ACTITIS HYPOLEUCOS.

Summer Snipe.

Tringa minor, Ray, Syn., p. 108, A. 6.

—— *hypoleucos*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 250.

—— *leucoptera*, Pall.

Actitis hypoleucos, Ill. Prodr. Syst. Mamm. et Av., p. 262.

Totanus hypoleucos, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit. tom. i. p. 657, et tom. iv. p. 419.

Tringoides hypoleucos, Gray, Cat. of Gen. and Subgen. of Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 117.

Actites hypoleucos, Blas. List of Birds of Europe, Engl. edit., p. 18.

Actitis empusa, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., part xv. 1847, p. 222 ?

How much pleasure have they lost who have not seen this nimble and elegant species tripping over the pebbly bottoms of our rivulets or the greensward fringing the river-banks, or witnessed how it imparts life to the scene in the neighbourhood of the glassy Highland loch ! For myself, I have always regarded it with especial interest. Faithful as is the Swallow to the time of its coming, and cheering as are the associations connected with its visit, the arrival of this bird, in the middle of April, gives an additional zest to the anticipations of a forthcoming summer. The trivial English name of Summer Snipe, by which this species is so generally known, is singularly inappropriate ; for it is in no way allied to the bird of sporting celebrity, but belongs to the Sandpipers, a totally different family, of which it is one of the most pleasing members. In its disposition it is meek, tame, and inoffensive. What the Pied Wagtail is to our lawns and gardens, and the Lark to our fields, the Summer Snipe is to the neighbourhood of our rivers and water-courses ; there it trips before us when we leisurely walk on their green turfy banks, or take a cast for a trout among the gravel-beds of the stream ; and it is certain to be one of the party in a pic-nic on the borders of some distant lake. In such situations it breeds ; and here, if the proximity of its nest be invaded, it resorts to the usual artifice of passing backwards and forwards across the stream for the purpose of enticing us away from the cherished spot. Now is the time to observe its slow, laboured, and peculiar flight, performed so close to the water that the tips of the wings appear to touch the surface ; now also is the time to observe its actions on the ground, the upflirting of its tail, the elegance with which it runs and leaps among and over the large pebbles, and the general gracefulness of its many movements. The Summer Snipe is a river and lacustrine species, seldom visiting the sea-shore, and that only prior to its departure to a warmer climate in September, when both the old birds and those which have been bred in the British Islands quit our shores for Portugal and Spain, and gradually pass onward to Africa.

There is no part of the British Islands, not even the outer Hebrides, in which this bird is not a denizen, or to which it is not a passing visitor, and so extensive is its range over the Old World that I believe it to be universally distributed in every suitable locality ; the only exception to this wide-spread distribution being that it is not found in New Zealand and some of the Polynesian Islands—at least, I do not recollect to have seen examples from thence. It is certainly an inhabitant of Lapland and all the intervening countries to the Cape of Good Hope, from Russia to Aden in Arabia, from Siberia to Cape Comorin in India, and from Kamtschatka to China ; Japan, Malacca, Sumatra, Borneo, Java, New Guinea, Timor, and Australia are also visited by this species. It is true that I have given the name of *Actitis empusa* to the Australian bird ; but I now doubt its being distinct. How singular it is that a species so universally distributed over the Old World should not be found in the New ! yet such, I believe, is the case ; for I observe that Dr. Baird does not include it in his recently published 'List of the Birds of North America,' its place in that country being supplied by a species of the same form, so intimately allied to our bird in size and structure that its habits and economy must be similar in every respect ; but that it is specifically distinct there is no doubt : the spotting of its breast has procured for it the appellation of *Actitis macularius*.

"The Common Sandpiper," says Mr. Selby, "is a bird of most lively habits, being continually in motion ; for, whether running along the shore or perched upon a stone, its tail is ever moving up and down, and it has also a habit of nodding the head by suddenly stretching out and contracting the neck. Its flight is graceful, and is performed by a rapid motion of the pinions, succeeded by an interval of rest, the wings at the same time being considerably bent and forming an angle with the body ; and in this manner it skims with rapidity over the surface of the water, not always flying in a straight line, but making occasional sweeps, uttering at the same time its shrill and well-known whistle. It breeds upon the banks of rivers and lakes, taking care to make its nest beyond the reach of the usual floods. The nest is generally placed under a

projecting tuft of grass or rush, where it scrapes rather a deep hole in the ground, and lines it with dried grass, leaves, and other materials. The eggs are four in number, of a cream-yellow colour, with numerous spots of dark brown upon the surface, and others of a lighter hue appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell." "They are pyriform, and placed with the narrow ends together, so as to occupy less space;" and "they are so disproportionately large," says Macgillivray, "that one is apt to marvel how so small a bird could have laid them, their average length being an inch and four-twelfths, and their greatest breadth an inch." "If disturbed during the period of incubation," continues Mr. Selby, "the female quits the nest as quietly as possible, and usually flies to a distance, making no outcry. As soon, however, as the young are hatched, her manners completely alter; she becomes greatly agitated on the apprehension of danger, and every stratagem is resorted to, such as feigning lameness and inability of flight, to divert the attention of the intruder from the unfledged brood. As soon as hatched, the young quit the nest, and in the course of three weeks are nearly able to fly. If discovered and an attempt be made to catch them before they are fully fledged, they boldly take to the water and dive to a considerable distance."

"Of all our summer birds of passage," says Mr. Thompson, "the Sandpiper, so attractive from its beautifully bronzed plumage, lively motions, loud piping note, and graceful curving flight, is the most widely dispersed, and the least choice as to locality, a mere sufficiency of water in any form being apparently the only essential to its presence. In the petty tarns situated amid the sublime scenery of our lofty mountains, as at Lough Salt in Donegal, on the low and extensive shores of our three greatest lakes—Lough Neagh, Erne, and Corrib, around the richly wooded and rocky shores of Killarney, as well as about lakes of every intermediate size and physical character, I have remarked this species. It is also found at the lofty source of our springs and brooks, in the beds of rocky torrents and gently flowing streams, and along the banks of the largest rivers, until, in their gathered might, they move majestically to mingle with the ocean. Here, again, on shores of every description—the soft oozy beach, the sand, the gravel, about the Norway-like *fiord* of the Killeries in Connemara, and the iron-bound coast of Antrim, including the Giant's Causeway itself—its piping note proclaims its presence."

So far as I am aware, the Summer Snipe does not breed on the banks of the Thames or any of its tributaries; but we know that it constructs its slight nest and rears its young in all suitable situations in Derbyshire, Lancashire, Westmoreland, Cumberland, Scotland, and Ireland.

The young are very peculiar in their appearance, and in their markings very much resemble youthful Avocets and long-legged Plovers. These little creatures, even before the appearance of their tail-feathers, run over the shingle with great agility, and readily screen themselves from observation by creeping under a stone, into a crevice in the earth, or among the herbage on the river-side.

The sexes are alike in plumage, and may be thus described:—

The head, all the upper surface, wing-coverts, and tertiaries greenish olive with a bronzy lustre; the feathers of the head and back with a streak of dark brown down the centre, and the wing-coverts crossed by numerous irregular bars of the same hue; primaries brown, glossed with bronze, with a narrow edging of white at the tip, and a broader mark of white along the basal portion of the inner web; secondaries white at the base, bronzy olive for the remainder of their length, with a narrow edging of white at the tip; above the eye a stripe of white; sides of the neck and breast pale olive; throat, centre of the neck, and all the under surface white; tail bronzy olive, the central feathers with a crescent of black at the tip, the next two or three on each side lighter, spotted with dark brown on each web, crossed with black near the end, and tipped with white; the outer feathers on each side the same, except that the external web is white instead of bronzy olive; the remainder of the bill pale flesh-colour, tip of the upper and the greater part of the under mandible dark brown; irides blackish brown; legs and feet pale greenish white.

The young in the first autumn are similar in colour, but have the whole of the upper surface of the body, under mandible, wings, and tail conspicuously barred with brown.

In the downy state, or when about two days old, a conspicuous line of black runs from the base of the bill through the eye to the occiput, and a similar dark line runs down the centre of the back; the upper surface is mottled with brown and grey; the under surface pure white; the legs fleshy white.

The Plate represents a male, a female, a nest of young ones, and an egg, all of the size of nature.

Gould, John. 1873. "Summer Snipe, *Actitis hypoleucos* [Pl. 58]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324015>.

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