

Genus LIMOSA.

GEN. CHAR. *Bill* very long, rather thick at the base, compressed, more or less turned upwards; both mandibles laterally grooved to within a short distance of the point, which is somewhat dilated and blunt; tip of the upper mandible projecting beyond the lower one. *Nostrils* basal, placed in the lateral groove, narrow and longitudinal. *Wings* acuminate, of mean length, the first quill-feather the longest. *Legs* long and slender; a great part of the tibiae naked; front and back part of the tarsi scutellated. *Feet* four-toed, three before and one behind; the outer toe united to the middle one by a membrane as far as the first joint; the inner one nearly free; hind toe short, and articulated upon the tarsus.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT.

Limosa melanura, *Leisl.*

Le Barge à queue noire.

THIS stately bird, one of the finest of its race, was so common in the low lands and fenny districts of England so late as twenty years since as to have been then regarded as one of the very commonest of the *Scolopacidae* visiting the British Isles; since which period, however, its numbers appear to have gradually diminished, so much so that a fresh-shot native specimen is now considered an article of a somewhat singular nature.

The Godwits are subject to considerable changes in their plumage, but in no one species are they more striking than in the Black-tailed, its winter dress consisting of grey above and white beneath, while the spring or nuptial attire is altogether different, the bird being then characterized by a much brighter and more gay colouring. From the periodical changes to which both sexes are subject, much confusion has arisen in the works of the older ornithologists, which by more recent investigation has been entirely cleared up, and the fact is now completely established, that the birds exhibiting variations of plumage between those here figured are identically the same; and as the birds of this genus do not acquire the rich colouring of the summer plumage until they are two or three years old, it is not surprising that the succession of intermediate stages which they continually present should have misled the ornithologist. The most clear and certain mark by which the present species may at all times be distinguished from its near ally, is the colouring of the tail, which is perfectly black for half its length from the tip, while, as its name implies, the barred tail of the other species is a feature equally distinguishing.

Besides the European continent, over the whole of which it is distributed, we find examples of the Black-tailed Godwit in most of the collections from Africa and India. It is especially abundant in Holland, whence it is brought to the London market in great abundance, both living and dead. In its manners and actions it is elegant and graceful; and soon becoming tame and familiar, it forms an agreeable tenant for the aviary. The flesh of the adult is rather coarse and rancid, but the young of the year are more delicate, and are therefore more in request for the table. A few pairs annually resort to the marshes in the neighbourhood of Yarmouth, and to the fens of Lincolnshire, but they are rarely permitted to breed unmolested, their large size and peculiar actions being sure to attract the notice both of the sportsman and the egg-gatherer. The eggs are four in number, of an olive green faintly blotched with black, and are deposited on the bare ground among the herbage, with little or no nest.

Its food consists of worms, shell-snails, insects, and their larvæ, for procuring which its lengthened tarsi and greatly developed bill admirably adapt it. It runs with great facility, and its power of flight is such as the lengthened form of its wing would lead us to expect.

The female surpasses the male in size, and frequently in the brilliant colouring of the summer plumage.

In winter the whole of the upper surface is brownish grey; the tail for half its length from the tip black; under surface greyish white; primaries blackish brown; legs and feet black tinged with olive.

In summer the crown of the head, the throat, neck, and breast are clear reddish brown streaked and barred with black; the whole of the upper surface and flanks transversely barred and edged with black and red; base of the bill red, deepening into black at the tip.

The young of the year has the crown of the head blackish brown, each feather being edged with reddish brown; the front of the neck and chest clear reddish ash; a streak between the bill and the eye, and the whole of the under-surface white; wing-coverts grey, margined and terminated with reddish white.

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