FREGILUS GRACULUS.

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Chough.

- Corvus graculus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 158.
 ——— *coracias*, Lapierre.
Coracia erythroramphos, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. viii. p. 2.
Pyrhocorax graculus, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit. tom. i. p. 122.
 ——— *rupestris*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 175.
Fregilus graculus, Cuv. Règn. Anim., 1817, tom. i. p. 406.
 ——— *europæus*, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 324.
 ——— *erythropus*, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 268.
Coracia gracula, Gray & Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 321.

CHOUGH, Cornish Chough, and Red-legged Crow are three of the trivial names by which this bird is commonly known. It was formerly much more numerous in the British Islands than it is now. When I was a boy it occurred plentifully at the Needles, in the Isle of Wight; and it was there that I killed the specimens figured in my 'Birds of Europe.' To say that the bird has totally disappeared from that place, the neighbouring Beachy Head, and Shakspeare's Cliff at Dover would perhaps not be deviating from the truth. Now as these steep and precipitous chalk rocks, and the closely cropped downs at their backs, have undergone no change, and consequently are as well suited to the habits of the bird as in former times, it is the hands of the relentless gunner and egg-collectors which have either extirpated it or driven it away to other localities. On some of the cliffs of the south coast of England it still holds its own, as is evidenced by the following note received a short time since from W. R. Glennie, Esq. Writing from Osborne House, Swanage, this gentleman says:—"You asked me whether I had met with Choughs of late on the south coast. As we were talking then of Devon, perhaps the question had reference to the south coast of that country only; but I send a line to say that I find them pretty frequent here on the Dorset cliffs. I saw several pairs yesterday in a walk of about eight miles along the coast, between this place and Kimmeridge, and stood behind a stone wall watching one pegging away for beetles within fifteen yards of me." In his 'List of British Birds,' Mr. Rodd states that the Chough is much less numerous in Cornwall than formerly, but is still sparingly observed in different localities along the coast, and that it breeds annually in Zennor Cliffs. It is numerous in many parts of Wales and in the Isle of Man, is very abundant in Islay, Galloway, and some of the western islands of Scotland, but appears to be comparatively scarce in the north-eastern parts of that country. Thompson states that it inhabits the precipitous rocks of various parts of Ireland. Temminck informs us that on the European continent it inhabits the high Alps of Switzerland, Italy, the Tyrol, Bavaria, and Carinthia, and that in rigorous winters it accidentally occurs on less elevated mountains, such as the Jura and the Vosges, always in the vicinity of regions covered with rime. Mr. Howard Saunders found it abundant in the mountain-districts of Southern Spain, especially at the back of the Sierra Nevada. It is said to inhabit the island of Crete; but Lord Lilford remarks that he did not meet with it in Turkey or Greece; yet, according to Loche, it frequents the nearly opposite high mountains of Algeria, and it was seen in large flocks near Tetuan, in Eastern Morocco, by Mr. C. F. Tyrwhitt Drake. The Rev. H. B. Tristram did not meet with it on the Lebanon, where, he remarks, it surely ought to be. Whether it ever occurs in Northern Russia or Siberia is a question I am unable to solve. The bird of this form that exists there may prove to be the very different *Fregilus himalayanus*.

Many of the actions of the Chough remind us of the Jackdaw. It is very active in its movements, both during flight and when on the ground; is cheerful and happy under restraint, and readily becomes reconciled to the aviary, where its inquisitive disposition renders it very amusing. Like its congener, it is fond of petty thieving, particularly of any thing that is glittering. In the British Islands it mostly dwells among the rocks on the sea-side; it is not, therefore, to be sought for inland, except in high and mountainous districts. Its eggs, which the collector always looks upon with interest, are very difficult to procure, in consequence of the excessive caution of the birds in selecting their places of nidification, which, the Rev. W. D. Fox informed Mr. Hewitson, are always on the face of the steepest cliffs, and in general in clefts far in, the passage to which turns at right angles frequently, so that you cannot reach the nest, or even see it. The nest is outwardly composed of sticks, succeeded by a quantity of roots and dry grass, lined with very fine roots, grass, and wool. The eggs are easily known from those of any of the Crow-kind; they are

most like those of the Magpie, from which they differ in their greater size and more ochreous colouring. Mr. Yarrell describes them as four or five in number, of a yellowish white, spotted with ash-grey and light brown, 1 inch 8 lines long by 1 inch 1 line in breadth.

The flight of the Chough is very similar to that of the Rook, but is somewhat more rapid; and it sometimes flies round in circles, with but little motion of the wings. Its food consists of insects (of various kinds) and berries; and that it, occasionally at least, feeds on small crustaceans is certain, Mr. Thompson having found minute *Ligia oceanica*, *Aselli*, &c., mixed with vegetable matter, in the stomach of a specimen he examined.

"This species," says Thompson, "is more generally diffused around the rock-bound shores of Ireland than British authors would lead us to believe it is on those of Scotland and England. It may be met with in such localities in the north, east, south, and west of the island. The basaltic precipices of the north-east coast are admirably adapted for it; and about the promontory of Fairhead it particularly abounds. In Dr. J. D. Marshall's memoir on the statistics and natural history of the Island of Rathlin, lying off the north of the county of Antrim, it is remarked:—'This is by far the most numerous species on the island. In the month of July I found them everywhere associated in large flocks, at one place frequenting inland situations, and at another congregated on the seashore. They had just collected together their different families, now fully fledged, and were picking up their food, consisting chiefly of insects, either on the shore, in the crevices of the rocks, or in the pasture-fields. Mr. Selby mentions that the Chough will not alight on the turf if it can possibly avoid it, always preferring gravel, stones, or walls. In Rathlin its choice of situation seems to be but sparingly exhibited, as I found it frequenting the corn- and pasture-fields in even greater numbers than along the shores.' The Chough is of a restless, active disposition, hopping or flying about from place to place; it is also very shy, and can with difficulty be approached. Some of the latest writers on British Ornithology appear to think that the Chough never leaves the vicinity of the sea; and in one work it is stated that the species is 'never observed inland,' although Crow Castle has been noticed by Montagu as one of its haunts. This is situated in the beautiful Vale of Llangollen, in North Wales, where the Lombardy poplar, spiring above the other rich foliage around the picturesque village of the same name, imparts, in addition to other accompaniments, quite an Italian character to the scene. A pair of these birds were, some years since, observed, throughout the breeding-season, about a ruin between Newtown-Crommelin and Cushendall, in the county of Antrim, three miles distant from the sea; and at Salagh Braes, a semicircular range of basaltic rocks in the same county, nearly twice that distance from the coast, the Chough builds." Mr. R. Davis, jun., of Clonmell, informed Mr. Thompson that "great numbers of Choughs breed in the precipices over the lake in the Commeragh Mountains, in the county of Wexford, about seven Irish miles from the sea, where they are very rarely molested, on account of building in almost inaccessible spots."

The voice of the Chough is described as shrill but not disagreeable; according to Mr. Yarrell, it is something like that of the Oyster-catcher; to others it resembles that of the Jackdaw, from which, however, it is easily distinguished. Meyer renders it by the words "*creea, creea*, and *deea*." It also emits a chattering sound, not unlike that of the Starling.

Montagu has given an interesting account of a Chough he kept in captivity, which exhibited the utmost amount of prying curiosity, evinced a great love of being caressed, and would stand quietly by the hour to be smoothed, but resented an affront with violence and effect by both bill and claws, and held so fast by the latter that he was with difficulty disengaged. To children he had an utter aversion, and would scarcely suffer them to enter the garden. Strangers of any age were challenged vociferously; he approached all with daring impudence; and so completely did the sight of strangers change his affections for the time, that even his best benefactors could not touch him with impunity in those moments of displeasure.

The sexes are alike in colouring; and the young attain the adult plumage, and the coral-red of the bill and legs, by the end of the second year, prior to which they are of a dull dirty yellow.

The figures are somewhat under the natural size. The plant is the *Ophrys aranifera*.

Gould, John. 1873. "Chough, *Fregilus graculus* [Pl. 62]." *The birds of Great Britain* 3, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323950>.

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