

# THALASSIDROMA LEACHII.

## Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel.

- Procellaria Leachii*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit., tom. ii. p. 812.  
*Hydrobates Leachii*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 562.  
*Thalassidroma Leachii*, Keys. und Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 93.  
*Procellaria Bullockii*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 136.  
*Thalassidroma Bullockii*, Selby, Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. ii. p. 537.  
*Procellaria leucorrhœa*, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxv. p. 422.  
*Cymochorea leucorrhœa*, Coues, Proc. of Acad. Nat. Sci. Philad., 1864, pp. 76, 90.

LIKE the common Storm-Petrel, the *Thalassidroma Leachii* must be regarded as indigenous to Britain, inasmuch as it breeds therein, and probably in many more localities than have as yet been noticed. At one or other season of the year it has been observed on the shores of every part of our islands, from the extreme south of England to the north of Scotland and the Hebrides; almost every local list of birds enumerates it as occurring in the county to which it pertains; in Ireland, according to Thompson, it is found in all quarters of the island, but less frequently. Apart from England, it has been met with on the coast of Holland and in many parts of Scandinavia; Professor Reinhardt says it is found in Greenland; the American ornithologists include it in their avifauna; and Von Schrenck observed it in Amoorland, and states that specimens from the Kurile Island do not differ from those seen in England. It was first observed as a British species, and discriminated as distinct from the *Thalassidroma pelagica*, by the celebrated collector W. Bullock, in whose sale-catalogue it appears as "An undescribed Petrel with a forked tail, taken at St. Kilda in 1818;" and the credit of first making us aware of its breeding in our islands is due to the late Sir William M. E. Milner, Bart., whose notes on the subject, extracted from the 'Zoologist' for 1848, will be found below. From that date until 1869 many hundreds of Leach's Storm-Petrel have been shot or otherwise obtained; but by far the greater number have been picked up dead, or in such an exhausted and helpless state as to be unable to fly—some on the sea-shore, others as far inland as the middle of our island: one was obtained in the streets of Halifax, in Yorkshire; Mr. J. E. Harting states that another was caught alive in an exhausted state, by a man at work on the highroad between Edgware and Stanmore, on the 4th of January, 1850. The Rev. Bryan Burgess, Chaplain to Lord Chesham, tells me that on the 2nd of November, 1859, Poulter, his Lordship's gardener, brought him a Fork-tailed Petrel (*Thalassidroma Leachii*) which he had found lying on its back and flapping its wings in the deer-park at Latimer, in Buckinghamshire; it died almost as soon as it was picked up, had the stomach empty, the whole frame very thin, and was much battered about the head, as if it had been pecked by other birds or had sustained some severe blows; and Mr. G. Dawson Rowley has recorded in 'The Field' for December 15, 1866, that another was caught in a "ham-and-beef" shop in Brighton. In all probability most of the examples alluded to have been driven to our shores by violent gales of wind, and starvation, the inevitable result, has caused them to fall down and die. The next autumn gale may bring us many more, and the succeeding morn reveal a number of exhausted birds, which are as likely to be found in an open park or on a garden-walk as on the sea-shore. Our lakes and ponds of fresh water do not seem to have any attractions for these truly ocean-loving birds.

Not having had an opportunity of observing this bird in a state of nature, I cannot do better than transcribe the short account given by Sir William Milner above alluded to, and the more full one contained in the third volume of Audubon's valuable 'Ornithological Biography.'

"Not far from the top of the cliff of the Isle of Dun, forming the western horn of the Bay of St. Kilda," says Sir William, "were a colony of the Fork-tailed Petrel, breeding, like the Stormy Petrel, under the stones and rock, about a yard deep. We were first attracted to them by a low chirping noise, which from time to time the females made while sitting upon their eggs. In one hole only did we find the male and female together. The egg is considerably larger than that of the Stormy Petrel, but resembles it in being surrounded at the larger end by a beautiful zone of red freckles. They are nearly three weeks before the Stormy Petrel in depositing their eggs; and in the localities where we found the Fork-tailed there was not a single Stormy Petrel." Sir William mentions that he also obtained specimens and eggs of the *Thalassidroma Leachii* on Borrera, another small island of the St. Kilda group.

After mentioning that towards the end of August 1831, the Storm-Petrel was so abundant off the coast of Newfoundland that from twenty-five to thirty individuals were shot in about an hour, Audubon says, "The species of this genus with which I am acquainted all ramble over the seas, both by night and by day, until the breeding-season commences; they then remain in their burrows, under rocks or in their fissures,