PAGOPHILA EBURNEA.

Illustrated by H. C. Richter, del. et lith.

Walter, Imp.

PAGOPHILA EBURNEA.

Ivory Gull.

Larus eburneus, Phipps, Voy. towards the North Pole, App., p. 187.

— *niveus*, Mart. Hist. de Spitzb., t. 4. f. A.

— *candidus*, Fabr. Faun. Grœnl., p. 67.

Cetosparactes eburneus, Macg. Man. of Nat. Hist., vol. ii. p. 252.

Pagophila eburnea, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 69.

Gavia eburnea, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.

— *nivea*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 766, tab. 38. fig. 1.

Pagophila brachytarsa, Holb. ?

It will be seen in the sequel that this beautiful Gull has occurred in our seas several times, and hence it is necessarily included in the avifauna of Britain; but the glacial seas of the extreme north are its natural home, for in those inhospitable regions it breeds and rears its young. If the North Pole be ever reached, and salt water be found to exist there, I predict that the Ivory Gull will be one of the birds enlivening the scene. Among the specimens that have come under my notice I have observed much difference in the size of the individuals, and it is a question whether there is not more than a single species of this particular form; still our acquaintance with these Gulls and the localities in which they were procured is not sufficiently perfect to enable us to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. Mr. Newton believes there is only one. As regards the sexes, but little difference occurs in size, and none in the colouring of adults; the young, on the other hand, accord with the young of some other Gulls in having their plumage spotted and barred with brown, a state represented by the hinder figure in my Plate, which will give a more accurate idea of its appearance than pages of writing.

The Ivory Gulls obtained in the British Islands are but few in number (seven or eight in England, three or four in Scotland and its islands, and one or two in Ireland). Captain Sabine states that it is abundant in Baffin's Bay, and Dr. Richardson that it also frequents Davis's Straits and various parts of the shores of the American continent, and he observed it breeding in great numbers in the high perforated cliffs which form the extremity of Cape Parry, in latitude 70°. It is generally met with out at sea in company with the Fulmar, and, like that species, is a constant attendant upon the whale-fishery, greedily feeding upon the blubber, which with other animal matter constitutes its food.

"The Ivory Gull, first scientifically described by Lord Mulgrave," says Mr. Newton, "is of all others the bird of which any visitor to Spitzbergen will carry away the keenest recollection. One can only wish that a creature so fair to look upon was not so foul a feeder. Contrary to the experience of almost all other observers, I once saw an Ivory Gull of its own accord deliberately settle on the water and swim. This was in the Stor Fjord. There is a very great variation in the size of different specimens of this bird, which is not at all to be attributed to sex or, as I think, to age; but I do not for a moment countenance the belief in a second species, which some ornithologists have endeavoured to establish under the name of *P. brachytarsa*. Some years ago I had the pleasure of announcing, at a meeting of the Zoological Society, that the Swedish expedition to Spitzbergen in 1861 had obtained some eggs of this bird, the first well-authenticated specimens brought to Europe. I here transcribe what Dr. Malmgren, the fortunate finder, says about them:—"On the 7th of July, 1861, I found, on the north shore of Murchison Bay, lat. 80° N., a number of Ivory Gulls established on the side of a steep limestone precipice some hundred feet high, in company with *Larus tridactylus* and *L. glaucus*. The last-mentioned occupied the higher zones of the precipice. *Larus eburneus*, on the other hand, occupied the niches and clefts lower down, at a height of from fifty to a hundred feet. I could plainly see that the hen birds were sitting on their nests; but these to me were altogether inaccessible. Circumstances did not permit me, before the 30th of July, to make the attempt, with the help of a long rope and some necessary assistance, to get at the eggs. On the day just named I succeeded, with the help of three men, in reaching two of the lowest in situation, of which each contained one egg. The nest was artless and without connexion, and consisted of a shallow depression eight or nine inches broad, in loose clay and mould on a sublayer of limestone. Inside it was carelessly lined with dry plants, grass, moss, and the like, and also a few feathers. The eggs were much incubated, and already contained down-clad young. Both the hen birds were shot upon their nests, and are now in the National Museum. The cocks were at first observable, but they vanished when we began the work of reaching their nests.' The locality just mentioned will

not be found marked on any English chart. It lies at the north-eastern entrance of Hinlopen Strait, in about long. $18^{\circ} 30'$ E., and was first accurately surveyed by the Swedish expedition. I am inclined to believe, however, that the Ivory Gull breeds sporadically on many other parts of Spitsbergen proper. Several of the examples we shot in Ice Sound and the Stor Fjord had their bellies bared of feathers, as usual in sitting birds; but I could not learn from any of the Walrus-hunters we met that they had ever discovered a breeding-place, except that our pilot told me that a ship's boat, which in 1859 succeeded in reaching Giles's Land, found many Ivory-Gull's nests on its lonely shore. This species, like other Gulls, does not always breed in colonies; and as it is sure to select the most inaccessible places for that purpose, an occasional nest here and there on the mountains or crags might well escape notice."—*The Ibis*, 1865, p. 507.

It will have been seen that Mr. Newton assigns to Dr. Malmgren the merit of bringing the first well-authenticated eggs of the Ivory Gull to Europe; but in a communication made to 'The Ibis' in 1866 by Dr. E. Perceval Wright, of Trinity College Dublin, it is stated that there is a much earlier record of its discovery by our celebrated countryman, Sir Leopold M'Clintock, from whose diary we learn that, as he was rounding Cape Krabbe, lat. $77^{\circ} 25'$ N., long. 116° W., he saw an Ivory Gull seated upon her nest on a bare patch of gravel, near the beach. There was one egg in the nest, which was chiefly formed of moss, a little white down, and a few feathers. "This egg is now in the Museum of the Royal Dublin Society.

"I may add that an account of the nidification of this Gull, by Dr. Carte, will be found in the 'Journal of the Royal Dublin Society' for July 1866, vol. i. pp. 57–60, pls. 1 and 2, and the egg was exhibited at the meeting of the Dublin University Zoological and Botanical Association in February 1855."

Upon this communication the editor remarks:—"We are extremely indebted to Professor Wright for calling our attention to this interesting fact, of which we and probably many of our readers have hitherto been entirely ignorant. Dr. Carte's paper, referred to above, is accompanied by a very well executed figure of the egg of the Ivory Gull brought home by Sir Leopold M'Clintock, to whom our friend Dr. Malmgren must certainly yield the honour of the discovery."

Temminck mentions having killed an individual of this species on the coast of Holland; Vieillot says it sometimes occurs on the coast of France; and Necker and Schinz have recorded one killed at Lausanne; Nilsson states that in winter it occasionally appears in Sweden and the northern parts of Scandinavia. Captain (afterwards the Rev. Dr.) Scoresby says, "though so delicate in appearance, it is almost as ravenous as the Fulmar, and as little nice in its food. It is a constant attendant on the flensing operations of the whale-fishers, where it generally seizes its portion on the wing. It rarely alights on the water, but often sits on the ice, preferring the most elevated situations. Its voice is a loud and disagreeable scream."

Respecting one of the British-killed specimens, Mr. Rodd says:—"It was shot from Penzance Pier-head on the 15th of February 1847, after having been seen for a day or two previously in company with common Sea-Mews and Herring-Gulls. It alighted several times on the New Pier, Battery Rocks, &c., adjacent to the town, without betraying any apparent shyness. Its note was described to me as being the reverse of harsh and grating, as described by authors, more resembling the warbling chirping whistle of the Oyster-catcher, but deeper and louder; the peculiarity of tone attracted the notice of men and boys at the quay, who are accustomed to the screaming and clamorous cries of the Common Gulls." "I know of but two instances," says Mr. Stevenson, "of the occurrence of this species on the Norfolk coast, one having been killed at Yarmouth many years back, and an immature bird shot at Wrenningham in January 1862. Four others were said to have been seen at the same time."

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Newton for a sketch of the head of this species, which has enabled me to give a far more correct representation than I could otherwise have done. In the note accompanying the sketch, Mr. Newton says:—"You may rely on its accuracy as regards *colour*; for it was drawn from a very fine bird before it was cold. I never saw one with brighter tints. The legs, toes, and claws are always of a very intense black; but, the roughness of the surface of the skin causing much light and shade, it appears much less *dead* than would have been the case had the skin been smooth."

The Plate represents an old and a young bird, nearly of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Ivory Gull, *Pagophila ebumea* [Pl. 62]." *The birds of Great Britain* 5, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324106>.

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