

LARUS ARGENTATUS, *Brünn.*

Herring Gull.

Larus argentatus, Brünn. Orn. Bot., p. 44.

Laroides major, argenteus, argentatoides, argentaceus et Americanus, Brehm.

IF ornithologists are right in considering Brehm's numerous names synonyms of the present species, the Herring-Gull will hereafter be only known by the specific term *argentatus*; indeed this is the appellation by which it is generally recognized, and certainly is the one that should be retained for this familiar Gull—a Gull that is more generally dispersed around the shores of the British Isles than any other, while, numerically speaking, there is no one of the larger kinds that can be compared with it; and I question if there be one of our rock-loving birds which is held in greater favour—its graceful flight, the silvery whiteness of its head, tail, and under surface, and the delicate grey of its back, relieved by the black marks near the tips of its pinions, rendering it an object of great beauty when sailing about in the neighbourhood of the frowning cliffs, on which it lays its charmingly coloured eggs. All artists who attempt the delineation of such wild scenes as the rookeries of the Guillemot and Puffin, always depict the Herring-Gull among the foremost of the objects. It is the bird, beyond all others, that is so enchanting to the ornithologist when he looks over such precipices as the Needles, in the Isle of Wight, and those of Handa Island, lying off the west coast of Sutherland, and sees in the dark abyss below the thousands of birds that are winging their way over the waters, their various cries mingling with the sound of the wind reverberating from the rocks and the thundering roar of the waves which gradually increase in violence as they come across the wide Atlantic and are here brought to a stand. Although so numerous around the coasts of England, Ireland, and Scotland, the Herring-Gull is seldom, if ever, seen southward of the Bay of Biscay; and some ornithologists have gone so far as to assure me that it does not frequent the Mediterranean at all. This assertion I cannot, of my own experience, either refute or confirm; but I think it is probably correct, as the bird is evidently as much a northern species as many others of the larger members of the *Laridæ*. In Britain its numbers certainly increase as we proceed northward, and it is a hundred times as numerous off the coasts of Scotland as on those of England. It frequents the seas of the northern portion of Europe, and is as abundant in the Baltic as it is with us; but how much further eastwards it proceeds has not yet been clearly ascertained. Jerdon does not include it in his 'Birds of India,' thus clearly showing that it is not a southern bird. In America, Dr. Baird informs us that it frequents the Atlantic, and it is common from Texas to Newfoundland.

Before I proceed to give some extracts respecting the habits, economy, and peculiarities of the Herring-Gull as described by other writers, I give a note kindly forwarded to me by W. Oxenden Hammond, Esq., of St. Alban's Court, Kent. I consider the scene upon which he has written of interest, and one that may have been witnessed by others.

"Writing from Connemara, my brother says:—'On September 7, 1868, we walked to the crest of the mountain-cliff that rises precipitously out of the deep waters of the Atlantic at the extreme west point of the Island of Achill. We saw a sun-fish straight down below us; having come up from the deep water, he basked for a few minutes in the sun, and then sank: in a minute or two he floated again. A Sea-gull (I should say the Common Herring-Gull, a large white Gull, with blue-grey back and wings) immediately went down to him off the cliff, when the fish, instead of taking alarm and sinking, allowed the bird to settle within two feet, and swim around him. The distance was too great for us to see the Gull's eyes or his bill open and shut; but I distinctly saw him breast the fish and occupy himself with it for some time; and I am satisfied that the fish was encumbered by parasites, and that it came up for the purpose of being relieved, and that the Gull responded and was probably in the common habit of rendering such service. The fish rose and sank several times whilst we remained on the cliff.'"

Mr. Robert Gray, writing on the birds of Western Scotland, p. 487, says:—"From Ailsa Craig northwards to the Shiant Isles and the cliffs of Cape Wrath, the Silvery Gull, as this species has been called, has many breeding-places. For the most part it prefers nesting on the turf, near the summit of its sea-beaten haunts, and is therefore found at times in colonies, not mixing with, but sitting alongside, groups of Lesser Black-backs as well as the Great Black-backs, forming a large but harmonious family of Gulls, conspicuous at a great distance when viewed from the sea, and looking like large white flowers among the grass. It is very abundant on all the shores, including those of the outward islands, where I have observed it to be very