

DUNLIN, OR PURRE.

Tringa variabilis, Meyer.

Le Becasseau brunette, ou variable.

IN consequence of the remarkable changes to which this *Tringa* is subjected, it has in its various stages received several specific appellations, therefore to the one now generally adopted, *variabilis*, is attached a great number of synonyms.

In its winter or grey dress it is called the Purre, and it is at this season that it is most plentifully distributed along the whole line of our coast, where it may be observed congregated in vast flocks, enlivening the bleak and dreary beach by the celerity with which it runs over the sands, and by its sweeping and vigorous flight, during which, like many other of its congeners, every individual of the flock, be it ever so numerous, simultaneously exposes the upper or under surface of the body, as they sweep along over the surface of the ocean or across the sands.

On the approach of spring, the great mass which have wintered in the British Islands retire northwards to breed. At this period a strongly contrasted change takes place in the colouring of the plumage, the uniform grey of winter being superseded by the more rich colouring, which is represented on our Plate. It is in this latter state that it is known by the name of Dunlin.

When the breeding-season commences the greater portion of these birds leave the sea-shore, and retire inland to wild heaths and the upland country, availing themselves of every situation on their passage that affords a suitable retreat for the rearing of their young. They generally select similar spots to those chosen by the Common Snipe (*Scolopax Gallinago*, Linn.), to which bird it assimilates in the whole process of incubation.

Although the greater number of the Dunlins annually migrate northwards, a few solitary pairs always remain in the northern portions of England and Scotland; in the Orkney and Shetland Islands they are still more abundant, and their numbers gradually increase as we proceed further north, until we arrive at the Arctic Circle.

On the Continent the Dunlin is as abundant as it is with us, being universally dispersed and subjected to the same natural laws. We would here also mention, that although the sea-coast constitutes their principal place of residence, they are also found on the banks of inlets and streams, as well as on those of the larger rivers, both on the Continent and in our islands.

The nest is merely a depression in the ground, lined with a few straws or dried grasses: the eggs, four in number, are of a greenish grey, spotted all over with reddish brown.

The food consists of worms, insects, mollusca, and the small crustacea, which it obtains by following the ebb-tide.

The great changes which the Dunlin undergoes rendering it necessary to describe the summer, winter, and immature plumage, we take the liberty of availing ourselves of the accurate description published by Mr. Selby, who has paid great attention to the subject.

“Winter plumage. Crown of the head, hind part of the neck, back, and scapulars ash grey, with a tinge of hair brown, the shaft of each feather being darker; between the bill and the eye an indistinct line of brown; eye-streak and cheeks white, streaked with pale hair-brown; chin and throat white; lower part of the neck and breast grey, the shafts of the feathers hair-brown; under surface pure white; wing-coverts hair-brown margined with pale ash grey, the larger ones having white tips; rump and upper tail-coverts deep brown margined with paler; two middle tail-feathers deep brown, the rest on each side grey, with white shafts; bill black; legs and toes blackish grey.

“Summer plumage. Crown of the head black, each feather margined with reddish brown; chin white; cheeks, fore part of the neck and breast black, with the feathers deeply margined with white, giving these parts a beautifully spotted appearance; under surface black; flanks and side-coverts of the tail white, streaked with black; back part of the neck, mantle, and scapulars black, each feather deeply margined with clear reddish brown; lower part of the back and upper tail-coverts brownish black; wing-coverts as in the winter plumage.

“Immature plumage. Head blackish brown, each feather edged with yellowish brown; upper surface exhibiting a mixture of the pale grey feathers that mark the winter plumage with the darker, or nestling feathers; cheeks and sides of the neck pale brown mixed with grey; breast grey spotted with black; belly white with large black spots; vent and under tail-coverts white.”

The Plate represents two adults, one in the winter and the other in the summer plumage, of the natural size.