

# STERCORARIUS POMATORHINUS.

## Pomatorhine Skua.

- ? *Stercorarius striatus*, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 152, pl. 13. fig. 2.  
*Lestrus pomarinus*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1st edition, p. 514.  
*Catarractes parasita*, var. *camschatica*, Pall. Zoogr. Ross.-Asiat., tom. ii. p. 312.  
*Catarractes pomarina*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 216, pl. 24.  
*Pomarinus*, Selby, Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. ii. p. 517.  
*Lestrus striatus*, Eyton, Rare Brit. Birds, p. 53.  
*sphaeriuros*, Brehm, Handb. der Naturg. Vög. Deutschl., p. 718.  
*Stercorarius pomarinus*, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 653, *Stercorarius*, sp. 3.  
*Coprotheres pomarinus*, Reich. Syst. Av., tab. 32. figs. 328, 329.  
*Lestrus pomatorhinus*, Sclater, Ibis, 1862, p. 297.

THE species of Skua above named, and represented on the opposite Plate, was first clearly distinguished from others of the group by the late Professor Temminck, who described it unequivocally in the original edition of his 'Manuel d'Ornithologie'—a work which, with all its imperfections, was then far in advance of any other of the kind, and which gave an enormous impetus to our knowledge of the birds of this quarter of the globe. Temminck called his new species *Lestrus pomarinus*, the derivation of which appellation was long a matter of uncertainty. Some naturalists conceived it was intended to refer to the country of Pomerania; but the truth of the matter remained unsuspected until, in 1860, M. Preyer, in the narrative of his travels in Iceland, set it at rest by suggesting that Temminck intended to refer to the peculiar lid-like formation of the nostrils, and coined his name from two well-known Greek terms having that signification. That distinguished naturalist, however, being better acquainted with birds than with the classics, made a mistake in the composition of his new word, and it thus became necessary, as Dr. Sclater subsequently showed, to modify the spelling from *pomarinus* into *pomatorhinus*, the form which I accordingly here adopt.

Like all the other species of the genus, the Pomatorhine Skua is an inhabitant of the colder parts of the world. Its limits northward may be said to extend as far as our geographical knowledge goes. Speaking of the regions on the other side of the Atlantic, Sir John Richardson says, "It is not uncommon in the Arctic Seas and northern outlets of Hudson's Bay, where it subsists on putrid fish and other animal substances thrown up by the sea, and also on the matters which the Gulls disgorge when pursued by it. It retires from the north in the winter, and makes its first appearance at Hudson's Bay in May, coming in from seaward. The Indians abhor it, considering it to be a companion of the Esquimaux, and to partake of their evil qualities."

Captain Holbøell, who was for many years Governor of the Danish possessions in Greenland, states that it is the commonest species of Skua found in the northern part of that country, which it visits from May to September, breeding always in society. He adds that it can fish well enough for itself when it likes, but prefers living by plunder, pursuing the Sea-Gulls, and compelling them to drop their booty, which it at once appropriates.

Dr. von Middendorff, the intrepid traveller who has added so largely to our knowledge of the natural history of the most northern portions of Asia, says that this bird breeds in especial abundance on the barren grounds or "tundras" adjoining the River Taimyr; but thence to the Boganida only a single example was procured. He first saw the bird on the 6th of June, and on the 7th July found (in lat. N. 74°) the first eggs lying on the moor without any nest. Northward of 74½° he did not meet with it.

Mr. Alfred Newton, writing in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society' for 1861 (p. 401), says, "In June 1855, Mr. Simpson and myself observed off Berlevaag, a promontory east of North Cape, large flocks of this species. On our return a few weeks afterwards with Mr. Wolley, we again saw them. In 1857 that gentleman sought diligently, but unsuccessfully, for their breeding-places in this district. He was led to believe that in the years when the Lemmings swarm in the mountains they usually breed far in the interior of the country; for this, as well as the allied species of *Stercorarius*, preys much on these little rodents. It is perhaps worthy of remark, that in the full-plumaged Pomatorhine Skua the middle tail-feathers have a kind of twist in their shafts, which brings the lower surfaces to meet together towards their extremities in a vertical direction; and this peculiarity gives the bird, when on the wing, a very singular appearance." At the same meeting of the Zoological Society at which Mr. Alfred Newton made the above remarks respecting this species, he exhibited an egg of the bird, for which he stated he was indebted to Dr. Baldamus, to whom it had been sent by Dr. von Middendorff. This egg is figured in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society' for 1861. It is represented as of rich brownish olive, largely