

HYDROCOLÆUS MINUTUS.

Little Gull.

Larus minutus, Pall. Reise, tom. iii. p. 702.

— *atricilloides*, Falk. Reise, tom. iii. p. 355, tab. 24.

Xema minutum, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 365.

Hydrocolæus minutus, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 113.

Chroicocephalus minutus, Eyton, Hist. of Rarer Brit. Birds, p. 54.

Gavia minuta, Macgill. Man. Nat. Hist. Orn., vol. ii. p. 242.

Larus pygmæus, Bory (Bonap.).

— *nigrotis*, Less. (Bonap.).

— *D'Orbigny*, Audouin (Bonap.).

It would appear that this elegant little Gull is annually becoming more and more abundant in the seas immediately surrounding our islands; for so numerous of late years have been the occurrences of examples in summer and winter plumage, and of young birds of the year, that it would be almost impossible to enumerate them. For our first acquaintance with it as a British species we are indebted to the celebrated Col. Montagu, who, in the Appendix to the Supplement of his 'Ornithological Dictionary,' gave the description of a young bird that had been shot on the Thames, near Chelsea. Since that date many others have occurred at different seasons. Mr. Yarrell mentions examples obtained in Cornwall, Devonshire, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Yorkshire, and Northumberland; and, more recently, Mr. W. Oxenden Hammond, of St. Alban's Court, has informed me of two having been brought to him, which had been killed on the Kentish Coast. In the 'Zoologist' for January 1867, Mr. W. W. Boulton records that no less than six were received by him during the previous summer, two of which were mature, the others immature; they had all been shot off Flamborough Head and Bridlington Quay, between the 1st of September and the 5th of October. Mr. Gatecombe, in a letter dated Jan. 20th, 1869, says, "An immature specimen of the Little Gull was killed in Plymouth Sound on the 31st of December last, exceedingly late for such a bird on our coast; but I think its remaining so long must be attributed to the continued severe gales we have experienced during the last two months." In a subsequent letter he says:—"Did I tell you that another Little Gull was killed in Cornwall, in the middle of February? If not, I think it worth recording, as they were never known to be so plentiful as they have been during the past year, some being procured every month." I may mention also that Mr. J. H. Gurney, Jun., has informed me that during the autumn of 1868 he had, "in the flesh, ten little Gulls, all shot on the Yorkshire Coast, at Flamborough Head, Speeton Cliffs, Filey, and Bridlington Quay." Of these, several were kindly sent to me before they were skinned; one of them was especially beautiful, and more than usually interesting from the fact of its being in full summer plumage, with its head as black as jet, its under surface of a most delicate rose-colour, and the underside of the wings of a dark smoky grey; some were in the winter dress, the head being white; and others, again, were in the plumage of the first year, having the barred tail and other characteristics seen in the young of the nearly allied form, the Common Black-headed Gull. Much variety appears to occur in the colouring of the bill; for, although it is mostly red, in some mature individuals it is black, or black suffused with red; and I may mention that I have observed a similar colouring of the bill, but to a less extent, in some full-summer-plumaged specimens of the Black-headed Gull.

In Scotland, Dr. Neill presented to the Edinburgh Museum a Little Gull which had been obtained on the Solway in 1824; Selby records a young bird as having been killed upon the Frith of Clyde; and a female was shot by Mr. Robert Dunn, in Shetland, on the 7th of April, 1853. It has also occurred in Ireland, although very sparingly; for Thompson only mentions two as having been procured, although two others were seen. Of the former, one, in the Museum of the Dublin Natural-History Society, a beautiful adult specimen, and the first in that plumage known to have occurred in the British Islands, was shot by Walter Boyd, Esq., of the 97th Regiment, in the month of May 1840, between Shannon Harbour and Shannon Bridge, on the river of the same name; the other, an equally beautiful and adult specimen, was shot in the estuary, about three miles distant from Belfast, on the 23rd of December 1847, and came under Mr. Thompson's examination within an hour after being killed. From the paucity of examples obtained in Ireland compared with the number killed in England, it is evident that the seas washing our eastern coast are more often visited than St. George's Channel; but this might naturally be expected, since the former localities are much nearer to the natural home of the species. During the summer it resorts to the marshes in the vicinity of the Baltic and Gothland, where, on the authority of Professor Nilsson, it is said to breed;