NUMENIUS ARQUATA.

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Curlew.

Scolopax arquata, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 59.

Numenius arquata, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 710.

——— *major*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 26.

——— *medius*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 609.

IF birds, like human beings, have recollections of the past, perceptions of the present, and anticipations of the future, such an endowment must necessarily add much to their happiness. I believe, however, that this is not the case, and that their actions and economies are purely the result of instinct, and not of reason, and consequently that the Curlew, when it leaves its summer home among the heather and other flowering plants of the hills, carries no recollection of the past to the sea-shore or the great oozy flats of our estuaries. How strange it is, and how interesting to know, that a bird should frequent such totally different localities at opposite seasons of the year!—the wet, oozy, mud-flats of the arms of the sea, the equally dirty sides of tidal rivers, and the flat shores of the ocean being resorted to by the Curlew in winter; while in summer it is strictly an inland bird, dwelling on the moorland, among bogs, on the sides of hills, and even the crowns of mountains—flowering rushes and blooming heather being the places in which its four large eggs are deposited, and in which its downy young first see the light. On reading the foregoing lines, ornithologists may say that they are equally descriptive of the habits and economy of the Dunlin. Admitting that they may be, they are none the less interesting, since they serve to show that structure, and not size, influences habits and modes of life. If closely compared, it will be found that in anatomical details the little Dunlin differs but little from the great Curlew; and, in like manner, but slight difference occurs in their modes of life. The two birds have associations in common, both wintering together on the muddy flats, and impulsively taking to the hills when the season of reproduction is near at hand. Not only do they change their locale, but a total change of food is the consequence,—small mollusks, marine worms, crustacea, and insects forming the staple article of the Curlew during its sea-side sojourn; while worms, snails, and such terrestrial insects as are natural to the hills constitute its diet in summer. In some cases, even during the season of reproduction, the Curlew performs nightly flights to the sea-side and to the neighbouring estuary; but that this is always done is impossible, from the great distance inland at which they sometimes breed.

Many of my readers will have gathered, from what has been written, that the Curlew is indigenous to the British Islands; but, for the information of those who are not so well acquainted with our native birds, I may state that it is universally distributed along the coasts of England and Scotland—from the Land's End, in Cornwall, to the Orkneys,—and that it is equally abundant in Ireland. In like manner it occasionally occurs in most parts of Europe, in Africa, and India; it has, in fact, a very wide range—so much so, that to say it extends over Europe and Asia, except their most northern parts, would probably not be exceeding the truth. In confirmation of this assertion I may state that Faber and Dr. Krüper mention it as having been killed, though very rarely, in Iceland; in Norway it penetrates beyond the Arctic circle, but in Sweden it does not reach so far by some three degrees; Swinhoe states that it is common in Amoy Creek, in China; and Mr. Gurney at Natal, in South Africa; Mr. Godman that it is occasionally found in the Azores; and Mr. Jerdon describes it as a bird of India.

Some of the recorded breeding-places of the Curlew may be mentioned:—Mr. Rodd gives the large moors about Roughtor, Brownwilly, &c., in Cornwall; formerly, if not now, on Dart- and Exmoor; several parts of Wales; the Derbyshire moors; the mountains of the English lake-districts; Scotland, both the highlands and the lowlands; the Orkneys and Hebrides, and many parts of Ireland.

“During the breeding-season,” says Sir William Jardine, in a note to his edition of Wilson's ‘American Ornithology,’ “the Curlew is entirely an inhabitant of the upland moors and sheep pastures, and, in the soft and dewy mornings of May and June, forms an object in their early solitude which adds to their wildness. At first dawn, when nothing can be seen but rounded hills of rich and green pasture, rising one beyond another with perhaps an extensive meadow between, looking more boundless by the mists and shadows of morn, a long string of sheep, marching off at a sleepy pace on their well-beaten track to some more favourite feeding-ground, the shrill tremulous call of the Curlew to his mate has something in it wild and melancholy, yet always pleasing. In such situations do they build, making almost no nest, and, during the commencement of their amours, run skulkingly among the long grass and rushes, the male rising and sailing round, or descending with the wings closed above his back, and uttering his peculiar quavering whistle. The approach of an intruder requires more demonstration of his powers, and he approaches near,

buffeting and *whaoping* with all his might. When the young are hatched, they remain near the spot ; and are for a long time difficult to raise ; a pointer will stand and road them ; and at that time they are tender and well flavoured. By autumn they are nearly all dispersed to the sea-coasts, and have now lost their clear whistle. They remain here until next spring, feeding at low tide on the shore, and retiring for a few miles to inland fields at high water ; on their return again at the ebb, they show a remarkable instance of the instinctive knowledge implanted, and most conspicuous, in the migratory sea- and water-fowl. During my occasional residence on the Solway, for some years past in the month of August, these birds, with many others, were the objects of observation. They retired regularly inland after their favourite feeding-places were covered. A long and narrow ledge of rocks runs into the Frith, behind which we used to lie concealed for the purpose of getting shots at various sea-fowl returning at ebb. None were so regular as the Curlew. The more aquatic were near the sea, and could perceive the gradual reflux : the Curlews were far inland ; but as soon as we could see the top of a sharp rock standing above water, we were sure to perceive the first flocks leave the land, thus keeping pace regularly with the change of the tides. They fly in a direct line to their feeding-grounds, and often in a wedge shape ; on alarm, a simultaneous cry is uttered, and the next coming flock turns from its course, uttering in repetition the same alarm-note. In a few days they become so wary as not to fly over the concealed station. They are one of the most difficult birds to approach, except during spring ; but may be enticed by imitating their whistle."

"The cry of the Curlew," says Thompson, "is by far the loudest uttered by any of our grallatorial birds. It will perhaps be scarcely credited that it can be heard at the distance of nearly three English miles ; yet, under peculiar circumstances, such is the case. I have heard it on calm moonlight nights, when at the extremity of the bay at Holywood Warren, awaiting the flight of these birds from Harrison's Bay and Cons-water, whence the flowing tide would drive them from particular banks respectively about two and three miles distant from my station. The call from the first-named locality sounded quite near, and from the latter distinct, though much more faintly, the state of the tide evincing with certainty that all the banks, except the two alluded to, were covered too deeply with water for the birds to be on them."

"Whilst in Norway," observes Mr. Hewitson, "we were much amused with what appeared to us to be quite a new and unnoticed habit amongst the *Grallatores* or Wading-birds. We found it to be a practice by no means uncommon with the Redshank and Greenshank, to settle upon trees ; but what surprised us more than all, was to see the long-legged Curlew alight, as it frequently did, on the tops of the highest trees of the pine forest, and to hear it as it passed from tree to tree, utter its loud clear whistle. Mr. George Matthews informed me, on his return from Norway, that Curlews were common during summer, and generally in pairs about Trondhjem, where they were usually seen perched on the tops of the cabins of the peasantry."

Mr. Selby states that "the nest is placed on the ground amongst heath or coarse herbage, in a shallow part scraped in the ground, and lined with decayed grass and rushes. The eggs are four in number, placed with their large ends outwards, and the smaller meeting to a point in the centre of the nest, of a pale olive colour, blotched all over with two shades of brown. The young leave their place of birth as soon as hatched, and are then covered with a thick yellowish-white down, varied with spots and masses of brown. By degrees the feathers develop themselves ; but the young birds are not sufficiently fledged to take wing till they are six or seven weeks old. During this period they are assiduously attended by their parents, who lead them to appropriate feeding-places, and, by brooding over, protect them from the cold and wet. Under these circumstances Curlews lose the excessive shyness that characterizes them at all other times, and, when the young are approached, will fly close around the intruder, uttering their cry of *courlis* in quick repetition. The flesh of these birds is excellent, being juicy and highly flavoured, and is in great estimation for the table."

A partial, but not very striking, change takes place in the plumage of the Curlew at the pairing-season, the tints becoming somewhat richer, and the spotting more apparent, the lighter portions of the feathers of the upper surface assuming a redder hue, and the stripes of black on the neck and chest becoming more conspicuous. The plumage of both sexes is alike ; the female is generally the larger of the two ; but to determine the sex with certainty, dissection must be resorted to. Considerable difference occurs in the length of the bill, some individuals, even of the same sex, having that organ much longer than others ; and it would seem that it increases in length even after the bird is capable of reproduction.

The Plate represents an adult and two young ones, of the natural size.

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