CEDICNEMUS CREPITANS.

ÆDICNEMUS CREPITANS.

Stone-Plover, or Thick-knee.

Charadrius ædicnemus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 255.

Otis ædicnemus, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 661.

Fedoa ædicnemus, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Coll. Brit. Mus., p. 28.

Ædicnemus crepitans, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1815, p. 322.

Ædicnemus desertorum et *Æ. arenarius*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 539.

——— *griseus*, Koch, Baier. Zool., vol. i. p. 266.

——— *indicus*, Salvadori, Att. Soc. Ital. Sc. Nat., 1866, tom. viii

——— *Belloni*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 114.

THE European Stone-Plover (or Thick-kneed Bustard, as it is commonly called) is a bird of considerable size, and one which, in my opinion, is unusually interesting, its large lustrous eyes, long and well-proportioned legs, and ample wings rendering it very graceful in appearance. It is a shy, wild creature, preferring the most stony fields and chalky downs to alluvial flats and cultivated districts, is very locally distributed over England, is not found in Scotland, and is extremely rare in Ireland. Here in England it is more often heard than seen, and would rarely be detected did not its peculiar whistling note, which is most frequently uttered in the night, betray its presence.

Its usual position in the daytime is in the centre of the largest fields of the uplands (not unfrequently among the thin crops of turnips or the few cereals that struggle for existence in such localities), in warrens, and in heaths. "According to the Hon. and Rev. W. Herbert, the Stone-Plover is found only on chalk or on ploughed land where there is a chalk subsoil. Whether this be an invariable rule or not, I must leave to others to determine; but it is a remarkable fact that in Middlesex, where there is but little chalk, the Stone-Curlew is a very scarce bird."

Some ornithologists have questioned whether this bird is a migrant, or if it be a stationary species in our island; it is certain, however, that, if a migratory movement to other countries takes place in autumn, a certain number stay with us, and merely remove from one part of the country to another; at least, such is the inference I deduce from the notes I have received from various correspondents.

"In Berkshire," says Mr. Hewett, "the Stone- or Norfolk Plovers arrive in spring, and soon form nests by scratching holes in the ground; they remain till September, when they leave."

"It is singular, but quite true," says Mr. Rodd, "that this species has never, to my knowledge, occurred in Cornwall in the summer season; at that time the bird is entirely unknown to us, being neither heard nor seen, although, year after year, specimens are procured in the depth of winter. The migratory movement of this bird is, no doubt, similar to that of others which come to us in the breeding-season, and retire again in the autumn and towards winter to the southern countries of Europe and the north of Africa. The only way to account for the regular hyemal visits of the Great Plover to this district is, that the extreme southern latitude of the British Isles, which may be included between the Lizard Point and the Land's End, is the exact northern boundary of the space occupied by the species in its winter-quarters."

"A pair of Stone-Plovers," says Mr. Philip Crowley, of Alton, "were shot at Holybourne on New-Year's day. Their plumage was much brighter than one I have, which was killed in the summer. They generally leave here about the middle or end of September; at least I have never seen or heard of any after that time."

"A friend of mine," writes Mr. W. Brodrick, of Ilfracombe, Devon, "shot a Norfolk Plover (*Ædicnemus crepitans*) on Branton burrows, about ten miles from this place, on Monday last (Jan. 18th, 1858). It was a male bird in perfect plumage and condition. The stomach contained the remains of small beetles."

In our islands it is almost in England alone that this bird is to be found. On the continent of Europe its distribution is more general; and it is equally numerous in North Africa, Palestine, Asia Minor, Persia, and India; for I do not regard the species inhabiting the latter country as different: if I did, I must then separate the bird I killed in Malta, as it varied from both English and Indian specimens, though so slightly that it could only be regarded as a local variety. I might quote from twenty writers the accounts they have given as the result of their acquaintance with this bird in various parts of North Africa, Malta, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and France; but I will end this part of its history by a few lines from Temminck, who, speaking of its distribution, curtly says:—"Abundant in the middle of France, in Italy, Sardinia, the Archipelago, and Turkey; occasionally in Germany, and very seldom met with in Holland."

The late Mr. Salmon, in his notice of the arrival of migratory birds in the neighbourhood of Thetford, in

Norfolk, says :—"The *Ædicnemus crepitans* is very numerous distributed over all our warrens and fallow lands during the breeding-season, which commences about the second week in April, the female depositing her pair of eggs upon the bare ground, without any nest whatever. It is generally supposed that the males take no part in the labour of incubation; but this would seem to be incorrect; for, wishing to procure a few specimens in the breeding-plumage, I employed a boy to take them for me: this he did by ensnaring them on the nest; and all he caught proved, on dissection, to be males. They assemble in flocks previously to their departure, which is usually by the end of October; but should the weather continue open, a few will remain to a much later period. I started one as late as the 9th of December in the winter of 1834."

Valmont Bomare states that in France "the Great Plovers arrive pretty early in spring. They settle on the dry grounds filled with stones, among fallows and stubbles, preferring low hills and sloping fields. During the day they keep themselves concealed and crouched on the ground; but at sunset they put themselves in motion, and are then heard to commence their cries, which they do not cease to repeat during the fine summer nights. When surprised, they run with extreme rapidity, fly low and but for short distances, are very wild and not easily approached. The female lays two or, at most, three eggs, in the midst of pebbles or gravel in some depression of the ground, or in a hollow which the birds have formed by scraping. It is said that they sometimes have two broods in the year, that incubation continues for a month, and that the growth of the feathers is slow in the young; they are, in fact, nearly full-grown before they can fly, their wing-feathers not having yet sprouted; but they run in this state with great lightness, and at this age appear as stupid as they are timid." In November the Great Plovers set out on their journey to warmer climates; and it appears that even in summer they do not advance far northward.

The food of the Stone-Plover is extremely varied; but mainly consists of slugs, grasshoppers, crickets, grubs, coleopterous and other insects, to which are added mice, lizards, and, doubtless, young birds. As an article of food, my friend J. W. Larking, Esq., informs me its flesh is most excellent: and from the many opportunities he has had of testing it during his long sojourn in Egypt, where the bird is very common, he is no incompetent judge.

Mr. Jerdon states that "the well-known Stone-Plover of England occurs in most parts of India, down to the extreme south, frequenting bushy wilds, cleared spots in jungle, low, stony, and jungly hills, and occasionally patches of grass with bushes interspersed, but, generally, in some retired and secluded spots. It is more rare in lower Bengal and in Malabar than in most other districts. When a flock of these birds is disturbed, they fly a short distance and then run and hide themselves, occasionally squatting so close as to have received from the Tamuls the name of *Jungle-hare*. They are permanent residents in India. It is a favourite quarry for the Shikra Falcon with the natives, for which its habit of lying close well adapts it, and it generally falls an easy prey. It is excellent eating, being very high-flavoured, and has received the name of Bastard Florikin among some sportsmen in the south of India. It feeds almost entirely upon insects, is quite nocturnal in its habits; and its wild long cry may frequently be heard at night, close to many stations where you may hunt long without finding it in the day-time."

The eggs, which are about two inches and a half in length by an inch and a half in breadth, are of a pale greyish brown, blotched, spotted, and streaked with dark brown and purplish grey; and so closely do they and the young chicks (in their downy state) assimilate to the colour of the materials around, that both are very difficult of detection.

I regard the fact stated by Mr. Salmon, that the male takes part in the performance of incubation, as most interesting; it is well known that the males of the Ostrich, Emu, and other struthious birds act in a similar manner. The trivial name of Thick-knee, given to this bird, is only applicable to its youthful state; when fully adult the legs are as fine as in any other Plover.

The sexes are alike in colour, and differ but little in size. The young birds, in their downy state, are very curious and interesting, both in their appearance and colouring—the latter being of a light mottled stony hue, diversified by conspicuous longitudinal lines of black across the forehead, down the neck and back, and along the flanks.

The Plate represents an adult and two young birds, of the natural size, with an adult flying in the distance, from a drawing by Mr. Wolf, and not, as stated on the Plate, by Gould and Richter.

Gould, John. 1873. "Thick-kneed Bustard, *Ædicnemus crepitans* [Pl. 35]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323994>.

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