

SULA PISCATÖR, Linn.

Red-legged Gannet.

Sula piscator, Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 217.—Gmel. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 578.—Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 501.

— *candida*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 103.—Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 501.

Lesser Gannet, Lath. Gen. Syn., vol. vi. p. 611.—Ib. Gen. Hist., vol. x. p. 437.

Sula erythrorhyncha, Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 601.

— *rubripes*, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part V. p. 156; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part IV.

SINCE the year 1837, when I published the description of a Gannet in the "Proceedings of the Zoological Society," under the name of *rubripes*, from the only specimen that had then come under my observation, I have had opportunities of examining many other examples, and indeed I now possess many specimens in various stages of plumage, both from Australia and China as well as from the intermediate countries, which, independently of proving the great extent of range enjoyed by this species, have convinced me to an almost certainty, that the various specific names of *candida*, *erythrorhyncha* and *rubripes* are merely synonyms of the bird described by Linnæus under the name of *Pelecanus piscator*. The specimen from which Lesson took the description of his *erythrorhyncha* was doubtless a mounted one or a dried skin, for immediately after death the beautiful and delicate green colouring of the bill and face changes to red; in like manner the feet change from the brightest crimson to dull orange-red, whence the term of *rubripes* was suggested to me as an appropriate appellation: this term I would gladly retain, did not the law of priority demand that it should be otherwise.

The Red-legged Gannet is very abundant along the northern shores of the Australian continent; it breeds in great numbers on Raine's Islet, from which locality my collection is enriched with several fine specimens; for these my thanks are due to Lieut. J. M. R. Ince, R.N., who, independently of his duties as superintendent of the erection of the beacon on that island, found amusement and occupation for his leisure moments in studying its interesting zoology. While acknowledging my obligations to Lieut. Ince, I am bound to add that I am no less indebted to Mr. John McGillivray for the following notes as well as for a carefully executed diagram of the bill and face, by means of which I have been enabled to colour the soft parts correctly; points so necessary to be observed, that I trust all future collectors will not fail to note them.

"With the exception," says Mr. McGillivray, "of one bird which perched on the rigging, and was caught while at sea in the neighbourhood of the Keeling Islands, we found this species only on Raine's Islet, a vegetated sand-bank in the line of the Great Barrier Reef. When we landed there on the 29th of May, it appeared to me that the breeding-season was then over, but I was fortunate enough to find a solitary bird sitting upon its nest, which contained a single egg. The nest consisted of a few roots of a creeper common on the island, forming a platform eighteen inches in diameter laid upon a tuft of herbage. A few days after this, the Gannets having been much molested, entirely deserted the island during the day, returning at night in a body of several hundreds, to roost on the ground and low bushes near the centre of the island."

Specimens in every stage of plumage were procured, from the uniform dull brown of the first year to the pure white of the adult; and Mr. McGillivray observed that the colouring of the bill and soft parts also varies with the age of the individual; in the first stage the bill is of a delicate bluish pink, the pink tint predominating at the base of the upper mandible, the bare patch about the eye of a dull leaden hue, and the pouch flesh-coloured; in the second the colouring of these parts is similar but somewhat brighter, and this gradually gives place to the colouring shown in the foremost figure of the Plate.

In habits, manners and general economy it doubtless closely resembles the other members of the group, and procures its fishy food in a similar manner, by plunging down upon them as they swim near the surface of the water.

The adults have the entire plumage buffy white, with the exception of the wings and tail; the former of which are blackish brown, washed with grey, and the latter pale greyish brown, passing into grey, with white shafts; irides grey; legs and feet vermilion.

The Plate represents an old and a young bird rather less than the natural size.