TRINGA CANTUS, Linn.

TRINGA CANUTUS, *Linn.*

Knot.

- Tringa canutus*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 65.
—— *ferruginea*, Meyer, Taschenb. deutsch. Vög., tom. ii. p. 395.
—— *calidris*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 253.
—— *cinerea*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 673.
—— *grisea et naevia*, Gmel. ibid., p. 681.
—— *islandica*, Gmel. ibid., p. 682.
—— *australis*, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 737.
Canutus islandicus, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 654.
—— *cinereus*, Brehm, ibid., p. 655, tab. 34. fig. 2.
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THE Knot is more numerous in Britain during the spring and autumn months than at any other season of the year. At the former period it is proceeding northward to breed in some unknown country, and in the latter it is retracing its steps in a southerly direction; our islands must therefore be regarded as a mere halting-station during its great vernal and autumnal movements: but this statement must not be taken literally, inasmuch as in the intervening seasons stray individuals and even small flocks are sometimes seen. I have received specimens of the Knot from nearly every coast of Africa; and it is probably that part of the globe from which our numerous spring visitors arrive, and to which they again proceed in autumn. Judging from a letter kindly transmitted to me by Lord Lilford, Spain, from south to north, would seem to be another of its halting-places; for he says:—"I found this species in enormous numbers (I believe I might, without exaggeration, say in millions) on the great alluvial flats of the Guadalquivir, not far from San Lucar de Barrameda, in the first fortnight of May 1872. There were also great numbers of many other species of marsh-birds; but this was by far the most numerous at that time. Almost all of the many specimens we obtained were in full summer plumage. Their numbers daily diminished as the marshes became drier with the advance of the season. I have kept a great many of this species alive in my aviary, some of which regularly acquired the red plumage in summer; but it seemed to me never so brilliant as in the wild birds. They often perched on the cross-perches in the aviary, and fed readily on chopped meat, bread, soaked grain, worms, &c., in summer catching gnats and flies for themselves."

"The Knot," says Yarrell, "visits Iceland, and goes to much higher northern latitudes every summer, as reference to the natural-history details of our various Arctic expeditions will prove. Captain Sabine, in his memoir on the birds of Greenland, says:—'The Knot was killed at Hare Island in June.' On Sir Edward Parry's first voyage, these birds were found breeding in great abundance on the North Georgian Islands; and on the second voyage a young male of the year was killed in the Duke of York's Bay on the 17th of August. Dr. Richardson adds:—'Knots were observed breeding on Melville Peninsula by Captain Lyon, who tells us that they lay four eggs on a tuft of withered grass, without being at the pains of forming any nest.' In the 'Fauna Boreali-Americana,' Dr. Richardson says the Knot breeds in Hudson's Bay and down to the fifty-fifth parallel; the eggs are described as being of a light yellowish brown, marked at the larger end with grey and reddish spots, forming more or less a sort of zone, and but little spotted towards the point." This bird, in all its various states of plumage, appears to be well known to the ornithologists of the United States.

The Knot is evidently less common on the west coast of Scotland and the Outer Hebrides than on the east; for Mr. Robert Gray says:—"Judging from my own observations, I should be inclined to regard this bird as a somewhat uncommon species in the western counties of Scotland. I have met with occasional specimens from Sutherlandshire to the Mull of Galloway, but have never seen such flocks on our shores as are to be seen on those of the eastern counties. It has occurred in Islay, as I have been informed by Mr. Elwes, but not, so far as I am aware, on any of the other islands, except in a single instance, namely that of a specimen in full summer plumage which was shot on the 30th of July 1870, by Captain MacRea, in the strand of Vallay, in the North Uist, and shown to me by that gentleman three days afterwards, when I visited the island. This specimen is now in the collection of Captain Orde. In September 1868, when on a visit to the Mull of Galloway lighthouse, I saw a fine specimen taken on the lanterns, against which it fell stunned; but Mr. McDonald, one of the keepers there, informed me that he had never observed one before."

Speaking of the birds of Ireland, Thompson says "the flight of the Knot is very swift and strong. On the 1st of February 1845, I noticed a large flock of from a thousand to twelve hundred, sweeping over the

banks on the Antrim side of Belfast Bay, rising high into the air, and passing through evolutions similar to those of the Dunlin. The first time they swept past, though at some distance, they actually startled me by their silvery flash. It was within two hours of high water; and the atmosphere was in a most singular state. There was frost, and had been for a few days previously; the sea-banks over which the tide flows, and which have usually a cold, wet, muddy aspect, now appeared dry, as if baked, and of a rich brown and dark green colour. When the large body of Knots alighted a great number of Dunlins took their stand at one extremity of the flock. They were nearly half a mile from the road on which I was; and as every individual of the many hundreds was distinctly seen, of a silvery whiteness, running about feeding on what appeared a rich green carpet of *Zostera marina*, the singularity of the scene may readily be imagined. The Gulls, too, were conspicuous for two miles, though appearing gradually smaller as they dotted the more distant beach. The light was of such a nature that, while each Knot and Dunlin looked silvery white, every Gull appeared of the purest snowy hue." While this page was going through the press, Mr. Harting kindly favoured me with the following notes:—"The Knot is found throughout Europe as a migratory species in spring and autumn; but a good many remain to winter on the southern coast. It passes down the west coast of Africa through Damaraland (where the late Mr. Andersson obtained specimens) to the Cape; it is not found in Egypt, nor on the east coast of Africa. It visits the Atlantic shores of America; but in Asia it is rare. Two specimens only are known to have been procured in India—one in winter plumage, obtained in the Calcutta bazaar, and one assuming the summer plumage, killed in southern India; the latter is now in the Calcutta Museum. It has occurred accidentally in Australia, specimens having been obtained by Strange in Moreton Bay; it also visits New Zealand.

"It is remarkable that the colour of the bill, legs, and feet in this species varies according to season; in summer they are nearly black, the soles of the feet greenish clay-colour. In winter the bill and tarsi are greenish grey, and the soles of the feet yellowish clay-colour.

"I think the Knot is one of the tamest of our shore-birds, and will allow a very near approach before taking wing, especially in autumn, when the flocks are composed for the most part of young birds. It is very easily decoyed, too, by an imitation of its note, even when the gunner is not concealed. When out in Pagham Harbour after Grey Plovers and Curlews, I have frequently called Knots right over the punt; and lying down in the punt in a deep gully waiting for the tide, I have called a single Knot over the mud from a considerable distance. It ran the whole way, calling at intervals in reply to me, and at length came so close that I might have knocked it down with an oar. I did, indeed, try to touch it with the muzzle of my gun, when it rose and flew away, the man who was with me in the punt exclaiming 'If you'd only kept on calling, Sir, I really believe he'd have walked into the boat.' I mention this to show how tame and confiding this bird is."

There is scarcely any one of the Sandpipers that has more pleasing associations connected with it than the Knot. The seasonal changes it assumes are both curious and interesting. Its winter garb is totally different from its rich summer dress, while the young, during the first autumn, have all the light-grey feathers of the back crescented with white or greyish white. As a bird for the table, although not equal to the Snipe, it is by no means despicable; and many thousands are annually sent to our markets for consumption as food. The extreme tameness of its disposition deprives any true sportsman of the desire to destroy it; and it is principally those who live by their gun, the men who traverse the broads in their flat-bottomed boats, and whose nasal organs are accustomed to the odour of the mud they almost breathe, that supply our markets by the tithe they take of the birds during their flight. "The first flights," says Mr. Stevenson, "are described by Mr. Dowell as by no means difficult of approach; but as the season advances and more arrive, they assemble in larger flocks, and are then more wary, and, except in dirty weather, are not to be approached by the aid of a gunning-punt. Those which arrive in August and September usually leave again in October. Overton, the Blakeney gunner, once shot two hundred and thirty Knots, twenty-five Grey Plovers, and eighteen Redshanks. Now, as the weight of the Knot is from four and a half to six ounces, and that of the Plovers and Redshanks even more, in a utilitarian point of view this shot was an important one.

The Plate represents the bird in summer and autumn plumage, and the young of the year, all of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Knot, *Tringa canutus* [Pl. 65]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, –. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324021>.

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