

DIOMEDEA MELANOPHRYS, *Temm.*

Black-eyebrowed Albatros.

Diomedea melanophrys, Temm. Pl. Col. 456.—Less. *Traité d'Orn.*, p. 609.

THE *Diomedea melanophrys* may be regarded as the most common species of Albatros inhabiting the southern ocean, and from its gregarious habits and very familiar disposition, it is known to every voyager who has rounded either of the Capes. I have never myself been at sea many days between the 35th and 55th degrees of south latitude without recognising it, and it appeared to me to be equally numerous in the Atlantic as in the Pacific. On my passage out to Australia, numerous individuals followed our vessel for hundreds of miles as we proceeded eastward, and I have no doubt that in the course of their peregrination they frequently make the circuit of the globe; a not unnatural conclusion, when we reflect upon the great powers of flight given to all the members of the present genus, and that their natural food is as abundant at one part as at another. It was nowhere more numerous than off the southern coast of Van Diemen's Land, where a large company followed our vessel for many days and continued to hover around us until we entered Storm Bay, but on our approaching the land, they suddenly disappeared, betaking themselves again to the open ocean. Of all the species with which I am acquainted, this is the most fearless of man, and it often approaches many yards nearer the vessel than any other; I have even observed it approach so near that the tips of its pinions were not more than two arms' length from the taffrail. It is very easily captured with a hook and line, and as this operation gives not the least pain to the bird, the point of the hook merely taking hold in the horny and insensible tip of the bill, I frequently amused myself in capturing it in this way, and after detaining it sufficiently long to afford me an opportunity for investigating any particular point respecting which I wished to satisfy myself, setting it at liberty again. I also caught numerous examples, marked and gave them their liberty, in order to ascertain whether the individuals which were flying round the ship at nightfall, were the same that were similarly engaged at daylight in the morning after a night's run of 120 miles, and which in nearly every instance proved to be the case. When brought upon deck, from which it cannot take wing, it readily becomes tame, and allows itself to be handled almost immediately; still, I believe that no member of this group can be fairly domesticated in consequence of the difficulty of procuring a supply of, or substitute for, its natural food. In heavy, black and lowery weather, the snowy white plumage of this bird offers a striking and pleasing contrast to the murky clouds above and behind them, almost leading one to imagine he is witnessing the descent and evolutions of those fantastic little beings the fairies.

No difference whatever is observable in the plumage of the sexes, neither is there any visible variation in this respect between youth and maturity; a never-failing mark, however, exists by which these latter may be distinguished: the young bird has the bill dark brown, while in the adult that organ is of a bright buffy yellow; and individuals in the same flight may frequently be seen in which the bill varies from dark horn-brown to the most delicate yellow.

I did not discover the breeding-place of this species, but I doubt not that it resorts for this purpose to situations similar to those selected by the *Diomedea exulans*.

Head, back of the neck, all the under surface and the upper tail-coverts pure white; before, above and behind the eye a streak of blackish grey; wings dark brown; centre of the back slaty black, into which the white of the back of the neck gradually passes; tail dark grey, with white shafts; bill buffy yellow, with a narrow line of black round the base; legs and toes yellowish white, the interdigital membrane and the joints washed with pale blue; irides very light brown, freckled with a darker tint.

The figures represent a middle-aged and a young bird rather more than two-thirds of the natural size.