ACTODROMAS MINUTA.

Conrad & H. B. Baker, del. et lith.

Walter, Imp.

ACTODROMAS MINUTA.

Little Stint.

- Tringa minuta*, Leisl. Nacht. zu Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. i. p. 74.
—— *cinclus*, Pall. Zoog. Ross.-Asiat., tom. ii. p. 201.
—— *pusilla*, Wolf et Meyer, Taschenb. Deutschl. Vög., tom. ii. p. 391.
—— *Temminckii*, Koch, Baier. Zool., tom. i. p. 292.
Pelidna minuta, Boie, Isis, 1826, p. 979.
—— *pusilla*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 666.
Actodromas minuta, Kaup, Natiirl. Syst., p. 55.
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ALTHOUGH this pretty species of Sandpiper has been very frequently killed in England and repeatedly in Ireland, its presence can never be looked for with certainty; moreover it does not breed with us; for though specimens occur in the red or nuptial dress, they are merely *en route* to the northern regions to deposit their eggs and rear their little progenies in countries almost unknown to us, the only record I find of their breeding in any place being that mentioned by Dr. David Walker in his "Notes on the Voyage of 'The Fox,'" who says, "The winter of 1858–59 was spent at Port Kennedy, in the mouth of Bellot Straits, 72° 11' N., 94° W. Early in June numbers of *Tringa minuta* and *T. interpres* were found breeding in the marshy valleys." It is indeed most remarkable that (with this exception, if Dr. Walker is correct as to the identity of the species seen by him) the true incubating home of a bird which ranges over Europe, the whole of Africa, Asia Minor, Persia, India, China, and Japan should not have been discovered.

With regard to the connexion of the Little Stint with our avifauna, Mr. Yarrell says:—"The species was first mentioned by Pennant as a British Bird from a specimen killed in Cambridgeshire, and is most frequent on the southern and eastern shores of this country. Indeed, from the eastern localities comprised within the geographical range of this bird, it is probable that it seldom comes so far westward as the British Islands, when on its way, in the spring, to the high northern latitudes in which a portion of them every year produce their young." He then proceeds to mention that the appearance of both old and young birds in autumn in the vicinity of the Solway has several times been recorded, that it has occurred in the western part of Lancashire, that from forty to fifty were seen on the Laira mud-banks near Plymouth in October 1840, that the bird has been frequently observed on the coast of Sussex, that he had obtained them in the London markets in the summer and winter plumage, but most frequently in that of autumn (when, indeed, they are more common than at any other period of the year), that a flock of thirty was seen in Romney Marsh, 1839, and that they are numerous on the coasts of Suffolk, Norfolk, Yorkshire, and Durham, but are not so often killed in the more northern counties. "They are most frequently found on the sandy shores of the sea, and generally in company with the Dunlin or the Sanderling, or both, as they fly in small and sometimes in large flocks together. They select for food aquatic insects, small crustacea, worms, and mollusks."

According to Mr. Rodd it is occasionally seen in Cornwall, and specimens obtained from salt marshes near the sea, Marazion marsh and Hayle estuary.

Neither Sir William Jardine nor MacGillivray met with the bird in Scotland; and although Thompson says it is a regular autumnal visitant to Ireland, it appears there in extremely limited numbers. More recently, however, it has been stated that a specimen was obtained at Fraserburgh in September 1854; and the Rev. F. O. Morris mentions that one was killed by William Strang, Esq., in Orkney in 1837, and another seen by him in 1848.

Temminck says that in its passage it visits the borders of the rivers in Germany and France, and in autumn is to be found on the great marshes of Holland, but rarely on its maritime coasts, that it is very common on the lake of Geneva and occurs in great numbers on the salt marshes of Dalmatia in August and September in the garb of winter, and that those seen on their passage through France are in their perfect nuptial plumage. Nilsson states it is found in Sweden from spring to autumn; but Mr. Dann informed Mr. Yarrell that it is by no means common there, and that the only specimens he met with were in autumn, in the flooded grounds on the banks of rivers and lakes, where, on being approached, they squat down and allow you to advance within a few feet of them. Mr. Selby mentions that he had received specimens in almost perfect plumage from Italy, where it has also been observed by Dr. Henry Giglioli in the neighbourhood of Pisa.

Loche mentions it as a bird of passage in Algeria; and the Zoological Society have received specimens

from Tangiers and Trebizond; Mr. E. C. Taylor states that it occasionally occurs in small flocks in Egypt; Dr. Andrew Smith obtained it in South Africa. At Natal, Mr. J. H. Gurney says, it "may be found feeding at low water amongst the mud and weeds in the bay; it is gregarious and is, I think, only found here in winter; is occasionally seen in considerable flights on the mud flats and borders of pools in the Transvaal. It is very shy and difficult of approach, and its flight is very rapid. This species has also been obtained by Mr. Andersson at Walvisch Bay;" according to Mr. C. A. Wright it is very common in Malta in the spring, part of the summer, and in autumn. Lord Lilford says it is rather common in the Ionian Islands "in April and May, particularly on the race-course of Corfu, an excellent locality for birds of many species at various seasons;" and Lieut. Sperling that about Missolonghi, in Greece, it was rather rare in the early part of December. Specimens were obtained by the Rev. H. B. Tristram in Palestine. Mr. Jerdon informs us that "the Little Stint is very abundant throughout India in winter, associating in large flocks, and feeding on marshy ground, rice-fields, and the edges of tanks and rivers. It is very excellent eating;" Captain Irby, that in Oudh and Kumaon it is "very common in flocks during the cold season." Mr. Swinhoe enumerates it among the birds observed by him between Takoo and Peking in north China, in his list of the birds of Amoy, and, in his notes on the ornithology of Foochow, says it is seen on the coast in September, chiefly on its way to more southerly regions, to pass up again in March or the commencement of April. In those months it is often found by inland salt marshes with other species of the same and allied forms and the Great Snipe (*Gallinago megala*, Swinh.); and, lastly, Mr. H. Whitely states that he observed this bird in small flocks on the sea-shore at Hakodadi, in Japan, in the autumn, and shot two specimens near the end of September.

Meyer says the Little Stint sleeps in the early part of the day, and if approached runs a short distance very quickly and then takes wing, its flight being rapid, but rather unsteady, and with arched wings. It is kept in confinement without difficulty.

Its note is said by one writer to resemble the words *deer-deer*, and by another *stint-stint*, whence perhaps one of its trivial names.

The above desultory notes comprise all I can find recorded respecting this Sandpiper, to which I have only to add that it is represented in America by a species which mainly differs in being of a still smaller size, and in Australia by another which is distinguished from it by having a larger amount of red on the sides of the neck and throat and in having a smaller bill.

In summer the head and neck are rusty red, speckled with black; the feathers of the back, scapularies, wing-coverts, tertiaries, and upper tail-coverts brownish black, broadly margined with rufous and white; primaries black, with white shafts; secondaries similar, but tipped with white; chin, breast, axillaries, and under surface of the body pure white; sides of the neck and chest rufous, speckled with black; irides dark brown; bill black; legs, toes, and claws brownish black.

In the autumn all the colours are much paler, and there is a considerable mixture of grey and buffy white on the margins of the feathers of the upper parts of the body.

In winter the grey tint becomes still more conspicuous,—the head and neck being ash-grey, with a darker line down each feather; the upper surface is very similar; the primaries and secondaries are in the same state as in autumn; but the tertiaries become ashy brown with lighter margins, and the tail ashy grey narrowly edged with white.

The figures represent a male and a female, in the dress of summer; the bird in the distance the plumage of winter or a young bird. The maritime plant is the Sea-holly (*Eryngium maritimum*).

Gould, John. 1873. "Little Stint, *Actodromas minuta* [Pl. 72]." *The birds of Great Britain* 4, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324027>.

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