



ACTITURUS BARTRAMIUS.

Bartram's Sandpiper.

Tringa Bartramia, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. vii. p. 63, pl. 59. fig. 2.

—— *longicauda*, Bechst. Vög., Nacht., p. 453.

Totanus Bartramius, Bonap. Cat. Birds of United States, p. 262.

Actiturus Bartramius, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 51.

Bartramia laticauda, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 553.

Tringoides Bartramius, Gray & Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 574, *Tringoides*, sp. 4.

Actitis Bartramia, Naum. Naturg. Deutschl., pl. 196.

Euliga Bartramia, Nutt. Man. Orn. of Unit. States and Canada, vol. ii. p. 169.

Totanus variegatus, Vieill. Gal. des Ois., tom. ii. p. 197, pl. cccxxxix.

WERE I to enumerate as correct all the statements recorded of the occurrence of Bartram's Sandpiper in England, I should be sadly deceiving my readers; for in most instances the birds so called have been male Ruffs in the plumage of the first autumn, just as Reeves of the same age have been mistaken for Pectoral Sandpipers; but it has undoubtedly occurred here in at least three instances; and there are two specimens in the Museum at Leyden labelled by the late celebrated Temminck as having been killed, one in Holland, the other in Germany; I have also received a single one from Australia, as recorded in the supplementary volume of my work on the birds of that country. These instances tend to prove that the bird is a great wanderer, its native home being America, over the northern portion of which it is widely dispersed, and where it breeds in abundance, migrating at the autumn season as far south as Mexico and Guatemala. It is by no means a true Sandpiper; for it evinces little partiality for the sea-shores or the margins of rivers, but betakes itself to the grassy meadows and uplands of the interior of the country. The peculiar form of its head and the large size of its eyes suggest to the ornithologist that it is somewhat related to the Stone-Plover or Thick-knee (*Edicnemus crepitans*), to whose habits its own also offer a considerable resemblance; moreover the sexes are alike in colouring.

The first example taken in England was recorded in the 'Zoologist' for 1851, by the late Hugh Reid, of Doncaster, without the assignment of any name; but Mr. A. G. More and Mr. J. H. Gurney subsequently determined it to be a veritable *Actiturus Bartramius*. It was killed near Warwick, and was sent to Mr. Reid for preservation on the 31st of October by R. Barnard, Esq., but is now, I believe, in the collection of Lord Willoughby de Broke, at Compton Verney, near Stratford-on-Avon. The second specimen was recorded by the Rev. Frederick Tearle, of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in the 'Illustrated London News,' with an accompanying representation of the bird, on the 20th of January, 1855, and formed the subject of the article "Bartram's Sandpiper," in the second supplement to Yarrell's 'British Birds.' Mr. J. H. Gurney, Jun., informs me that this bird is now in his father's collection, and has called my attention to the following account of its capture, from the pen of the Rev. F. Tearle, in the fifth volume of the 'Naturalist':—

"The specimen was first seen by some labourers engaged in threshing, near a farm-yard about ten miles from Cambridge. Its peculiar and plaintive whistling cry first attracted their attention; and on watching it, they observed that it frequently alighted and ran along the ground in an apparently weak and exhausted state. For this reason one of the men fancied he could catch it with his hat, and began to chase it across the field. But as soon as he approached tolerably near, the bird rose and flew round in large circles above him, uttering at intervals its wailing note. He soon relinquished the pursuit; but a gamekeeper's boy, who lived in a cottage close by, took out his father's gun, and shot it. It allowed him to approach several times within gunshot before it rose. Standing erect, it seemed to watch and wait for him, then ran a short distance and stood as before, after the manner of a bird that wishes to decoy an intruder from its nest. It eventually rose, and was brought down. I am unable to state its sex."

The third and last killed in England was seen hanging up in a gamedealer's at Falmouth, Nov. 13th, 1865, by Mr. G. F. Matthew, and afterwards by Dr. Bullmore, who bought, and recorded it in the 'Zoologist' for 1866, where he says:—"From inquiries instituted by me I find this bird was flushed by a farmer's son near Mullion, from a piece of pasture-turnips where he had just previously risen some six or eight Snipes. It rose singly, uttering a short shrill scream, flew over the hedge, and dropped into a ditch by the side of a contiguous road. On the approach of its pursuer it again rose, and alighted in the middle of a hayfield, where it was shot while busily occupied in running about on the ground."

The best accounts of this species are contained in the works of Wilson and Audubon, the latter of whom states that it is the most truly terrestrial of all its tribe with which he was acquainted; "for although not unfrequently met with in the vicinity of shallow pools, the muddy margins of the shores of the sea, and fresh-water lakes and streams, it never ventures to wade into them. The dry upland plains of Opellousas and Attacapas in Louisiana are amply tenanted with these birds in early spring and in autumn. They arrive there in the beginning of March from the vast prairies of Texas and Mexico (where they spend the winter), and return about the first of August. They are equally abundant on all the western prairies on both sides of the Missouri, where, however, they arrive about a month later than in Louisiana, whence they disperse over the United States, reaching the middle districts early in May, and the State of Maine by the middle of that month, at about which period they are also seen in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. That some proceed as far north as the plains adjoining the Saskatchewan river is certain; for Dr. Richardson there met with examples in the month of May. In the neighbourhood of New Orleans (where the bird is known by the name of "Papabote") it usually arrives in great bands in spring, and is met with on the open plains and large grassy savannas, and usually remains about a fortnight. On their return southward in the beginning of August (when they tarry in Louisiana until the 1st of October), they are fat and juicy. In spring, when they are poor and thin, they are usually much less shy than in autumn, at which period they are exceedingly wary and difficult of approach. Like all experienced travellers, Bartram's Sandpiper appears to accommodate itself to circumstances as regards food; for in Louisiana it feeds on Cantharides and other Coleopterous insects; in Massachusetts on grasshoppers, on which it soon grows very fat; in the Carolinas on crickets and other insects, as well as the seeds of the crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*); and in the barrens of Kentucky it often picks the strawberries. Those which feed on Cantharides require to be very carefully cleaned; otherwise persons who eat them are liable to suffer severely; but when their flesh is imbued with the flavour of ripe strawberries it is truly delicious.

"They not unfrequently alight on fences, trees, and out-houses, but, whether in such situations or on the ground, seldom settle without raising both wings upright to their full extent and uttering their loud and prolonged, but pleasing notes. They run with great activity, stop suddenly and vibrate the body once or twice. When earnestly followed they lower their heads and run off rapidly, or squat, according to the urgency of the occasion. At other times they partially extend their wings, run a few steps, as if about to fly, and then cunningly move off sideways and conceal themselves among the grass or behind a clod. You are not unfrequently rendered aware of your being within sight of them by unexpectedly hearing their plaintive and mellow notes; yet, on searching for the bird, you nowhere see it, for the cunning creature has slipped away and hid itself. When wounded in the wing, they run to a great distance and are rarely found.

"I have found the eggs of this bird laid on the bare earth, scooped out to the depth of about an inch and a half, near the roots of a tuft of rank grass in the middle of a meadow; and seen some nests formed of loosely arranged grasses, placed almost beneath low bushes growing on poor elevated ridges furnished with a scanty vegetation. The eggs measure an inch and five eighths by an inch and a quarter; they are broadly rounded at one end and rather pointed at the other, their surface smooth; the ground-colour dull greyish yellow, with numerous spots of light purple and reddish brown."

"In New Orleans," says Mr. Dresser, in 'The Ibis' for 1866, "this bird is much sought after by epicures; and I quite agree with them in so doing, for I never tasted a better one. Indeed we ate them three times a day whenever we could procure them, and would touch nothing else. Our mode of cooking them was to pluck and draw, then split them up the back, and fry them in their own fat, adding a little pepper and salt; and in such good condition were they, that this melted fat would almost cover them in the pan, and the process nearly became one of boiling instead of frying. In some cases I have seen them so fat that they actually burst on falling to the ground."

I am indebted to J. H. Gurney, Esq. for the following interesting note on the habits of this bird as observed by Mr. R. P. Nicholls, of Kingsbridge, Devon, "an intelligent and trustworthy observer of nature."

"In the neighbourhood of the town of Trempealeau, on the river Mississippi, in the western part of Wisconsin, United States, where I resided for several years, these birds were very common from the beginning of May to July, when they seemed to retire, most probably southward. They are to be seen running and flying in pairs, and breeding on the extensive prairie-lands, always on the borders of the oak openings, and not near water; they seem to be very tame, and will permit one to approach, especially when breaking ground, so near as to be able to knock them down with the ox-whip, which to do is considered cowardly by the people. Their mode of flight is very peculiar; they rise from the ground and soar, not unlike the Kestrel, directly over your head, as if watching your movements; and if a tree is near, they apparently float to, and perch on, the uppermost bough, at the same time raising their wings over the back so as nearly to touch at their points, and uttering a shrill short whistle gradually diminishing in sound until it is scarcely perceptible. Where the trees are large they also frequently settle on their main branches. I have often sat down on the grass, remaining perfectly quiet, when they would pick about in pairs, uttering a guttural note, and approach within six or seven yards of me with the greatest confidence. Their nest is merely a slight indentation in the ground, protected by a tuft of prairie-grass. I have often seen the eggs, numbering four or five, of a large size, and of an olive-brown colour, profusely spotted with dark brown. I have never known them breed on ground that has been once cultivated, but always on the wild prairie-land."

The Plate represents two birds, of the natural size.



Gould, John. 1873. "Bartram's Sandpiper, *Actiturus bartramius* [Pl. 63]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324019>.

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