

# CHROICOCEPHALUS PHILADELPHIA.

## Bonaparte's Gull.

*Sterna philadelphia*, Ord, Guthrie's Geog. two Am. edit., vol. ii. p. 319.

*Larus Bonapartei*, Richards. and Swains. Faun. Bor.-Amer., vol. ii. p. 425.

*Xema Bonaparteii*, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 62.

*Chroicocephalus Bonapartei*, Bruch.

——— *philadelphia*, Baird.

THROUGHOUT the entire course of the present work I have found it difficult to determine where the line should be drawn with regard to the admission of the few American birds that have from time to time been killed in our islands into the 'Birds of Great Britain.' Generally speaking, I have included those which inhabit the extreme northern part of America and omitted those that find a natural home in its more southern division, such as the two species of Cuckoos (*Coccyzus*), the belted Kingfisher, Red-winged Starling, and a few others. With regard to Bonaparte's Gull, I find it has been admitted into the lists of British birds published by the late Mr. Yarrell and all subsequent writers; I feel bound therefore to follow in their wake; and hence it is that a figure of it appears here.

Mr. Harting, in his 'Handbook of British Birds,' gives the following instances of the occurrence of this Gull on this side of the Atlantic.

One, on the Lagan, near Belfast, 1st of February 1848.

One, on Loch Lomond, April 1850.

One, on an English lake: Yarrell, Hist. Brit. Birds, vol. iii. p. 555.

One, Dublin Bay, July 1864.

One, Falmouth Harbour, autumn 1864.

"This species," says Yarrell, in the second Supplement to his British Birds, p. 53, "was first characterized in the 'Fauna Boreali-Americana,' by Richardson and Swainson, in 1831. It is there stated that this handsome small Gull is common in all parts of the fur-countries, where it associates with the Terns, and is distinguished by its peculiar shrill and plaintive cry. It has since been received from Greenland." Mr. Thompson, in his 'Birds of Ireland,' mentions that a specimen of this little Gull, the first of the species known to have visited Europe, was killed at the tidal portion of the river Lagan, between Ormeau bridge and the Botanic Garden, about a mile above the lowest bridge, at the town of Belfast, on the 1st of February, 1848; it was flying singly. The person who shot the bird, attracted by its pretty appearance, merely left it to be preserved by a taxidermist, who, on the receipt of any birds, either rare or unknown to him, was in the habit of taking them to Mr. Thompson for his inspection; the bird was therefore examined previously to its being skinned, and exact measurements were made. Another example was shot in Ireland on the coast near the Skerries. A specimen was obtained on Loch Lomond in 1851, another on one of the lakes of England; and one more besides those here enumerated has been procured since the publication of the first occurrence of the species.

The following passage occurs in the account of this species, published by Audubon in the fourth volume of his 'Ornithological Biography':—

"No sooner do the shads and old-wives enter the bays and rivers of our midland districts, than this Gull begins to show itself on the coast, following these fishes as if dependent upon them for support—which, however, is not the case; for at the time when these inhabitants of the deep deposit their spawn in our waters, the Gull has advanced beyond the eastern limits of the United States. However, after the first of April, thousands of Bonapartian Gulls are seen gambolling over the waters of Chesapeake Bay, and proceeding eastward, keeping pace with the shoals of fishes.

"During my stay at Eastport, in Maine, in May 1833, these Gulls were to be seen in vast numbers in the harbour of Passamaquody at high water, and in equal abundance at low water on all the sand and mud bars in the neighbourhood. They were extremely gentle, scarcely heeded us, and flew around our boats so close that any number might have been procured. Their stomachs were filled with coleopterous insects, which they caught on the wing, or picked up from the water, into which they fell in great numbers when overtaken by a cold fog, while attempting to cross the bay. On the 24th of August 1831, when at Eastport, I shot ten of these Gulls. The adult birds had already lost their dark hood; and the young were in fine plumage. In the stomachs of all were shrimps, very small fishes, and fat substances. The old birds were still in pairs."

The Plate represents a fully adult male in summer plumage, and a bird in change, both of the size of life.