

STERNA MACRURA, Naum.

Arctic Tern.

- Sterna hirundo*, Faber, Prod. der isländ. Orn., p. 88.
—— *macrura*, Naum. Isis, 1819, p. 1847.
—— *arctica*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2ndé édit. tom. ii. p. 742, et tom. iv. p. 458.
—— *Nitzschii*, Kaup, Isis, 1824, p. 153.
—— *macroura*, Coues, Proc. Acad. Sci. Philad., 1862, p. 549.
—— *brachytarsa*, Graba?
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THIS bird has hitherto been known to all British ornithologists under Temminck's specific appellation of *arctica*; but that of *macrura*, having been previously assigned to it by Naumann, must, in fairness to that author, be the one adopted. As to the present bird being the *Sterna hirundo* of Linnæus, as some modern ornithologists are inclined to believe, sufficient has been said in my account of the Common Tern. Both birds are summer visitors to the shores of various parts of our islands for the purpose of breeding, after which they leave for the surrounding seas, particularly those which wash our southern and western coasts. In the winter season the two species often intermingle, especially the young birds of the year. The Tern or Sea Swallow now under consideration is the more northern bird of the two, its summer range extending to within the arctic circle, where it inhabits the polar portions of the Old and New World, being as plentiful in Iceland and the boreal regions of America as it is in those of Europe and Asia. Our voyagers found it breeding on Melville Peninsula, and on the islands and beaches of the Arctic Sea, Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands. It also breeds in Norway, Lapland, Sweden, and Denmark, and penetrates to the dismal solitudes of Spitzbergen. Britain affords it many great nurseries, of which one of the most southern is the Farn Islands, off the coast of Northumberland. Northward of this, it breeds all round the northern and eastern coasts of Scotland, the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland, and on those of Ireland, wherever suitable localities occur. Its actions are more aerial than those of the Common Tern, its body and its wings are proportionally longer, and it has a more lengthened tail—features which indicate that it possesses great powers of flight; its tarsi are shorter, its feet much smaller, and its bill more slender and pointed. Other differences also exist by which this bird may be distinguished from its near ally: thus the bill in the adult is of a beautiful carmine-red to the very tip; and the body is of a darker or more uniform blue-grey tint, both on the upper and under surface. I mention these various points of difference, because many persons may not be acquainted with the distinguishing characters of two of our commonest Terns. Some people think that the Arctic Tern breeds on the shingle at Eastbourne, Pevensey, and Dungeness; but I believe this to be a mistake, and that the Common and the Little Terns are the only species that breed there. The eggs of *S. macrura* and *S. hirundo* are subject to considerable variation in colour, but are so similar that I think it is quite impossible to say to which species any single set of eggs belong, unless the bird be shot while rising from them.

Whatever has been written respecting the habits, actions, and incubation of the Common Tern is equally descriptive of those of the present species, except that it keeps more constantly to the salt water, and rarely goes to the borders of lakes and other interior waters for the purpose of breeding. According to Macgillivray, there is a marked difference in their flight: he describes it as more bounding, and adds that its cries are shriller.

Mr. Selby, speaking of the bird as observed by him on the Farn Islands, remarks that "It is the most numerous of the Terns which resort to them, and the colony occupies a considerable portion of Brown's Main. The eggs are placed so near each other that it is almost impossible to walk upon the part they inhabit without crushing several in making the attempt. They are laid upon the bare ground or gravel, and differ very much in colour and marking. The young, when excluded, are covered with a particoloured down, usually of a fulvous or brown shade, with darker variegations. They fledge very rapidly, and within a month from the time of hatching are able to fly. Their food is the fry of the *Ammodytes Tabianus* (Land- or Sand-Eel), which is brought to them in great abundance by their parents. They arrive towards the middle of May, and desert their breeding-station early in August. The female lays two or three eggs, the prevailing tint of which is oil-green, with darker spots and blotches."

"The swiftest little creature in the whole sea is the sand-eel; and yet the Terns catch thousands of these fish, in the same way as the Osprey catches the Trout, excepting that the Tern uses its sharp-pointed bill instead of its feet. I have often taken up sand-eels which the Terns have dropped on being alarmed, and have invariably found that the little fish had but one small wound, immediately behind the head. That a bird should catch such a little slippery, active fish as the sand-eel, in the