## EURINORHYNCHUS PYGMÆUS.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Platalea pygmæa, Linn. Mus. Ad. Frid., tom. ii., Prod. p. 26.—Id. Syst. Nat., 12th edit., tom. i. p. 231; Gmel.

Eurinorhynchus griseus, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit., tom. ii. p. 594.—Nilss. Orn. Suec., tom. ii. p. 29.—Jerd. Birds of India, vol. ii. part ii. p. 693.

pygmæus, Pears. Journ. Asiat. Soc. Beng., vol. v. p. 127.—Id. Asiat. Res., vol. xix. p. 69, pl. 9.— Bonap. Compt. Rend., tom. xliii. p. 596.—Gray & Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 580, pls. 152 and 156. fig. 6.—Harting, in Ibis, 1869, p. 426.—Gray, Hand-list of Birds, part iii. p. 51.—Swinh. in Ibis, 1867, pp. 234, 235.

—— orientalis, Blyth, Ann. & Mag. of Nat. Hist., 1844, vol. xiii. pp. 178, 179.—Id. Cat. of Birds in Mus. Asiat. Soc. Calcutta, p. 270.

Nor more than twenty-four specimens of this highly curious little Sandpiper have been collected in a hundred years; and besides these, few others have been seen or satisfactorily determined as being identical with this rare bird. Linnæus was comparatively but a young man when he first became aware of the existence of such an anomaly. Nothing was then recorded respecting its history; nor should we have known where to look for the bird, had not other examples been obtained from time to time during the interval between the date when Linnæus wrote (1764) and that of Mr. Swinhoe's visit to China in 1866 (vide Ibis, 1867, p. 234). Had the illustrious Swede's specimen been the only one known, we might naturally have supposed that it was a mere lusus or freak of nature—an accidental dilatation of the mandibles of a Little Stint or some nearly allied species, so closely does the Eurinorhynchus assimilate to those birds; but as all the examples since discovered are alike, there is no doubt in my mind as to the specific if not the generic value of its distinguishing characters. Besides the general resemblance of its structure, the bird undergoes precisely the same changes of plumage in winter and summer as the Little Stint (Actodromas minuta)—the grey, white, and brown plumage of winter giving place to a russet-red colouring, more or less diffused, at the opposite season.

The habitat of Linnæus's example was stated to be Surinam; but this is a point which cannot now be determined: the chances are that a wrong locality was given to him, and that the temperate regions of the Old World and some parts of the Arctic Circle are its true home—the winter being spent at the sandy mouths of the great rivers of China and Asia generally, whence the bird retires northward to breed in those high regions upon which man has not yet entered, but where, doubtless, many others of our rarer Sandpipers lay their eggs and reproduce their young. Still this is mere surmise; and I might not have suspected such a probability had not the specimen in full summer plumage, now in the new Museum at Oxford, been collected on the verge of the polar seas.

An elaborate essay respecting this species having been published by Mr. Harting, I will say no more, but give this gentleman all the credit he deserves for the masterly manner in which he has treated the subject, by transcribing a large part of what he has said in 'The Ibis' for 1869.

"Notwithstanding the vagrant habits of the species which compose the Limicolæ, and the increasing researches of naturalists in all quarters of the globe, it is remarkable that a bird which was described more than a century ago by Linnæus should still be one of the rarest and least-known. From a perusal of all that has hitherto been published with reference to this species, it would appear that those who followed more immediately in the wake of Linnæus did little else than copy his original description, perpetuating by so doing the erroneous habitat which had been assigned to the bird, and adding little or nothing to its history. Under the name of Platalea pygmæa or Eurynorhynchus griseus, certain authors have created some confusion by describing birds which were properly referable to some other species; while the few original descriptions on record have all been taken from specimens which were procured in the winter plumage. For a long time the true habitat of Eurynorhynchus was unknown; and even at the present day its precise geographical range remains undetermined.

"The earliest notice of this species is to be found in an octavo catalogue usually appended to his "Museum Ludovicæ Ulricæ Reginæ Suecorum,' &c., published by Linnæus in 1764, but entitled 'Museum Adolphi Friderici Regis Suecorum,' &c., Tomi secundi Prodromus. He, no doubt from the form of the bill, referred this species to the genus Platalea; a comparison, however, shows that beyond this resembill, referred this really no connexion with that form. Its affinities, as pointed out by Cuvier and Temminck, blance it has really no connexion with that form. Its affinities, as pointed out by Cuvier and Temminck, are certainly with the genus Tringa; . . . at the same time it differs sufficiently to justify the course which Nilsson adopted in forming for its reception the new genus Eurynorhynchus, in which at present it stands alone.