

GREY PHALAROPE.

Phalaropus platyrhynchus, *Temm.*

Le Phalarope platyrhynque.

THIS bird can no longer be ranked among the rarities of our British catalogue, from its frequent occurrence and the many instances of its capture of late years in this country, particularly in its winter plumage, in which state it is known by the name of Grey Phalarope ;—a mode of nomenclature which, referring to one state only, we consider by no means appropriate to birds that undergo various periodical changes of plumage. Indeed, were it not for adding to the list of synonyms, already too numerous, we should have ventured to designate the present species “the Broad-beaked Phalarope,” in order to distinguish it from its congeners, from which it differs so much in this single character ; we retain, however, the name of Grey Phalarope, as it is generally used by British Ornithologists.

The native habitat of this species is well known to be the regions extending within the limits of the Arctic circle, where it takes up its summer abode, migrating as the severity of winter comes on to more temperate climes, and dispersing singly or in pairs throughout most of the countries of Europe, especially the British Islands ; nor is it less abundant in many parts of Asia, as well as of America, from the northern towards the intertropical regions. Although the powers of wing, which enable the Phalaropes to make extensive migrations, are very great, still we do not look for their periodical visits with that degree of certainty and regularity which characterizes the migrations of birds in general. The places, moreover, which it not uncommonly chooses for residence during its sojourn with us, are such as would possess for it, according to our ideas, but little attraction ; thus, for instance, it will often continue for weeks together, if unmolested, about a farm-yard pond or mere puddle, manifesting a familiar and unsuspecting disposition, and allowing itself to be approached with freedom ; it does not, however, appear to confine itself much longer to one spot, but after remaining at a certain place from one to three or four weeks, suddenly departs, if on the approach of spring, towards the north, and in autumn towards the south ;—every European country in fact appears to be equally visited, although at uncertain and often long intervals.

Like the other species, it is an admirable swimmer, taking its food on the surface of the water with the utmost agility and address ; indeed it appears to seek its nourishment there alone, and may be watched, while assiduously engaged in this occupation, displaying a thousand graceful attitudes and manœuvres.

Though usually seen in England in its grey or winter livery, it sometimes occurs in an intermediate state during the progress of change, and occasionally, though very rarely, in its red or summer plumage. Our most frequent visitors of this species are young birds of the year, which make their appearance during autumn, and are then for the first time putting forth the delicate grey feathers of the back, which they carry through the winter.

We transcribe from the published account of these birds by Captain Edward Sabine, some particulars of the difference in the size of the sexes, and of their plumage, which had been previously unnoticed. “Average length of males 7 inches 6 lines ; extent 16 inches 2 lines ; weight $1\frac{3}{4}$ ounce. Females 8 inches 4 lines ; extent 17 inches ; weight 2 ounces. The breeding plumage of the male corresponds minutely with the description which Temminck has assigned to both sexes : the female has the forehead, crown and hind head a uniform deep sooty black, without intermixture of orange or red : the band which passes through the eye is a pure white, and is larger and better defined than in the male, including more space above and in front of the eye ; the black predominates in the back and scapulars, the orange bordering of the feathers being smaller and much lighter than in the male ; the under plumage is of a deeper and richer brick-red colour, and is unmixed with white feathers for a much longer portion of the season ; the female bird attains her perfect plumage earlier in the year, and retains it longer than the male, which is also the case with several other of the Northern birds.”

Few birds differ so much in the winter and summer states of their plumage as the present, the transition being from a strong reddish brown to a delicate silver grey.

The nest is unknown, or, at least as far as we are acquainted, is undescribed ; the eggs are one inch two lines and a half long, and eleven lines across, of a greenish stone colour, spotted and specked with black.