Temple & H.C. Butler del. et lith.

CASARCA RUTILA.

Walter, imp.

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Ruddy Sheldrake.

Anas rutila, Pall. Nov. Comm. Petrop., tom. xiv. p. 579, tab. 22. fig. 1.

— *casarca*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 511.

Tadorna rutila, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.

Vulpanser rutila, Keys. und Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 84.

Tadorna casarca, Macgill. Man. of Nat. Hist., Orn., vol. ii. p. 163.

Casarca rutila, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 56.

FROM the circumstance of the trivial name of this species being "Ruddy Sheldrake" it would naturally be supposed that it is closely allied to the bird figured in the preceding plate, the *Tadorna vulpanser*; and to a certain extent it is; but, as every ornithologist is aware, the two birds have been generically separated. The Common Sheldrake is one of the most ornamental of our water-fowl, graceful in its actions, beautiful in its markings, and domestic in disposition—traits which render it an especial favourite; the Ruddy Sheldrake, on the other hand, although a finely coloured bird, and by no means devoid of beauty, is more *Anserine* or Goose-like in its actions and economy, and is more adapted for the land than the water, on which element it is less graceful and buoyant; its bill and legs, too, are coarse and black—instead of being richly coloured, like those of the Common Sheldrake.

The *Casarca rutila*, unlike the *Tadorna vulpanser* (which is indigenous to our islands), is merely a visitor, and one of the rarest birds so classified in our lists, its occurrences here being few and at periods far apart. The first British specimen is said to have been killed as long ago as 1776, and to still form a part of the collection at Newcastle-on-Tyne. The late Mr. Fox, of Durham, appears to have been the first to notice it as British, from the example above alluded to, which previously belonged to Marmaduke Tunstal, and which was believed to have been shot at Bryanstone, near Blandford, in Dorsetshire. Yarrell states that two other specimens have since been killed—one in the south of England, now in the collection of the late Mr. Selby, and the other in January 1834, at Iken, near Orford, on the coast of Suffolk, which passed into the possession of Mr. Manning, of Woodbridge. Thompson, in his 'Natural History of Ireland,' states that an example of this species was shot "on the Murrough of Wicklow, by Mr. John Moreton of that town, on the 7th of July, 1847. The Murrough is an extensive low sandy tract bordering the sea, such as is resorted to by the Common Sheldrake (*T. vulpanser*) for the purpose of breeding. "On the next day," adds Thompson, "the specimen came into the possession of T. W. Warren, Esq. Its plumage indicates a male, nearly adult." Besides the above, the Rev. F. O. Morris speaks of another as having been obtained on Sanday Island, one of the Orkneys, by Mr. Strang, in October 1831.

The range of the Ruddy Sheldrake over the surface of the globe appears to be almost as extensive as that of the Common Sheldrake; for it is found in most of the warmer parts of Europe and, I believe, the whole of Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Mediterranean, and, like most other species which frequent the latter part of that continent, Palestine, the Holy Land, Asia Minor, and Persia; it is also one of the commonest species of Ducks in the peninsula of India, in Thibet, China, Formosa, and Japan. The justly celebrated Russian naturalist, Pallas, states that it does not extend beyond 50° N. lat., and that in Mongolia, where it breeds in Marmot-holes and hollow trees, it is held sacred by the Mongols and Calmucks. Dr. Hooker observed it breeding in the rocks of the Himalayas, and Dr. Adams in Sikkim and Ladakh. The following extracts will show that the bird has many habits in common with the Sheldrake, particularly that of breeding in holes; like that species, too, it is said to be almost unfit for human food:—

Mr. W. H. Simpson, in his 'Fortnight on the Dobrudscha,' says, "The earth-cliffs about Kustendjé" (the eastern terminus of the Danube and Black-Sea Railway) "are much resorted to by birds for breeding, from the facility with which they are perforated. The Ruddy Shelduck breeds in these places, and also in the holes of Trajan's Wall, and in other holes up the country. Though the bird is plentiful, it is by no means easy to obtain the eggs. I and my friend spent the greater part of the day in driving a tunnel into a bank where one had been seen to come out. But our labour was in vain; for, after advancing several yards, working one at a time, prostrate and in the dark, the original hole was found to fork off into two branches. The natives sometimes obtain a sitting, and the young ones are brought up for domestic purposes."—*Ibis*, 1861, p. 365.

"Hundreds of these birds," says the Rev. H. B. Tristram, in his 'Notes on the Ornithology of North Africa,' "resort to the salt lakes of Bou Guizoun, Waregla, Tuggurt, &c. At Bou Guizoun I captured some half-dozen nestlings of various ages in the downy state, some of them scarcely more than a day old; and yet the only place where they could possibly have bred, and where we had procured a nest three days

previously, was a range of cliffs more than twelve miles distant. This was in May 1856."—*Ibis*, 1860, p. 81.

In Mr. O. Salvin's 'Five Months' Birds'-nesting in the Eastern Atlas,' it is stated that "though this bird is numerous on all the salt lakes of the elevated plains, its egg is one of the most difficult to obtain. One nest only rewarded our labours. The rarity of the eggs is hardly surprising when the situation chosen by this bird for its nest is considered. It selects a hole or crevice of a cliff for its breeding-place, and associates with the Raven, the Black Kite, and Egyptian Vulture during the period of the reproduction of its young. Almost immediately on encamping at Ain Djendeli we used daily to see a pair of Ruddy Sheldrakes pass over our tent, their direction always being backwards and forwards between the cliffs to the south of us, and the small marsh between us and the lake. After careful investigation, the nest was discovered to be in a hole in the face of a rock, which required all the skill of Mohamed, and all our appliances of ropes &c., to reach. The result was four hard-set eggs, which are now in the collections of Messrs. Tristram, Simpson, Wolley, and myself. Though the Arabs were aware of the habits of the bird, we did not succeed in obtaining any more."—*Ibis*, 1859, p. 362.

In Palestine Mr. Tristram found the *Casarca rutila* near the Dead Sea, and obtained its eggs in a cliff in Northern Galilee, among some Griffons' (*Vultur fulvus*) nests in May.

The late Mr. Strickland says it is frequently to be seen in the poultry-shops at Smyrna; and Messrs. Dickson and Ross state it is abundant at Erzeroum, frequenting the marshes during the daytime, and feeding late in the evening and early in the morning in corn- and stubble-fields—that it arrives about the middle of March, and departs at the end of November; they also remark that it is rarely seen on the water.

"The Ruddy Sheldrake, or Brahminy Duck, as it is called in India," says Mr. Jerdon, "is a well-known winter visitant to all parts of the country. It is generally seen, even at this season, in pairs or small parties, frequenting alike rivers, brooks, jheels, and lakes. It walks well on the ground, and grazes in the young corn-fields, just like Geese; it also picks up seeds of grass, grain, &c. Towards the close of the cold weather the Brahminy Ducks assemble in numbers, and on the Chilka Lake I have seen thousands in one flock in April. The call is peculiar and Goose-like (resembling a clarinet, says Pallas), sounding something like *â-oung*, and hence the name of *Aangir*, which, according to Pallas, is given to this bird among the Mongols." Mr. Yarrell says that this sound is uttered while the bird is flying, and that at other times it cries like a Peacock, especially when kept confined, and that it now and then clucks like a hen. Dr. Jerdon says, "The Hindoos have a legend that two lovers, for some indiscretion, were transformed into Brahminy Ducks, that they were condemned to pass the night apart from each other on opposite banks of the river, and that all night long, each in its turn, asks its mate if it shall come across, but the question is always met by a negative:—'Chakwa, shall I come?' 'No Chakwi.' 'Chakwi, shall I come?' 'No Chakwa.'"—*Birds of India*, vol. iii. p. 792.

Captain L. H. Irby, in his 'Notes on Birds observed in Oudh and Kumaon,' says, "The Ruddy Sheldrake (*Casarca rutila*), Brahminy Duck of Europeans, the *Chukwa* of the natives, probably so called from its cry," is "very common in the cold season on the large rivers and lakes, but is seldom seen on the small jheels, except in the vicinity of rivers. During the day, immense flocks rest on the sand-banks of rivers, and towards dusk break up into pairs and disperse in various directions. Should one bird be killed, its mate will not leave the spot, but continue flying round for some time, calling repeatedly. It is a shame to shoot them, as their flesh is proverbial for its dryness and other bad qualities. There is a strange Hindoo legend about the *Chukwa*, the pith of which is, that any person who kills one is for ever after doomed to celibacy."—*Ibis*, 1861, p. 249.

The food of the Ruddy Sheldrake consists of aquatic plants and their seeds, insects, the fry of fish, grain, &c. They lay eight or nine creamy-white eggs; and when the young ones come forth, the mother will often carry them, from the place of hatching to the water, in her bill.

The above passages comprise all the information of interest on record respecting this bird. I am aware that it might have been compressed into two or three paragraphs; but I have thought it only an act of justice to the various writers to let each speak for himself. I have only to add that there is but little difference in the outward appearance of the sexes; perhaps a lighter-coloured head and the absence of the black ring from the neck of the female are the only ones; and I am not certain that in the latter this is constant.

The Plate represents the two sexes, nearly of the size of life.

Gould, John. 1873. "Ruddy Sheldrake, *Casarca rutila* [Pl. 12]." *The birds of Great Britain* 5, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324056>.

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