

## PUFFINUS MAJOR, *Fabr.*

### Great Shearwater.

*Puffinus major*, Faber, Prod. der island. Orn., p. 56.

——— *arcticus*, Macgill. Man. of Nat. Hist. Orn., vol. ii. p. 262.

*Cymotomus arcticus*, Macgill. Man. of Nat. Hist. Orn., vol. ii. p. 13.

*Puffinus fuliginosus*, A. Strickl. Proc. of Comm. of Sci. and Corr. of Zool. Soc., part. ii. 1832, p. 129 ?

*Procellaria fuliginosa*, Jenyns, Man. of Brit. Vert. Anim., p. 285 ?

——— *major* (part.), Temm. Man. d'Orn. 2nd edit., tom. iv. p. 509.

*Ardenna major*, Reich. Syst. Av., tab. xiv. fig. 770.

LEAVING the American monographist of the Procellariidæ, Mr. Elliott Coues, and others to determine among themselves the true synonymy of this species, I shall very briefly state where the bird most frequently occurs in our islands, where it is most numerous, and add a few remarks respecting the dark-coloured individuals which are sometimes met with. Although it is probable that it never breeds within the limits of Britain, or, if so, only in the southernmost of the Scilly Islands, it certainly occurs in great numbers along the shores of Devonshire and Cornwall, the fishermen who pursue their calling off the coasts of those counties frequently bringing in living or dead examples which have become entangled in their nets or caught by the baited hooks intended for the capture of fish. On other parts of our coasts and on those of Ireland its occurrence is only accidental. The seas which wash the base of the dreary Eddystone, the Lizard, and the rocky promontory of the Land's End, those surrounding the Scilly Islands, the Bay of Biscay, the Mediterranean, and the seas around Madeira constitute the true home of the species; beyond this, or on the other side of the equator, its existence, in my opinion, is very doubtful; and its occurrence in the arctic circle, which has been affirmed, is, I believe, equally dubious. That birds of this form and having a very general resemblance to the one here figured are to be found in other countries besides those mentioned I do not deny; but I think that on examination they will be found to be referable to other species. As regards the colouring of this large Petrel, I may remark that out of fifty or eighty specimens which have come under my notice, not more than three or four have been of a fuliginous or chocolate hue similar to one of the two figured in my 'Birds of Europe.' Now, as these dark-coloured individuals are usually in company with others of a lighter plumage like the one here represented, and moreover are of the same size, I am inclined to believe them to be merely melanic varieties; in which opinion I am strengthened by being aware that dark-tinted examples occur not only in this extensive family, but also in other allied groups of birds—for instance, in some of the members of the genus *Stercorarius*, more particularly in *S. parasiticus* and *S. pomatorhinus*. I have been sadly puzzled when a specimen of the latter species, sooty-black to a feather, has come under my notice. We cannot for a moment consider such birds distinct; it is likely, therefore, that I am right in regarding the dark-coloured examples of the Great Shearwater as mere varieties.

To show how abundant the bird is off the Devonshire coast, I may here insert a few extracts from notes on the subject kindly communicated to me by Mr. Gatcombe. In November 1860 he says:—"A friend of mine has four specimens of the Great Shearwater, two of which have the whole of the plumage greyish brown, and two with white breasts, all taken at the same time by fishermen off Plymouth Sound and brought in alive. A few years since large flocks made their appearance off Plymouth in both the dark and light states of plumage, when this bird and many others were caught with baited hooks; indeed almost every autumn large numbers of these birds may be seen off the coasts of Devon and Cornwall. Many of the Manx Shearwaters are occasionally obtained, and I remember being told that one year Torbay literally swarmed with them; but I think that on the whole the Greater Shearwater is the commonest species on our coasts. I suspect there can be little doubt that the dark-coloured examples are merely the young of the year, as birds with dark and others with white breasts are found together in the same flock;" in which opinion I do not coincide, although the young of the year are clouded of a darker hue than the adults. In another note, dated October 8th, 1865, he says, "Yesterday several specimens of the Greater Shearwater were brought in alive by some fishermen, who took them with a line and bait near the Eddystone. Large flocks occasionally occur in the Channel during the autumn; and this appears to be the case now; for the fishermen told me that fifty or sixty were flying close to the boat at the same time."

Mr. Rodd, who has also favoured me with some notes on the occurrence of the bird off the Cornish coasts, says, "All the specimens obtained have been procured in the autumn, and they have all appeared in the same kind of plumage: the caps of some specimens have been darker than others; but none have come under my notice of a chocolate-colour or approaching to that tint in the more subdued tone of broccoli-brown."