TOTANUS FUSCUS.

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Spotted Redshank.

- Scolopax fusca*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 243.
—— *totanus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 665.
—— *curonica*, Gmel. ibid., tom. i. p. 669.
—— *cantabrigiensis*, Gmel. ibid., tom. i. p. 668.
Totanus fuscus, Leisl. Nacht. zu Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. i. p. 47.
—— *natans*, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 227.
—— *maculatus*, Bechst. ibid., tom. iv. p. 203.
—— *ater*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 634.
—— *Raii*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 31?
Tringa atra, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 738.
—— *longipes*, Meisn. & Schinz, Vög. der Schweiz, p. 216.
Erythrosceles fuscus, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 54.
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EXTENSIVE as is our avifauna, and numerous as are the species of which it is composed, it is in a great measure made up of migrants which merely pay us passing visits as they proceed to and return from their summer and winter homes, and accidental visitors driven out of their course. Among these the present bird must be enumerated. It belongs to the *Totani*, perhaps the most elegant of the Sandpipers; for whether running by the waterside, or winging their way over the marsh, their actions are preeminently graceful; their plumage is generally in perfect trim; and even those which frequent the dirtiest of water-courses keep their white parts clean and unsullied. The Spotted Sandpiper may be regarded as the chief of these interesting birds; for it is of large size and beautifully proportioned. It is a bird which is subject to an unusual number of changes; and even when fully adult, its dress during summer is remarkably different from that of winter. In its young state its entire under surface is covered with obscure crescentic light-brown markings, the sides of the neck are decorated with numerous short brown striæ, each feather of the upper surface is margined at the tip with a necklace-like series of coalescing greyish-white spots, and the legs and feet are coral-red; while the adult, in summer, has the head, neck, breast, and under surface sooty black, with the exception, in some individuals, of a crescent of white at the tip of each of the flank-feathers, and the legs are reddish black. In winter the upper surface is nearly uniform olive-brown, and the under surface all but pure white. Both sexes are alike in plumage at all seasons; and thus the female is as black as the male in summer, and as white as that sex in winter. It is in the young state that it is most frequently seen in the British Islands; but many instances are on record of adults having been killed in the winter dress, and of some few in the full dress of summer, at which season the white of the neck and under surface has given place to sooty black, as shown in the front figure of the accompanying plate. Such transformations as these are naturally very puzzling to the ordinary observer; and it was only after much patient research that they became thoroughly known to the scientific ornithologist. Those collectors who are in the habit of inspecting the London markets may frequently alight upon a fine example of this bird, which has been turned out of a basket sent up from Yarmouth, Ipswich, or some part of Lincolnshire; and the gunners of the Norfolk broads, the Suffolk estuaries, the Orwell, the lower Thames, and the Medway often meet solitary individuals in the months of August and September, when the bird is on its passage southwards. In spring it is again seen in the same situations, and by the same class of men, but less frequently; and that it comes to our island later in the season is certain; for Mr. Harting, in his 'Birds of Middlesex,' states that a fine specimen in full breeding-plumage was killed at Kingsbury reservoir, in June 1841, and is now, he believes, in the "Boys' Museum" at Eton College; that the bird also visits the interior of England in winter, is proved by the record in the same volume of a specimen in the plumage of that season, which had been shot on the Brent in 1849. But I find no recorded instance of its breeding either in this country or in Scotland; both Macgillivray and St. John are silent on the subject; and we must go further north if we wish to personally study this part of the bird's economy. If, on the other hand, we can be content with a vivid description of it, it is ready to our hand from the pen of the late Mr. John Wolley, who devoted his whole life to the advancement of ornithological science, and who with this view almost hibernated among the snows of Lapland to witness in spring the arrival there of so many of our rare birds; and I shall without hesitation avail myself of Mr. Hewitson's permission to extract the entire passage from his valuable 'Coloured Illustrations of the Eggs of British Birds.'

"It is with much pleasure," says Mr. Hewitson, "that I am enabled not only to give figures of the eggs of this species, hitherto unknown, but also to add the following most interesting particulars kindly sent me by Mr.

Wolley from Finland:—"I expect that henceforth the Spotted Redshank will always start up in my memory at the mention of Lapland: it is so peculiar to the country, so remarkable in its appearance in summer, and so often attracts attention by its striking actions; added to which, my ignorance of its nest and eggs for a whole year after my arrival thus far north kept up in my mind the liveliest interest concerning it. It was easy to talk about a bird with so much character; and I soon found it was known amongst the people by several names, all more or less expressive; and in my drives about Finland and into Norway during the winter I had heard from so many quarters accounts of its nesting-peculiarities, that I only waited for its return here to verify them. It came as soon as the snow was off the ground, and laid its eggs with very little delay. At this time a singular call is heard in the marshes, which the Fins express by the sound *reevat*, corresponding to a word in their language meaning an evil spirit; and one of the names of the bird is taken from it—a name always spoken with a spiteful emphasis by rein-deer stalkers; for the Rivatter is as mischievous to them as the grey crow is to a Highland forester, or a gull to a seal-shooter; but the cry with which it spoils their sport is *tjeuty*; and from this another name is derived, generally coupled with the distinctive epithet corresponding to black, or with one meaning burnt wood; but whether this last is taken from the colour of the bird, or from a common place of resort for it, or both, I am not sure. Certain it is that this black bird not unfrequently lays its eggs in a part of the forest which has formerly been burnt; and here is one of its most unexpected peculiarities—a marsh-bird choosing the driest possible situation, even hills of considerable height and covered with forest timber. I have seen two nests so placed; and one of them was on ground which, from the charred wood lying about, had evidently been burnt at some former period. They were nearly at the top of long hills, many hundreds of yards from any marshy places, and with good-sized fir trees on all sides; but they were not in the thickest part of the forest; and the vegetation on the ground round about was very scanty, diminutive heather and such like plants, growing thinly amongst short reindeer lichen. Here they were placed in slight depressions of the ground near some small ancient logs so nearly buried as to afford no shelter, on a bedding of only a few dry leaves of Scotch fir. The bird sometimes sits so close that one is tempted to try to catch it with the hand. Its white back is conspicuous as it crouches with its neck drawn in; and it either gets up at once or runs a short way before it rises, and then flies round with an occasional *tjeuty*, or stands upon the top of a neighbouring tree, showing the full length of its slender legs, neck, and bill. But it is not until it has young that all its powers are brought into play: it then comes far to meet any intruder, floating over him with a clear cry that echoes through the forest, or may be heard over a great extent of marsh, or stands very near, bowing its head and opening its bill quite wide in the energy of its gesticulation. The eggs, four in number, are of a rich green ground-colour when fresh, or sometimes of a bright brown. This year they were laid hereabouts at the end of May. The young are probably carried into marshy land as soon as they are hatched; for there they are to be found while still very small. I am told that dry mounds rising out of swamps are sometimes chosen as breeding-places.

"The nests described were stumbled upon in walking through the forest, where the bird is scattered usually at wide intervals, only two or three pairs being seen in the course of a long day's walk. The bird is so wary that I have never succeeded in watching it to its nest."

It must not, however, be supposed that Norway and Finland are the only countries in which it summers and performs the duty of reproduction; for there can be but little doubt that all suitable situations in similar latitudes of the Old World are alike resorted to, and consequently that it is as plentiful in northern Russia, Siberia, and Mongolia as it is in the far west. I presume, at least, that such is the case, because we know that it is a winter resident in North Africa, India, and China; and we may therefore conclude that the individuals frequenting those countries pass vernal and autumnally north and south; this it is pretty certain is the route of the Woodcock, and doubtless of this bird also.

Mr. Hewitson has figured three beautiful varieties of the eggs of this species, and remarks that they vary as "much as those of the Terns, while in the elegance of their form they are truly typical of the eggs of the *Scolopacidae*."

Of the three figures above mentioned one is greenish olive, blotched (particularly round the middle) with dark and reddish brown; the second is pale greyish green, similarly but not so much marbled with brown; and the third is of a tawny hue, blotched all over with dark and purplish brown.

The front figure in the Plate represents the bird in the full summer dress, the centre one that of immaturity, and the reduced figure in the distance that of winter. The two former are of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Spotted Redshank, Totanus fuscus [Pl. 55]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324012>.

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