

RISSA TRIDACTYLA.

Kittiwake.

- Larus Rissia*, Brünn. Orn. Bor., p. 140.
— *tridactylus*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 55.
— *torquatus, gavia, et canus*, Pall. Zoog. Rosso-Asiat., tom. ii. pp. 328, 329, 330.
Gavia tridactyla, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.
Rissa Brünnichii, Leach, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 181, pl. 21.
Cheimonea tridactyla, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 84.
Rissa cinerea, Eyt. Hist. of Rarer Brit. Birds, p. 52.
— *tridactyla*, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 62.
Laroides tridactylus, rissa, et minor, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 754, 755, 756, pl. 37. fig. 3.

THE Kittiwake is at once the most beautiful and the most interesting of our indigenous Gulls. Its plumage is so perfect and unsullied that, in this respect, no other species can surpass it; neither has any of its congeners so buoyant and graceful a flight. On the blue waters of the ocean it sports like a fairy, and when seen flying round the rocks and dark chasms wherein it breeds, one might almost imagine that they are spirits and not birds which are floating in the air. Those who are acquainted with the breeding-places of this bird, and have heard its wild cries amidst the spray and the loud monotonous booming of the waves of the ocean, will readily comprehend the feelings which fill my breast while thus feebly writing on the Kittiwake. Not for a moment must it be supposed that it is the only species to be found in such situations; for there also is to be seen a vast number of rock-loving birds of different genera, and even different families—Willocks, Puffins, Cormorants, other kinds of Gulls, Pigeons, the ubiquitous Starling, the Sea-Eagle, and the sharp-eyed Peregrine Falcon often forming part of the assemblage. Intermingled with such birds, the Kittiwake floats about to and fro, performing the most graceful curves and elegant evolutions. To those lovers of nature who have seen such scenes these lines will afford no information; to others, and particularly to those who have not had an opportunity of visiting these cradles of the birds of the ocean, they may be of interest, and induce a desire to view in reality that of which I am only depicting the shadow. Let them visit Flamborough Head, Ailsa Craig, Horn Head, in Ireland, and above all the Island of Handa, off the western coast of Sutherland, in the month of June or July, and I venture to say they will, in the first place, be awe-struck by the scene, and, secondly, highly interested in the sight which will be before them. In whatever aspect the Island of Handa be viewed, whether it be rounded by boat, or the green carpet of turf on its summit be traversed on foot, each will have special claims to his admiration: to look down from these giddy heights into the dark channels and chasms from above excites terror in many beholders; while the roaring waves which, after spanning the Atlantic, dash against the base of the rocks, have dismayed many a bold heart when the boatmen, with fearless temerity, have taken the traveller close beneath some of the most majestic of Albion's cliffs. In such places the Kittiwakes build their nests and rear their young; these are their summer homes—the *ultima Thule* of their happiness; a narrow ledge of rock, from one to two hundred feet high, forms a base for their seaweed nest. At other seasons, the Kittiwake is sailing round our coasts, scanning the ocean for its natural food, the surface-swimming fry of fishes, and other marine creatures of a lower order, for procuring which it is more especially adapted than those Gulls which principally haunt the shores and inlets; I say adapted, because its whole structure and the density of its plumage are better fitted for a sea-life, and clearly point out, if not an affinity to, a mimicry, if I may so term it, of the Petrels, a tribe of birds more truly oceanic than the Gulls. Ornithologists will also see a divergence from one group to the other in its short feet, nearly obsolete hind toe, in its more lengthened wing, in its dense plumage, and its more buoyant flight.

Beyond the British Islands, and apart from our own seas, the Kittiwake has many other, and far distant, homes: southward it has been observed in Madeira and on the Mediterranean; while northward it has been found in Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Nova Zembla, Greenland, Spitzbergen, Davis's Straits, and all along the northern parts of America in summer, and its southern coasts in winter. Professor Newton says, "this very common bird appears to frequent the whole of the Spitzbergen coast." In Parry's Expedition it was observed as far to the northward as they reached—lat. 82° 45' N. "It is extremely numerous," says Capt. James C. Ross, "during the summer season, along the west coast of Prince Regent's Inlet, where, in several places that are peculiarly well fitted for breeding-stations, they congregate in inconceivable numbers. We killed enough to supply our party with several excellent meals, and found them delicious food, perfectly free from any unpleasant flavour."