

XEMA SABINI.

Sabine's Gull.

Larus Sabini, Sab. Linn. Trans., vol. xii. p. 520, pl. 29.

Xema Sabini, Leach, in Ross's Voy., App., p. lvii, with fig.

— *collaris*, Leach.

Gavia Sabini, Macgill. Man. Nat. Hist., Orn., vol. ii. p. 241.

SEVERAL instances of the occurrence of this species in the British Islands are on record. The late Mr. Thompson exhibited to the Linnean Society, on the 15th of April, 1834, a specimen which had been killed in Belfast Bay on the 18th of September, 1822; the collection of Mr. Rodd of Penzance has been enriched by at least two examples; another was shot in Belfast Bay in September 1834; a fifth in Dublin Bay in October 1837; a sixth at Milford Haven in 1839; a seventh at Newhaven, in Sussex, in December 1853; and Mr. Murray A. Mathews has seen two at Weston-super-Mare, in Somersetshire, which had been killed on Weston Sands a year or two previously. All these specimens are immature, affording additional evidence that young birds wander much further from their homes than adults.

This beautiful species of Gull was described for the first time in the twelfth volume of the 'Transactions of the Linnean Society' by the late Joseph Sabine, Esq., from specimens sent to this country by his brother, Captain (now General) Sabine, President of the Royal Society, who accompanied the expedition of 1818 in search of a north-west passage. "They were met with by Captain Sabine and killed by him on the 25th of July 1818, on a group of three rocky islands, each about a mile across, off the west coast of Greenland, twenty miles distant from the mainland, in latitude $75^{\circ} 29' N.$, and longitude $60^{\circ} 9' W.$ They were associated in considerable numbers with Arctic Terns, breeding on those islands, the nests of both birds being intermingled. This Gull lays two eggs, on the bare ground; these are hatched in the last week in July: the young are mottled at first with brown and dull yellow. The eggs are an inch and a half in length and of regular shape, not much pointed; the colour is olive blotched with brown. The parent birds flew with impetuosity towards those who approached their nest and young; and when one bird of a pair was killed, its mate, though frequently fired at, continued on wing close to the spot where it lay. They get their food on the sea-beach, standing near the water's edge and picking up the marine insects which are cast on shore." "A solitary individual," says Swainson, "was seen in Prince Regent's Inlet, on Sir Edward Parry's first voyage; and many specimens were procured in the course of the second voyage, on Melville Peninsula; so that it is a pretty general summer visitor to the arctic seas, and is entitled to be enumerated amongst the European as well as American birds. It arrives in the high northern latitudes in June, and retires to the southward in August. When newly killed, they have a delicate pink blush on the under surface" (Fauna Boreali-Americana, vol. ii. p. 428). Specimens are also said to have been obtained at Spitzbergen, Igloodik, Behring's Straits, Cape Garry, and Felix Harbour; and some Esquimaux told Captain James C. Ross that it breeds in great numbers on the lowland west of Neityelle. It seems likely that there is some mistake with respect to the statement that this bird has been procured at Spitzbergen; for Mr. Newton, in his notes on the birds of that country, remarks that Dr. Malmgren, who has thoroughly explored a very large extent of it, and especially the locality in which the bird was said to have been found, did not meet with any trace of it.

Little has been recorded respecting the breeding-places of the *Xema Sabini*; but that the coasts of Greenland, Hudson's Bay, and the fur-countries of America are the places principally resorted to for this purpose, there can be little doubt.

The collectors employed by the Smithsonian Institution at Washington are understood to have lately met with this bird breeding in considerable numbers; but it is to the intrepid Siberian explorer, Von Middendorff, that naturalists as yet owe their only specimens of its eggs which have yet reached European collections. One of these was exhibited by Mr. Alfred Newton to the Zoological Society at their meeting on the 10th of December, 1861, accompanied by the following remarks:—"The ruins of an egg of this rare Gull were sent to me by Dr. Baldamus. He obtained them from Von Middendorff, who found the species on the lakes of the *Tundras* and the little islets at the mouth of the Taimyr, breeding abundantly in company with the Arctic Tern (*Sterna macrura*, Naum.), as General Sabine had done twenty years previously on the islands in Melville Bay. . . . Whether any specimens were brought home by the first discoverer of this species I do not know; if so, it is probable they no longer in existence, though it is clear, from the accounts given in the 'Transactions of the Linnean Society' (vol. xii. p. 520), that many might have been