STREPSILAS INTERPRES.

J. Gould & H.C. Fisher del. et lith.

Walter. Imp.

STREPSILAS INTERPRES.

Turnstone.

- Tringa interpres*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 63.
—— *morinella*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 249.
Strepsilas interpres, Ill. Prod. Syst. Mamm. et Av., p. 263.
—— *collaris*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1st edit. p. 349.
Morinella collaris, Meyer, Vög. Liv- und Esthl., p. 210.
Charadrius cinclus, Pall. Zoog. Ross.-Asiat., tom. ii. p. 148.
Cinclus interpres, G. R. Gray, Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 549, *Cinclus*, sp. 1.
—— *morinellus*, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 1841, p. 87.
Strepsilas borealis, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 559.
—— *littoralis*, Brehm, ib., p. 560.
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THE Turnstone is found not only in the British Islands but in almost every part of the globe,—in the Old World from Norway to the Cape of Good Hope, from China to Capes Leuwin and Howe in Australia, and even still further south (for I found it in all the parts of Tasmania I visited); in the New World from Hudson's Bay to Florida and Mexico. Mr. Darwin obtained specimens in the Galapagos archipelago, on the coast of Peru, and, according to Yarrell, in the Straits of Magellan; it is also found in the Moluccas and, doubtless, in all the other islands of the New Guinea group in the Pacific, as it certainly is in Madeira and Teneriffe in the Atlantic. Although so great a wanderer, it is nowhere very abundant; and wherever it is met with, it is singly, in pairs, or in small companies of not more than six, eight, or a dozen. Its chief breeding-quarters are doubtless the high northern regions; but some deposit their eggs, as we know, on the western coast of Norway.

The situations to which the Turnstone is more especially partial are low islands, the strands of the sea-shore, and the borders of inland waters contiguous to the ocean. In its disposition it is more tame than wary; and its actions and economy are as curious as its plumage is chaste and beautiful. Those who may wish to see a living example have only to visit the Menagerie of the Zoological Society in the Regent's Park, where they will find a domesticated individual living in perfect harmony with other birds, and in as beautiful a condition as if in a state of nature.

The usual food of the Turnstone consists of marine insects and their larvæ, worms, and crustaceans, for procuring which its peculiarly constructed bill is admirably adapted. On the beach the progress of a small troop of Turnstones may be readily traced by the stones, shells, and clods of earth they have turned over in their course. At the base of the upper mandible is a small fleshy sheath or fold of skin, the purpose of which is unknown. It has often recalled to my recollection the *Chionis*, to which bird the Turnstone seems to me to offer a slight alliance. As this fold shrivels up, becomes hard, and is not apparent after death, it must be looked for in the living bird; it is, I trust, rendered sufficiently clear in the accompanying illustration. I am uncertain whether the chestnut-red plumage in which I have figured this interesting bird, is or is not a livery which once assumed is never again thrown off; in winter we mostly meet with the bird in the dark costume represented in the reduced figure on the opposite Plate; these, however, may be young birds of the year; it was in this state that the individuals I observed in Tasmania were mostly seen.

Mr. Stevenson, in his notes on the Birds of Norfolk, states that the Turnstone visits that county regularly, though not in large numbers, arriving in August, remaining during the winter, and leaving again in spring for the breeding-grounds. He has met with small flocks in the *scavops* at Hunstanton as late as the 13th or 14th of June, and has no doubt that some few remain all the year round, but as yet has no evidence of their breeding in that neighbourhood. Mr. Rodd says it is common on the flat beaches and the Marazion sands in Cornwall during the spring and autumn migrations; and Mr. J. Edmund Harting tells me that, after spending a week in looking for the Turnstone along the Northumberland coast and on the Farne Islands, he, on the 15th of May 1863, fell in with a small flock of eight near Beadnel, and succeeded in killing two. This gentleman is of opinion that the bird still breeds on the Farne Islands; but this requires confirmation, although he states that, during a visit to North Sunderland in 1863, he purchased from a fisherman some eggs taken on the islands the previous year, among which he discovered one he believed to be a Turnstone's.

Mr. Hewitson's account of the nesting of this bird, as seen by him in Norway, is so interesting that I cannot refrain from transcribing it:—

“I have never heard of an instance of the Turnstone breeding upon the British islands, although led to expect it from having at various times seen several of the birds upon the Northumberland coast and also

upon the Shetland Islands during the months of summer. It was therefore with peculiar pleasure that we discovered its retreat upon the coast of Norway during a bird-nesting excursion to that country. We had visited numerous islands with little encouragement, and were about to land upon a flat rock, bare except where here and there grew tufts of grass or stunted juniper clinging to its surface, when our attention was attracted by the singular cry of a Turnstone, which, in its eager watch, had seen our approach and had perched itself upon an eminence of the rock, assuring us, by its querulous oft-repeated note and anxious motions, that its nest was there. We remained in the boat a short time until we had watched it behind a tuft of grass, near which, after a minute search, we succeeded in finding the nest. It was placed against the ledge of the rock, consisted of nothing more than the dropping leaves of the juniper bush, under a creeping branch of which the eggs, four in number, were snugly concealed and admirably sheltered from the many storms by which these bleak and exposed rocks are visited, allowing just sufficient room for the bird to cover them. We afterwards found several more nests with little difficulty, although requiring a very close search. In sailing amongst the many islands with which this coast is everywhere studded, we had no difficulty in ascertaining those on which we should prove successful, and were frequently led to the spot from a distance by the extreme anxiety and pugnacity evinced by this bird in its attacks upon the larger sea-fowl, especially Richardson's Skua, the egg-devouring enemy of other sea-birds. The several nests we examined, with the exception of two, were placed in similar situations to the one described; one of these was under a slanting stone, the other, without any covering whatever, upon the bare rock. They all contained four eggs, some of them more pointed than others, some much like eggs of the common Snipe, but all having a beautiful tint of purple or crimson, seen in few other eggs."

The egg, as figured on the 79th plate of Mr. Hewitson's 'Coloured Illustrations of the Eggs of British Birds,' accompanying the above account, has a ground-colour of pale-yellowish olive, blotched all over with irregular patches of dark brown and pale purple, and is one inch and a half in length by one inch and one-eighth in breadth.

Dr. Saxby, in his 'Ornithological Notes from Shetland,' states that in December "Turnstones frequent all parts of the coasts of these islands, associating with Ringed Plovers and Purple Sandpipers, but usually in small numbers, more than half a dozen being seldom seen together. When in company with other species they are more easily approached than at other times; but after having been fired at they become very suspicious, and for weeks afterwards it is difficult to get within shot upon open ground. On being disturbed they nearly always utter their loud twittering notes, and invariably fly seawards, seldom alighting until they have several times passed and repassed the selected spot. When wounded they swim with great ease, and will even take to the water voluntarily when closely pursued; but I have never seen one attempt to dive. Although they mostly frequent rocky shores, the sands, during stormy weather or immediately afterwards, appear to be very attractive." With regard to the habit which has obtained the bird its trivial name, Dr. Saxby remarks, "I have watched these birds for hours at a time, and besides witnessing the act repeatedly, have afterwards visited the ground where the displacement of stones and shells, and even the completely reversed position of some have been quite sufficient to prove the existence of the habit. Such traces are of course most readily observed upon a sandy beach, where the stones are few and scattered; and upon masses of drifted weed the wet appearance of all those portions which have lately been disturbed are very evident; indeed it is chiefly among seaweed that that peculiar method of searching for food is employed." "I was delighted," says Audubon, "to see the ingenuity with which they turned over the oyster-shells, clods of mud, and other small bodies left exposed by the retiring tide. Whenever the body was not too large, the bird bent its legs to half their length, placed its bill beneath it, and, with a sudden quick jerk of the head, pushed it off, when it quickly picked up the food that was thus exposed to view, and walked deliberately to the next shell to perform the same operation. In several instances, when the clusters of oyster-shells or clods of mud were too heavy to be removed in the ordinary way, they would not only use the bill and head, but also the breast, pushing the object with all their strength, and reminding me of the labour I have undergone in turning over a large turtle. Among the seaweeds cast on the shore they used the bill only, tossing the garbage from side to side with the utmost dexterity."

The figures in the accompanying Plate represent the two sexes, of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Turnstone, *Streptopelia interpres* [Pl. 60]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324017>.

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