

# THALASSIDROMA PELAGICA.

## Storm-Petrel.

*Procellaria pelagica*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 50.

*Hydrobates pelagica*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 562.

*Færøensis*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 803.

*Thalassidroma pelagica*, Vig. Zool. Journ., vol. ii. p. 405.

*melitensis*, Schemb. Cat. del Gruppo di Malta, p. 118.

THOSE persons, imbued with a taste for nature, who have crossed the Atlantic from England to America, or made the more extended passage, *viâ* the Cape of Good Hope, to India or Australia, or voyaged round our globe, must have been delighted with the numerous oceanic birds which came under their notice as soon as the ship had entered upon the blue water of the open sea. Petrels, in lieu of Gulls and Terns, are certain to have been met with; perchance the present species, or some other member of the genus *Thalassidroma*, a Fulmar, a Shearwater, or one of the many species of Albatros has attracted their attention out of the more than fifty species of birds constituting the family *Procellariidæ* that are now known, among which much diversity of size and structure is found to exist, the Albatros (*Diomedea exulans*) being the largest, and the little Storm-Petrel (*Thalassidroma pelagica*) the smallest. Assuming that the great Albatros usually weighs about fifteen pounds and the Storm-Petrel an ounce, the former is 240 times as heavy as the latter. Petrels, of one kind or other, frequent every portion of the great waters, except those near the poles. They are, almost without exception, truly dwellers on the surface of the mighty deep, seldom, if ever, coming to land except for the purpose of incubation, and then only resorting to the rocky islands and headlands nearest to their ocean homes. Some of the species, particularly the Albatroses, make huge nests near the summits of precipitous mountains, such as occur at Tristan d'Acunha; but by far the greater number incubate in the holes of rocks, under stones, or so deep down in the ground that without a knowledge of the nocturnal habits of these birds the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, and certainly the casual visitor, would not be aware that the ground on which they are treading conceals the sitting Petrel. In the evening, during twilight, they sally forth from their holes and go out to sea for the purpose of procuring food for themselves and their young; as morning approaches, the passing to and fro ceases, and all is quiet again for the day.

The above remarks apply to the *Procellariidæ* generally; let me now say something about our little favourite, the Storm-Petrel,—favourite, however, only with some; for superstition has induced the weak-minded mariners to regard it with awe as the presager of storms, while the pretty bird they see fluttering round the ship is simply engaged in searching for its natural food, or seeking the temporary shelter the lee side of the vessel affords. When a fierce gale occurs, or a raging storm is at its height, the wing-powers of the Petrel are strained to the utmost, and, during its flight, it performs many beautiful evolutions, which call forth our admiration; at one moment the bird is under the lee of a great wave, at the next overtopping its crest, and descending into the succeeding hollow, all the while scanning the sides of the billows for any floating mollusk or other marine animal, which it takes from the surface, at the same time patting the water with its little feet. Here, night and day, during the raging of the gale, the Petrel must keep on the wing and make the best of it until a calm sets in, when the bird again assumes its light butterfly-like actions, or rests on the placid surface until hunger prompts it to resume its search for that food best adapted to maintain the muscular power requisite for the great exertion it is so often called upon to perform.

At most seasons the Storm-Petrel, if looked for, may be found in every part of the seas surrounding our coasts. On the approach of spring, the Channel is visited by Storm-Petrels in considerable numbers; and so true are they to the time of their arrival that, Mr. C. Monfort informs me, "they always appear off Worthing about the end of April, and gradually become more abundant until the middle of May. Those that first arrive are mostly males, very few females being among them. At the end of May they begin to decrease; and although the males always preponderate, a greater number of females are now to be seen than earlier in the season. A few remain till about the middle of June."

The range of this species of Petrel extends southwards as far as Madeira; the bird is also found all over the Mediterranean, the northern parts of Europe, and in similar latitudes on the eastern coast of America. That it does not cross the line appears to be certain; for I did not meet with it in the seas to the southward of it, nor, so far as I am aware, has any observer recorded its being found there.

From the Scilly Islands to the extreme north of Scotland, Ireland, and the Hebrides, in almost every rugged promontory, numbers of Storm-Petrels breed; but, as before mentioned, the mere passer-by has no conception of their existence. To find them, the particular situations must be examined, and the evening