

STERCORARIUS LONGICAUDUS.

Long-tailed Skua.

- ? *Larus crepidatus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 602.
Stercorarius longicaudus, Vieill. Cuv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxxii. p. 157.—Briss. Orn., tom. vi. pp. 150, 155.
Lestris parasiticus, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit tom. ii. p. 796.
 ——— Buffon, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 562.
Stercorarius cephus, Leach, Swains. Faun. Bor.-Amer., vol. ii. p. 432.
Catharacta cephus, Keys. und Blas. Wirb. Eur., p. 95.
Cataractes longicaudatus, Macgill. Man. Nat. Hist. Orn., vol. ii. p. 258.
Stercorarius cephus, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 653, *Stercorarius*, sp. 2.
 ——— Buffon, Coues, Proc. Acad. Sci. Philad., 1863, p. 136.
The Arctic Bird, Edw. Nat. Hist. of Birds, part iii. pl. 148.
Buffon's Skua of British Ornithologists.

I ADOPT the specific term *longicaudus* for this elegant bird because it is a very appropriate appellation, and there is little doubt of its being the oldest that has been applied to it, the bird being sufficiently well described as *Stercorarius longicaudatus* by Brisson in 1760 (see his 'Ornithologie,' vol. vi. p. 155). It is, undoubtedly, the "Arctic Bird" of Edwards, although his figure represents the bird with yellow tarsi and black toes in lieu of the normal colouring. Adult birds with yellow tarsi are now before me, and particularly a Cornish-killed example, sent for my inspection by Mr. Rodd, an examination of which seems to prove that the part of the legs which is grey in the living birds changes to dull yellow after being mounted and exposed to light. It will be recollected that in Richardson's Skua the tarsi and toes are uniform in colour.

It will be seen, on reference, that the foregoing species (*S. parasiticus*) is strictly an inhabitant of and breeds in the British Islands. The present bird, on the other hand, has never been known to incubate on any of them, although it has been frequently shot in spring off our coasts. Five splendid adult examples were sent to Mr. Leadbeater to be preserved, early in June 1860; they had been shot out of a large flight which appeared a few days previously off the coast of Ireland, and which was probably performing its annual northward migration. The period was remarkable for violent gales of wind and rough weather, which, by compelling the birds to adopt an unusual route, may account for the occurrence of so many individuals of a rare bird at one time. They were in the finest state of plumage; and dissection proved that three were females and one at least a male. The latter was considerably smaller than the former; and it will be interesting if ornithologists, in their future investigation of this group, can give any proof that the males of the members of this genus are constantly less than the females. Besides these five birds, I have been favoured by E. H. Rodd, Esq., with a specimen which was killed in Falmouth Harbour; I have also seen a young individual in the collection of Mr. Fox at Falmouth; and Mr. Gatcombe informs me that immature examples are not uncommonly seen near Plymouth in autumn. From the foregoing remarks it will be perceived that the British Islands are beyond the limits of the area usually frequented by this species—a circumstance illustrative of the old adage that two of a trade can never agree; the Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, having habits in common, were not, indeed, likely to breed near each other: yet their nurseries are not very far apart; for if we take a journey to the countries of Norway and Lapland, we shall find the bird breeding in abundance on many of their wild fell-lands: here, then, as well as in the extreme northern portions of America, Iceland, and Greenland, the bird finds a summer home. I take the liberty of quoting some interesting notes on this bird by Mr. Wheelwright, as seen by him in the Quickiock district of Lapland.

"Owing, as it was supposed, to the numbers of Lemmings which swarmed on these fells this summer, the Buffon's Skua was unusually numerous in this neighbourhood, and I obtained more than thirty specimens of old birds, many eggs, and a few young. But, from all I could hear, this was a very unusual occurrence, and years may elapse before they will appear again in such numbers on these fells, though a year never passes without some being seen. It appears therefore that the northern stretch of this large fell-range is the summer home of this Skua, which in winter is occasionally met with as far south as the British Channel. I cannot hear of its breeding, however, further south than 'Peleekaism,' perhaps 100 miles south of Quickiock. The Laps appear to be well acquainted with this bird. We got our first nest on the 3rd of June, and continued to take fresh eggs until the end of the month. Except in one instance, I never saw more than two eggs in a nest. Once I found three; and as I have taken a single egg from a nest which had been sat on, it seems that they do not always lay two, though we may take that to be the general number. The nest