ÆGIALOPHILUS CANTIANUS.

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Kentish Plover.

- Charadrius cantianus*, Lath. Ind. Orn. Suppl., p. lxvi.
——— *albifrons*, Meyer, Taschenb. deutsch. Vög., tom. ii. p. 323.
——— *littoralis*, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 430, tab. 23. figs. 1 & 2.
——— *Alexandrinus*, Hasselq. Reise, p. 213.
Ægialitis cantianus, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 558.
——— *albifrons*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 551.
——— *albigularis*, Brehm, *ibid.*, p. 553.
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"THIS little Plover," says Yarrell, in his 'British Birds,' "was first described and named by Dr. Latham in the ninth volume of his 'General History of Birds,' p. 328, from specimens sent him by Dr. Boys, which had been killed at Sandwich, in Kent, in the years 1787 and 1791, in which locality the species has several times been obtained. In May 1830 Mr. George Clayton, of Rochester, found it in pairs at Pegwell Bay and on the Sandwich Flats; it has also been met with on the shelly bank, towards Sandhurst Castle and Deal, whence I have seen specimens. The Ringed Plover is common in the same localities; but the Kentish Plovers may be readily distinguished when on the ground by their smaller size. Though they mix together when feeding, Mr. Clayton says the two species do not fly in company." "The egg," Mr. Yarrell states, "is correctly figured by Mr. Hewitson, in his well known work the 'Eggs of British Birds.' I possess two eggs of this species, given me by Dr. Pitman, obtained with others on the Sussex coast; these are one inch and three lines in length by eleven lines in breadth, of a yellowish stone-colour, spotted and streaked with black."

The above is probably the earliest record of this interesting species; and I have considered it only just to the late Mr. Yarrell to repeat the information he has given to the world.

Mr. Stevenson, in his 'Birds of Norfolk,' after recapitulating some of the instances of its occurrence as stated by Yarrell, Mr. Clarke, of Saffron Walden, the late Mr. Hoy, and Mr. J. H. Gurney, proceeds to say:—"I have not had the opportunity of examining specimens of this bird in the flesh; but Mr. Gould describes the bill and legs as hard and black, whilst the same parts in the Ringed Plover are pulpy and yellow; and in all plumages the former may be recognized by the white of the breast extending upwards to the chin without any interruption, which is not the case with the Ringed Plover."

I am somewhat surprised that Mr. Stevenson has never had fresh Norfolk examples of this bird, since from 1828 until within the last few years I have been in the habit of receiving specimens along with other shore-birds direct from Yarmouth, where I know they had been killed by the gunners who eke out a living by shooting birds for the London collectors.

If we compare the Kentish Plover with the Ringed Plover (or the Ringed Dottrel, as it is more frequently called), we find certain structural differences which, although they may be slight, doubtless have some influence over their habits and economies. On this head I may repeat here what I said in my 'Handbook to the Birds of Australia,' published in 1865:—"In accordance with the spirit of minute subdivision, which now pervades all branches of natural science, I have for a long time considered that the small Plovers hitherto comprised in the genus *Ægialites*, of which the *Æ. hiaticula* is the type, required a further subdivision; I therefore propose the term above given (*Ægialophilus*) for the *Æ. cantianus* of Europe, and to associate with it the *Æ. ruficapillus* of Australia. There are many other species of this form, all or nearly all of which have black bills and long legs, and are less banded with black on the under surface than the members of the genus *Ægialites*. They have a different note, are nimble of foot, and affect situations bordering the open sea."

The Kentish Plovers have longer legs and shorter toes, which are black and hard, instead of the former being pulpy and the latter yellow as in the Ringed Plovers; their eyes also are larger when compared with the size of the body. The situations the two birds affect when they come to us to breed are also very different, the Ringed Plovers dispersing themselves over shingly beds and sides of rivers, while the Kentish Plover keeps to the sea-shore, and deposits its eggs above high-water mark and out of the reach of the spray. Those who have seen the two birds alive in their native haunts cannot have failed to observe the difference of sites chosen by the two birds. The note of the Kentish Plover also is markedly different from the plaintive pipe of the Ringed Plovers, being more harsh and chattering. If they have not all been ruthlessly destroyed since the month of June, 1846, the reader may go to the little town of Lydd, on the coast of Kent, and thence to the shingles, and observe for himself both the species above mentioned.

I had no difficulty in finding the young of both kinds ; and it was from those there obtained that the figures in the accompanying Plate were drawn. The young as well as the old of these two Plovers also differ in the colouring of their soft parts and in the size of their eyes. The characteristic markings of their eggs, too, are also very different.

The visitor to Lydd will also see a fine colony of Black-headed Gulls in a rush-pit in the midst of the wastes, and both the Lesser and Common Terns in abundance. Had my visit to that enchanting spot been a year or two earlier, I might have observed the wandering Sand-Grouse, *Syrphantes paradoxus*, flying to and fro ; for this was one of the localities they frequented when with us, and I had with me as a guide the person who committed the barbarous act of shooting some of them.

The Kentish Plover is a true spring migrant to our shores, and may be seen, at least sparingly, at that season on the coasts of Cornwall, Sussex, Suffolk, and Norfolk. It does not go so far north as Scotland ; but, according to Mr. Blake Knox, " it has been observed in a few instances during its migrations on the Dublin coast ; it is however, at all times a rare visitant to Ireland."—*Zoologist*, 1866, p. 301.

On the continent of Europe it is more abundant than with us. In some parts of Spain it is particularly numerous, and is found in still greater numbers over the whole of North Africa, and almost as far as the Cape Colony, as is evidenced by Mr. Anderson's 'Notes on the Birds of Damara Land,' p. 272, where he says, "This is rather a rare bird, and hardly to be found except on the sea-coast, in the neighbourhood of which it seeks its food on the open ground, interspersed with grass and aquatic herbage. It feeds on worms and insects, and also on the sandhoppers which abound on the beach of Walwich Bay, and of which it seems particularly fond. I have invariably found it in pairs, but have never met with its nest."

This species is also mentioned in Layard's 'Catalogue of the Birds of Ceylon,' p. 296 ; and, according to Messrs. Finsch and Hartlaub, it is found at Mozambique, *vide* 'Birds of East Africa,' p. 654.

As we learn from the writings of various authors, the Kentish Plover is particularly plentiful in India. Jerdon, when writing on the birds of this family, says it is more common than either *Ægialitis Geoffroyii* or *Æ. pyrrhonorax*, "being more frequently found far inland on the banks of rivers and large tanks, but prefers the neighbourhood of the sea-coast and large rivers near their mouths. It has a wide geographical distribution over the Old Continent. *Æ. hiaticula*, *ruficapilla*, and *inornata* of Gould, from Australia, are members of this group ; and there are others." He then proceeds to remark, "The next group is that of the Ringed Plovers, which frequent dry sandy plains," clearly showing he considered these were two distinct but nearly allied forms—a view of the subject I myself took many years ago.

Mr. Swinhoe states, in his 'List of the Birds of China,' that the Kentish Plover is found on the coasts of that country in winter. This may be the case ; but I have seen specimens of a bird from thence which I consider distinct, but most nearly allied, and which certainly possesses characters that, if I may be allowed to speak from recollection, would render it necessary to give it a distinct specific appellation.

The sexes of the Kentish Plover are nearly of the same size ; and the average weight is about two ounces.

The Plate represents male and female, with young at the age of two or three days, of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Kentish Plover, *Ægialophilus cantianus* [Pl. 40]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.323997>.

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