

young, but would suffer themselves to be trodden upon or taken off with the hand ; and so thickly were the nests placed, that it was no easy matter to avoid crushing either eggs or birds at every step. By the middle of January the eggs were nearly ready to hatch, and there would be an overwhelming increase of this species yearly but for the check which nature has provided against it in the presence of a small lizard which is very abundant about their breeding-places, and which finds an easy prey in the young Noddy and the *Sterna fuliginosa*. I am satisfied, that on an average, not more than one out of every twenty birds hatched ever reach maturity, or live long enough to take wing ; besides which, great numbers of the old birds are constantly killed : these lizards do not eat the whole bird, but merely extract the brain and vertebral marrow ; the remainder is however soon cleared off by the *Dermestes lardarius*, an insect which occurs in amazing numbers, and gave me a great deal of uneasiness and constant trouble to preserve my collection from their repeated attacks. I did not observe the Noddy on any but the South Island. As it finds an abundant supply of food, consisting of small fish, small mollusca, medusæ, cuttle-fish, &c., immediately outside the outer reef, it has no occasion to go far out to sea ; I never observed it feeding in the smooth quiet water between the outer reef and the islands."

Considerable variation is found to exist in the markings of the eggs ; the greater number are of a cream-colour, thinly sprinkled all over, except at the larger end, where they become more numerous and form an irregular zone, with blotches of chestnut-red and dark brown, the latter colour appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell ; but examples occur in which the markings are much more numerous and almost equally distributed over the surface, and others which are nearly pure white ; and I possess one specimen in which the markings are so large and dark that it might be readily mistaken for the egg of some other bird. They are two inches in length by one inch and a half in breadth.

The flight of this species is apparently laboured, being performed with a considerable action of the wings ; at the same time the bird is capable of sustaining itself for a long time just above the surface of the water, and of frequently making abrupt and rapid turns while engaged in the search of its prey ; its soft and dense plumage renders it exceedingly buoyant, and as the largely-developed membrane of the feet would indicate, it swims with great ease.

The sexes are so nearly alike, that by dissection alone can they be distinguished ; and the young acquire the plumage of the adult at a very early age.

Upper and under surface chocolate-brown ; crown of the head pale grey, gradually blending with the brown of the upper surface ; primaries and tail brownish black ; immediately before and above the anterior angle of the eye a spot of black ; irides brown ; bill black ; feet dull brownish red ; webs dusky ; claws black.

The Plate represents a male, a female, a nest and an egg of the natural size.