



PUFFINUS ANGLORUM.

Thomson & H. B. Baker, del. & lith.

Walter, Imp.

PUFFINUS ANGLORUM.

Manx Shearwater.

Procellaria Anglorum, Raii Syn., p. 134.

Puffinus Anglorum, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 131.

Procellaria puffinus, Brünn. Orn. Bor., p. 20.

Nectris Anglorum, Kuhl, Mon. Proc. Beit. Zool., p. 146.

Puffinus arcticus, Fab. Prod. Isl. Orn., p. 56.

Cymotomus Anglorum, Macgill. Man. of Brit. Orn., vol. ii. p. 13.

Nectris puffinus, Keys. & Blas. Wirb. Eur., p. 94.

THERE are but few situations in the British Islands which are of a rocky nature and facing the sea, nor any little inlets around our coasts, that are not visited by the Shearwater; and in many of them it breeds: the Isles of Scilly on the south, the Farn Islands on the east, Lundy and the Isle of Man on the west, the Orkneys, Shetlands, and Hebrides and St. Kilda in the North Atlantic are only a few of the localities frequented. It is also found in Iceland, in the Faroe Islands, Spitzbergen, on the coast of Norway, in the Baltic Seas, in Heligoland, on the coasts of France and Spain, and throughout the whole of the Mediterranean, in Madeira, the Azores, and on many parts of the eastern shores of North America. During some periods of its existence it lives far out at sea, at others within soundings. At the period of incubation it makes a cradle for its young in the deserted rabbit-holes on the low islands and shores in which those creatures abound, the lee sides of great stones near the beach, the crevices in upright basaltic rocks, and all similar situations. Its powers of flight are considerable, and, being very restless, it spends much of its time in flying to and fro in a direct line over the surface of the water.

The late D. W. Mitchell's account of the bird as seen by him on the coast of Cornwall is given with all the freshness of his wonted style, and with the faithfulness and geniality of a true lover of nature. This account I shall repeat here, believing that it will not be the less interesting because it has previously appeared in my late friend Yarrell's 'History of British Birds.'

"To the westward of St. Agnes, in the Scilly group, lies a barren island called Annet. Its northern slope is abrupt and craggy; it gradually slopes towards the south, and narrows into a sort of peninsula, where the sandy soil is rich enough to produce a dense growth of short ferns. Here is the stronghold of the Shearwater. Sit down on a rock which commands the little territory, and you will see nothing but the Terns, who have a station on the higher and central part of the island, and are making a flight of inquiry. Yes, you will see a hundred or two of Oystercatchers, who do not like your landing so near their nests, and make short journeys, hither and thither, whistling all the while like birds possessed. You will see two or three pairs of Turnstones and a few Ring-Dotterels, perhaps a Curlew. You may wait all a sunny day in June, but not a Shearwater will you see on land or water. There are plenty near you all the time, however, as you may ascertain by the odour which issues from the first burrow you look into among the ferns. As soon as the sun is down, you will see a little party of five or six flitting silently across the sound, or steering out to sea. The latest fishers from the colony of Terns are coming home from the sandy shallows, five or six miles away, with their throats and beaks crammed with Lance-fish, when the Shearwaters begin to wake. You will not see them come out of their holes: you first catch sight of them skimming round the corner of a rock close to the water. Perhaps they will have a great gathering, such as I observed one evening in 'Smith's Sound.' There was a congregation of at least three hundred in the middle of the tideway, washing, dipping, preening feathers, and stretching wings, evidently just awake, and making ready for a night's diversion. As I wanted a few specimens more than I had dug out of the burrows, I ran my boat well up to them, and, when they rose, got as many as I wished, besides a few unfortunate cripples who were only winged, and proved by their agility in swimming and diving, a good deal too much for my boatmen. I think a good dog would have no chance with them; they allowed me to come quite close. They sit low in the water, and make no noise when disturbed, though in their holes they are eloquent enough, the Scillonian synonyms of *Crew* and *Cockathodon* being derived from the guttural melodies they pour forth when the spade approaches the end in which the egg is deposited. I once caught a pair in a burrow who were crooning a duet of this kind before we commenced operations. I presume they were in the honeymoon, as there was no egg. They produce but one egg, which, when fresh-laid, is of the most dazzling whiteness, and of a peculiarly beautiful texture. It measures two inches and five lines in length, by one inch and nine lines in breadth, is very large for the size of the bird, and is frequently deposited on the fine sandy soil without any preparation, though generally there is a slight accumulation of fern-leaves and old stems. When you kill a Shearwater

by pressure, as I generally did with the view of obtaining an uninjured skin: it vomits a most abominable oil, in which float so many particles of brilliant green that it appears of that colour, though the stain it leaves is yellow. The quantity ejected is sometimes enormous.

"When the young bird leaves the egg it is covered with a greyish-black down, except a stripe along the breast and belly, which is white. I found a chick very lively in an egg which had been taken from the burrow two days previously to my examining it. My notice was attracted by hearing a little voice in the basket as I sat preparing a skin about midnight. I thought of Asmodeus in the bottle immediately."

The above account is equally descriptive of the habits of the bird in other localities. When I visited Malta and Gozo some years since, not a bird was to be seen during the day; but the fishermen assured me that they were ensconced among the rocks, and that at nightfall they would set their nets and procure me as many as I wished; this they did, and brought me half a sackful of living birds the next morning.

With reference to the Shearwater as seen in Shetland, Dr. Edmonston informed MacGillivray, "The bird is not seen unless on the ocean during the day; for it remains concealed in its hole; and only in the twilight can it be detected by the vigilant and hardy fowlers, who, from their great partiality to the young, regard the discovery of their nests as a sort of treasure, which they bequeath as an heirloom to their sons. Its single young one, though excessively fat, it must be confessed, justifies the epicurean taste of the fowlers. It is rather strange that the young of sea-birds, although uniformly fed on fish, should be totally free from a fishy taste, while the flesh of adults is almost always harsh, and often nauseous."

"This bird," says Mr. Low, "is the chief acquisition our rock-men get for all the danger in climbing the most dreadful precipices: for this, one sitting on the brink of the rock with a coil of rope made of hair on his arm will let his neighbour many fathoms over the steepest rocks, such as would make others shudder to look at; and yet these people think no more of it than of an airing; and though few years pass without some or other of them perishing, yet that never deters the survivors. It is really dreadful to see people let over a rock of several hundred fathoms height, with the deep below them, supported only by the single arm of their comrades, who have nothing to rest themselves against, but must depend on their strength for the preservation of both; sometimes, indeed, both slip together. The birds come to the rocks of Orkney in February or March, and sometimes after their arrival deposit their single white egg in holes of the little earth that is to be found in the interstices of the rocks."

"Its flight," says Macgillivray, "is gliding, rapid on occasion, buoyant and easy. It flies low over the sea, descending into the troughs of the waves, and mounting again. When hovering over an object seen in the sea, it lets down its feet and pats the water with them. In dark or stormy weather it has an ominous aspect as it glides rapidly along and disappears in the haze. Its food consists of various animal substances; but the particular kinds have not been determined, its gullet and stomach having usually been found filled with decomposed matter and oil, which it vomits on being seized," and which Mr. Wright thinks is due, in the case of the Maltese birds, to their feeding upon *Inula crithmoides*. Respecting their mode of feeding, Meyer says:—"When a flock of these Petrels are thus employed, the birds are seen swimming on the waves with their heads in the water, all in the same direction, and moving on very rapidly, the hindermost bird always flying up and settling in advance of the foremost, like Rooks following a plough. Fishermen when in pursuit of their calling watch carefully the movements of these birds, and when they see them thus employed lower their nets with a tolerable certainty of finding the shoals of which they are in search near the surface."

I conclude my account of the Manx Shearwater with the following note from A. W. Crichton, Esq.:—

"In furtherance of a desire to investigate the nesting-habits of the bird, I, on the 2nd of July, 1866, descended the cliff of Altahuile, in Rathlin Island, co. Antrim, Ireland, by means of ropes to a depth of between 16 and 17 fathoms, and after capturing the old female in the nest, placed at the extremity of a fissure in the basaltic face of the cliff and as far in as my right arm could possibly reach, drew forth the young one in an early stage of the downy state, which I have much pleasure in submitting to you for your work."

"Authors have often described," says Thompson, "flocks of birds which keep flying all day over the Dardanelles and Bosphorus, and are never seen to alight either for rest or food; but only of late has the species been positively determined. As remarked in Walsh's 'Constantinople,' 'one reason why they have escaped the close attention of naturalists is that no person is permitted to kill any bird upon the Bosphorus without incurring the displeasure of the Turks;' and, says the Bishop of Norwich, 'an additional reason why they are held in respect by the Turks is that, in consequence probably of their restless life, they are supposed to be bodies animated by condemned souls, thus doomed for ever to frequent the scenes of their former existence;' they are in fact called 'damned souls.'"

The figures represent an adult and a young bird in the downy state, both of the natural size.



Gould, John. 1873. "Manx Shearwater, *Puffinus anglorum* [Pl. 84]." *The birds of Great Britain* 5, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324128>.

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