

stroke. He beat my dog entirely out of the pit, insomuch that he was obliged to run among our legs for shelter, and could not be forced out again; for although Bonxie, as the bird is called, had some respect for us, while we kept together, on him he had no mercy; every whip he fetched him made his own wings crack, and the dog crouch into the hollows of the moor, until we came up and relieved him. I followed one of them to some distance from the rest of my party, and received some rude salutes for my imprudence from three of these birds, which made at me with the utmost rage. I defended myself the best way I could with my gun, fired several times at them; but, as none dropped, the report did not startle them in the least, but rather seemed to enrage them the more. When the inhabitants are looking after their sheep on the hills, the Skua often attacks them in such a manner that they are obliged to defend themselves with their cudgels held above their heads, on which it often kills itself." It has a hoarse and strong cry, and lives much in the manner of the Parasitic Gull, attacking the larger kinds of Gulls as the other does the smaller, but never meddles with birds to destroy them, nor attacks the lambs on the island, but, in its opposition to all formidable intruders, protects them from the Eagle, who does not venture to prey there during the breeding-season. In gratitude for its services, it was protected by a penalty of sixteen shillings and eight-pence for every individual shot; and when met with at sea by the fishermen, it always had a share of whatever fish might be in the boat.

Captain Vetch, in his account of this species, published in the fourth volume of the 'Memoirs of the Wernerian Society,' says, "The Bonxie or Skua-Gull breeds, I believe, in the British Islands only in Shetland, and there only on the three highest hills—Snuke in Foula, Ronas, and Saxaford. On Foula it seems to have taken exclusive possession of the Snuke, where it generally breeds at a height of 1300 feet, and nowhere else. It is easily tamed, and, I understand, is a very docile bird. I often observed it walking about within a few yards of the tent, and without any apparent fear; when, however, its nest is approached, it shows a determination to defend its possession with its life. Ravens, Eagles, Hawks, or other birds are soon driven from the territory it inhabits. On nearing the nest, an attack instantly commences; male and female in rapid succession descend from a considerable height, with a velocity and noise truly startling; horses, cattle, and sheep are immediately put to flight, and receive no intermission of attack till driven far from the nest; and if man, bent on sinister purposes, continues to brave the Bonxie's fury, he seldom accomplishes his aim without carrying away marks of war. The nest is a mere concavity in the ground; the number of eggs, two; the month of breeding, July. The young bird is a nimble, gallant little animal, and almost as soon as hatched leaves the nest. On the approach of danger, he secretes himself in holes or behind stones with great art, and, when captured, makes a show of defence that is quite amusing. The number of these birds that annually breed at Foula probably does not exceed thirty pairs."

In 'Some Observations on the Birds of the Faroe Islands,' by the late John Wolley, Esq., that gentleman says, "In the only two spots where the Great Skua now breeds in the British Islands, it is preserved only by the utmost vigilance of the proprietors, one of whom, Mr. Edmonston, has succeeded in recovering the stock, after it had been reduced to a single pair, in Unst. But in Faroe its breeding-places are numerous, though its preservation demands great self-control on the part of the people, for its attacks upon anyone approaching its nest are most irritating. Its blows are aimed at the head, with the full momentum of the bird's body; and it returns again with the most steady intrepidity imaginable. The protection afforded to it lasts only during good behaviour; when a colony is becoming too large some of them are apt to begin to attack lambs; they are then doomed to the infliction of a battue, which is supposed to act as a warning to the survivors for some years to come. It is said that only a few individuals acquire this bad habit—just as in the Scottish Highlands it is a single fox or eagle which gets into the way of carrying off lambs, but which evil-disposed one gives a bad name to, and is the death of, many of its innocent brethren.

"The Skua is one of the birds of which a certain number of heads is required to be given in by every inhabitant annually, which reminds one of the mode in which Egbert endeavoured to extirpate wolves in Britain. I do not know if this is now strictly enforced; but I have seen the people collect heads, when they had an opportunity, either of this bird or the Raven, or the Great Black-backed Gull—that is, when they were ready killed for them. I heard that several heads of the Hooded Crow or Richardson's Skua might be substituted for one of the larger birds. Skua is the Faroese name of the bird."

Mr. Dunn, who visited the Shetland Islands in 1831 and 1833, says "the nest is usually constructed amongst the heather or moss, the female mostly laying two eggs, but sometimes three." They are of an olive-brown, blotched with darker brown; and are two inches and nine lines long by two inches in breadth.

There is little difference in the external appearance of the two sexes; neither do the young differ from the adult, except in having the feathers more broadly margined with reddish brown.

The Plate represents the bird in its breeding-dress, somewhat smaller than the natural size.