

GELOCHELIDON ANGLICA.

Gull-billed Tern.

Sterna anglica, Mont. Orn. Dict., Supp.

—— *stübbberica*, Otto, Deutsch. Uebers. von Buff. Naturg.

—— *risoria*, Brehm, Beitr., tom. iii. p. 650.

—— *aranaea*, Wils. Am. Orn., vol. viii. p. 143.

Thalasseus anglicus, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.

Viralva? anglica, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Hist., vol. xiii. p. 174.

Gelochelidon anglica, agraria, et meridionalis, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 772, 773, 774, tab. 38. fig. 3.

—— *palustris*, MacGill. Man. Nat. Hist., Orn., vol. ii. p. 237.

Laropsis anglica, Wagl. Isis, 1832, p. 1225.

It is to be regretted that the law of priority with regard to specific names, now so rigidly adopted by all scientific ornithologists, obliges us to retain that of *anglica* for the present species, inasmuch as almost any other term would have been more appropriate, since neither England nor, indeed, any of the British Islands is its native country, and I question if, during the last fifty years, more than twenty examples have been seen therein, while on many parts of the neighbouring continent and in Africa it is common; in India it is equally abundant; and it would also seem to be a denizen of America; for Selby, after investigating specimens from that country, felt no hesitation in considering the Marsh-Tern, of Wilson's 'American Ornithology,' to be the same bird; Audubon, "having taken six specimens of the American Marsh-Tern to the British Museum, and minutely compared them in all their details with the specimens of the Gull-billed Tern, which formed part of the collection of Colonel Montagu and were procured in the south of England, found them to agree so perfectly that no doubt remained with me of the identity of the bird described by Wilson with that first distinguished by the English ornithologist;" and Mr. Elliot Coues, in his 'Review of the Terns of North America,' says:—I have not a sufficient number of skins before me for a perfectly satisfactory comparison of the birds of the two continents; but, so far as I can judge, I am decidedly inclined to agree with Audubon in opinion that no difference exists. I have minutely compared the specimens before me, and found them absolutely identical in every particular of size, form, and colour."

These observations tend to show the correctness of the remark I have made respecting the inappropriateness of the term *anglica* as applied to a species so widely distributed; still it must be retained until naturalists, by common consent, agree to change this and hundreds of other equally inapplicable terms: and surely this will be done some day!

Montagu was the first to distinguish this species from the other Terns he saw around him on the coasts of Sussex and Kent; and the first figure and description of it appeared in the Supplement to his 'Ornithological Dictionary,' published in 1813. The bird was at first confounded with the Sandwich Tern; but the difference in the form and length of the bill in the two birds soon led him to characterize it as distinct, and he gave it the name of *anglica*, not being at the time aware that it occurred elsewhere than in England. Of the three specimens known to him, one was shot in Sussex, and he saw two others that had been killed at Rye; and Mr. Yarrell has recorded two more, one of which was killed in Kent: the locality of the other escaped his recollection. Besides these, five have been shot in Norfolk, one in Yorkshire, one near Brighton, and one in Cornwall.

Until of late years, but little had been recorded respecting the habits and economy of this Tern; but, thanks to the energy of the English naturalists who have recently visited Eastern Europe and North Africa, we are now much better acquainted with them, as will be seen from the extracts given below from their notes recorded in 'The Ibis.'

I have stated in general terms that the Gull-billed Tern is found in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America; it appears, however, to range still more widely, since Mr. Salvin found it common at Chiampan and on the Pacific coast of Guatemala, in Central America; and Temminck states that two specimens killed by the late Prince Maximilian of Wied, in Brazil, did not differ from examples obtained in Hungary; Dr. Leith Adams saw it in Nubia; Mr. Taylor says it is the most common of the Terns frequenting the marshy places of the interior of Egypt, and that he obtained specimens between Cairo and Sakara. Mr. Tristram states that it occurs in flocks both in the Western and Eastern Sahara, that several were shot at Bou Guizoun and near Ain el Ibel, on the El-Aghouat route, and vast flocks met with round the Zahrez, in the same country.