accidental on the Banks of Newfoundland; said to breed on a rock near that island.

Adult in summer.

Bill as long as the head, feathered as far as the nostrils, beyond which it is

very high, exceedingly compressed, tapering, and slightly declinate. Upper mandible with the dorsal line straight for an inch and a quarter, then declinate and decurved to the end, the ridge very narrow, broader at the base; the sides nearly flat, with a basal ridge succeeded by a deep groove, then a large flat space, succeeded by eight oblique curved ridges, the edges sharp toward the end, the tip decurved and obtuse. Nostrils marginal, linear, short, pervious, but concealed by the feathers. Lower mandible with the angle long, the sides extremely narrow and linear for half their length, the horny part not being extended over the bone, which is covered with feathers, afterwards deep and compressed, with the dorsal line at first convex, then ascending and concave to the end, the sides flat, with about ten transverse ridges, the edges sharp, the tip deflected.

Head large, oblong, anteriorly narrowed. Eyes rather small. Neck short and thick. Body compact and full. Wings extremely small, but perfectly formed. Feet placed far behind, short, very strong; tarsus short, compressed, anteriorly scutellate, laterally covered with angular scales, those on the hind part very small. Hind toe wanting; third toe longest, outer nearly as long, inner much shorter, lateral toes marginate, all with numerous scutella and several rows of angular scales above, and connected by reticulated webs. Claws rather small, narrow, arched, convex above, and obtuse.

Plumage close, blended, very soft, on the head and neck short and velvety. Wings diminutive, much pointed; the primaries tapering to an acute point, the first longest, the rest rapidly graduated, their coverts long; secondaries short and broad, scarcely longer than their coverts. Tail short, pointed, of *fourteen* feathers.

Bill black, with the grooves between the transverse ridges white. Iris hazel. Feet and claws black. Fore part of the neck below, and all the lower parts white, of which colour also is a large oblong patch before each eye and the tips of the secondary quills, the rest black; the throat and sides of the neck tinged with chocolate-brown, the wings with greyish-brown, the head, hind neck, and back glossed with olive-green.

Length to end of tail 29 inches, to end of wings $23\frac{3}{4}$, to end of claws $31\frac{1}{2}$, to carpal joint $18\frac{1}{2}$; extent of wings $27\frac{1}{4}$; wing from flexure $7\frac{1}{8}$; tail $2\frac{7}{8}$; bill along the ridge $3\frac{5}{8}$, along the edge of lower mandible $4\frac{1}{2}$; greatest depth of upper mandible 1, depth of lower $\frac{5}{8}$; width of gap $1\frac{7}{8}$; tarsus 2; middle toe $2\frac{5}{8}$, its claw $\frac{5}{8}$; outer toe $2\frac{5}{8}$, its claw $\frac{3\frac{1}{2}}{8}$; inner toe $2\frac{1}{8}$, its claw $\frac{4\frac{1}{2}}{8}$.

W.E.H.

Great Frigate.

Adult.

Drawn from Nature by J. Audubon F.R.S. &c.

Lith. Printed & Col'd by J. T. Bowen, Philad'a.

Audubon, John James. 1844. "Great Auk, *Alca impennis*, Linn. [Pl. 465]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 7, 245–246. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319582>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/124981>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319582>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/319582>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: NOT_IN_COPYRIGHT

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.