

LARUS CANUS, Linn.

Common Gull.

- Larus canus*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 54.
— *hybernus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 596.
— *cyanorhynchus*, Meyer, Taschenb., p. 480.
— *procellosus*, pt., Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 647.
Laroides procellosus, canus, et canescens, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 750, 751, 753.
Gavia cinerea, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 175, tab. xvi. fig. i.
— *hyberna*, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 189.
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If any one of the sea-birds which enliven our shores with their presence be deserving of the term Common it is undoubtedly the one here depicted, and of which during the last few years, as we learn from the daily papers, many thousands have been destroyed, in mere wantonness, or for the sake of their skins for what have been considered decorative purposes. It is sickening to think of the amount of destruction which has been dealt out to these fairy-like creatures for such trivial ends. To kill them off to the last bird when they visit Flamborough and other headlands of our coasts for the purpose of breeding, as has been repeatedly done, is in my opinion most disgraceful. So wholesale has been the destruction of this species and of the beautiful Grebe, that the latter has been almost extirpated,—a result which must meet with the most decided disapprobation of every rightly constituted mind; and I do hope that the ladies, for whom most of these acts of Vandalism are committed, will at once abandon a fashion which must call forth the maledictions of every true lover of nature—no inconsiderable portion of the community. Having said this much with the view of protecting an indigenous species whose buoyant flight and elegant evolutions in the air must have been witnessed and admired by thousands, I now proceed to give an account of its habits and economy. In the British Islands it is so generally dispersed that to particularize localities wherein it may be found is unnecessary. Every writer, whether it be Mr. Rodd, of Cornwall, Macgillivray, of Scotland, or Thompson, of Ireland, testifies to its general distribution over the country to which their observations refer. In winter it may be seen either singly or in small companies on most of our low flat shores, sometimes by the sea, at others in the estuaries, not unfrequently far up our tidal rivers, and occasionally still further in the interior of the country. It often settles and feeds on pastures near the sea, and may be seen following the plough for the sake of the worms and grubs exposed on the newly turned soil. In such situations the snowy whiteness of the plumage contrasts strongly with the surrounding objects; and the birds look truly beautiful when a flock rise suddenly in the air, and when opposed to a black cloud resemble sprites floating in buoyant curves and performing many varied and graceful evolutions.

Each species of Gull usually resorts to some particular group of rocks or islands for the purpose of breeding; and the present one offers no exception to the rule. Among the sites chosen by it in England are Flamborough Head on the coast of Northumberland, and St. Abb's Head in Berwickshire, where, according to Selby, it occupies the whole face of the cliff. In Scotland the craggy cliffs of many parts of the mainland, and similar situations in the Orkney and Shetland Islands, are equally resorted to. It is also said to breed on Lochs Shin and Laighal and a few smaller ones, sometimes making its nest on their turfy shores. In Ireland, Thompson states, on the authority of Dr. J. D. Marshall, that in June 1834 it occupied one of the large natural amphitheatres formed on the north-western side of Rathlin Island, that Mr. J. V. Stewart knew it to breed on the lofty cliffs of the peninsula of the Horn to the westward of Horn Head, and Mr. Neligan informed him that it bred in numbers on a low grassy islet off the Kerry coast. The nest, which is of large size, is generally composed of masses of seaweed, grasses, and other vegetable substances. The eggs are usually three in number, of a dark olive-brown, spotted with darker brown and black, two inches and a quarter in length by one inch and a half in breadth.

“This species,” says Macgillivray, “has a light and buoyant flight, during which it often inclines to either side. It walks and runs prettily, with short steps, pats the sands at the edge of the water with its feet, emits a shrill and somewhat harsh cry, and is apt to give the alarm to other birds at the approach of the sportsman. It is not, however, nearly so timid or so sensible of danger as the larger Gulls, and frequently allows a person to come within shot. Often also, when one has been killed or wounded, its companions, after flying off, collect again, hover around, or even alight, when some of them may frequently be obtained. When feeding along with Rooks in pasture-grounds they are generally less wary than those birds, especially in places where they are not much liable to be molested. They never, I think, molest any other bird, nor are they addicted to quarrelling among themselves. Their food consists of small fishes, such as