

bers being apparently in any degree lessened; it readily seizes a hook baited with fat of any kind, and if a boat be lowered its attention is immediately attracted, and while flying round it is easily shot. Many exaggerated and marvellous accounts having been published respecting the weight and the dimensions of this bird, particularly of the extent from tip to tip of the wings, I paid much attention to the subject, and after killing numerous examples of both sexes and of all ages, I found the average weight of the *Diomedea exulans* to be seventeen pounds, and the extent from tip to tip of the wing ten feet one inch. Dr. McCormick, R.N., however, informs me that he has met with examples weighing as much as twenty pounds, the extent of whose outstretched wings measured twelve feet. The known breeding-places of the *Diomedea exulans* are the islands of Tristan d'Acunha, Auckland and Campbell; that it also breeds on the Mewstone, Eddystone, and the adjacent rocks to the southward of Van Diemen's Land, I have but little doubt, as some of the finest adult specimens I procured were shot within a few miles of those barren and inaccessible rocks; but as I have not had an opportunity of observing the nidification of this bird, I avail myself of Mr. Augustus Earle's "Narrative of a nine months' residence on the island of Tristan d'Acunha," wherein he says,—

"Yesterday, May the 28th, being a fine morning, accompanied by two of the men, I determined to ascend the mountain. As several parties had before gone up, they had formed a kind of path; at least we endeavoured to trace the same way, but it required a great deal of nerve to attempt it: the sides of the mountain are nearly perpendicular; but after ascending about 200 feet, it is there entirely covered with wood, which renders the footing much more safe; but in order to get to the wood, the road is so dangerous that it made me almost tremble to think of it; slippery grey rocks and many of them unfortunately loose, so that when we took hold they separated from the mass, and fell with a horrid rumbling noise; here and there were a few patches of grass, the only thing we could depend upon to assist us in climbing, which must be done with extreme caution, for the least slip or false step would dash one to atoms on the rocks below. By constantly looking upwards and continuing to haul ourselves up, by catching firm hold of the grass, after an hour's painful toil we gained the summit, where we found ourselves on an extended plain of several miles' expanse, which terminates in the peak, composed of dark grey lava, bare and frightful to behold. We proceeded towards it, the plain gradually rising, but the walk was most fatiguing over strong rank grass and fern several feet high. A deathlike stillness prevailed in these high regions, and, to my ear, our voices had a strange unnatural echo, and I fancied our forms appeared gigantic, whilst the air was piercing cold. The prospect was altogether sublime and filled the mind with awe: the huge Albatros here appeared to dread no interloper or enemy, for their young were on the ground completely uncovered, and the old ones were stalking around them. They lay but one egg, on the ground, where they make a kind of nest by scraping the earth around it; the young is entirely white and covered with a woolly down, which is very beautiful. As we approached they snapped their beaks with a very quick motion, making a great noise; this and the throwing up of the contents of the stomach are the only means of offence and defence they seem to possess. I again visited the mountain about five months afterwards, when I found the young Albatroses still sitting on their nests, and they had never moved away from them."

To this interesting account I beg to append the following notes, kindly furnished me by Dr. McCormick, Surgeon of H.M.S. Erebus during the late expedition to the South pole:—

"The *Diomedea exulans* breeds in Auckland and Campbell Islands, in the months of November and December. The grass-covered declivities of the hills, above the thickets of wood, are the spots selected by the Albatros for constructing its nest; which consists of a mound of earth, intermingled with withered grass and leaves matted together, 18 inches in height, 6 feet in circumference at the base, and 27 inches in diameter at the top, in which only *one* egg is usually deposited; for after an examination of more than a hundred nests, I met with *two* eggs in the *same* nest in one solitary instance only. The eggs I had an opportunity of weighing varied in weight from  $14\frac{1}{2}$  to 19 oz., thirty specimens giving an average weight of 17 oz.; colour white. The Albatros during the period of incubation is frequently found asleep, with its head under its wing: its beautiful white head and neck, appearing above the grass, betray its situation at a considerable distance off. On the approach of an intruder it resolutely defends its egg, refusing to quit the nest until forced off, when it slowly waddles away in an awkward manner to a short distance, without attempting to take wing. Its greatest enemy is a fierce species of *Lestris*, always on the watch for the Albatros quitting its nest, when this rapacious pirate instantly pounces down and devours the egg. So well is the poor bird aware of the propensity of its foe, that it snaps the mandibles of its beak violently together whenever it observes the *Lestris* flying overhead."

I am indebted to Dr. McCormick for a fine egg of this species, which is four inches and three-quarters long by three and a quarter broad, of a pure white and of the ordinary shape; another, presented by this gentleman to the Royal College of Surgeons, is much longer and nearly equal in size at both ends.

Mr. Earle states that the young are a year old before they can fly, but on this point I fear he must be mistaken; for although a long period must elapse before their lengthened wings are sufficiently developed to sustain their heavy bodies during their lengthened flights, still it is natural to suppose that the young would leave the nest before the recurrence of the breeding-season; and we know that such is the case, from the circumstance of young birds and newly laid eggs not having been found at the same time on the islands visited by the officers of the late expedition under Captain Ross.

The Wandering Albatros varies much in colour at different ages: very old birds are entirely white, with the exception of the pinions, which are black; and they are to be met with in every stage, from pure white, white freckled and barred with dark brown, to dark chocolate-brown approaching to black, the latter colouring being always accompanied by a white face, which in some specimens is washed with buff; beneath the true feathers they are abundantly supplied with a fine white down; the bill is delicate pinky white inclining to yellow at the tip; irides very dark brown; eyelash bare, fleshy and of a pale green; legs, feet and webs pinky white.

The young are at first clothed in a pure white down, which gives place to the dark brown colouring mentioned above.

The figures represent a bird of the middle age, and a bird supposed to be two years of age, about half the natural size.