

# HYDROCHELIDON LEUCOPTERA.

## White-winged Tern.

*Sterna nigra*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 56.

— *fissipes*, Pall. Zoogr. Ross.-Asiat., tom. ii. p. 398.

— *leucoptera*, Meisner u. Schinz, Vög. der Schweiz, p. 264.

*Hydrochelidon leucoptera*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.

— *nigra*, G. R. Gray, Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 660, *Hydrochelidon*, sp. 3.

*Viralva leucoptera*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 170.

This very beautiful and highly interesting Marsh-Tern occurs far less frequently in the western parts of Europe than its near ally, the *Hydrochelidon nigra*; its true habitat, in fact, lies further south than the countries resorted to by that species. All authors agree in stating that it is plentiful on the shores of the Mediterranean and the great lakes of Algeria; and Bailly informs us that it occasionally occurs during the spring on those of Switzerland, and at the same time is to be met with in Savoy, along the Rhone and the Isère; and Brehm includes it in the birds of Germany. In Britain the White-winged Tern can only be regarded as an accidental visitor, for few are the occasions in which England and Ireland have been favoured with its presence.

The first notice of the occurrence of this species in Britain was recorded in the fifteenth volume of the 'Annals of Natural History,' by Frederick M'Coy, Esq., at that time resident in Ireland, but who is now Director of the National Museum at Melbourne, Victoria, in the following terms:—

"*Sterna leucoptera*, TEMM. A specimen of this beautiful bird was shot by J. Hill, Esq., on the Shannon in 1841, in company with the Black Tern, *S. nigra*, with which it was confounded; the specimen was sent, along with one of the latter species, to the Natural-History Society of Dublin, in whose Museum they are now preserved; but, from their general resemblance to each other, the present species has remained there undistinguished till the present time. As I believe this to be the first record of the occurrence of the bird in Britain, I subjoin a short description of the specimen, to assist in drawing the attention of British naturalists to it, as it will probably be found not unfrequent.

"Legs and feet in the preserved specimen pale yellow, probably red in the living bird; claws darker; bill dark blackish-brown; head, neck, breast, abdomen, under wing-coverts, and back deep glossy black; lesser wing-coverts, tail, and upper and under tail-coverts pure-white; first three quill-feathers black, with a broad longitudinal band of white on the inner webs; remainder of the wings ash-grey, becoming darker towards the body.

"The form, proportions, and size of this species are very nearly those of the Black Tern, *S. nigra*; like that bird, too, it has the webs of the toes very deeply indented, being reduced to a mere rudiment between the middle and inner toes. The two species are, however, easily distinguished: the under wing-coverts of *S. nigra* are white, of the *S. leucoptera* black; the tail of the former is dark grey, of the latter pure white; in *S. nigra* the throat is white, the breast and abdomen dark grey, and the back lead-colour, while in *S. leucoptera* all those parts are black. I speak of both species in their perfect plumage."

Mr. Frederick, of Westbourne Terrace, informed me that in 1853 a beautiful specimen was killed by Mr. Rising's keeper, at Horsey, near Yarmouth.

Another scientific friend and correspondent, N. Troughton, Esq., of Coventry, has favoured me with the following communication respecting some examples killed in that neighbourhood:—"In June 1857 a pair, male and female, were shot within half a mile of the town-wall, at a pool called Quinton's. They were in beautiful plumage; I saw them in the flesh, and obtained them for my collection about two years afterwards. The person who preserved them told me that, about ten years prior to this, two females out of a flock of seven were shot close to the town on a pool called Swanswell; and five years previously a single male was killed on the Avon, near Wolston, about five miles from Coventry. You may rely on the truth of these statements. Coventry and its neighbourhood is the resting-place of many marine birds as they pass through the island—Gulls innumerable, Gannets, Petrels, Cormorants, Divers, Grebes, and Mergansers. I expect they drop from fatigue."

Through the kindness of Mr. Stevenson I am enabled to give a figure of this bird from a Norfolk-killed example in its finest dress. Respecting its acquisition this gentleman writes, under the date of July 13, 1867:—"A fine male specimen of the White-winged Black Tern has just come into my hands. It was shot on Hickling Broad on the 27th of June. The plumage is very perfect; the dark portions, however, are not pure black, as described by Yarrell, but dark greenish-black, and the shoulders beautifully white, shading off into French grey; feet orange-red."