

# LARUS ISLANDICUS, *Edm.*

## Iceland Gull.

- Larus leucopterus*, Faber, Prodr. isl. Orn., p. 91.  
— *argentatus*, Sabine, Trans. Linn. Soc., vol. xii. p. 546.  
— *glaucoides*, Temm.  
— *islandicus*, Edmonst. Trans. Wern. Soc., vol. iv. p. 500.  
— *arcticus*, Macg. Trans. Wern. Soc., vol. v. p. 268.  
— *minor*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 736.

ACCORDING to the law of priority, now so generally followed by naturalists, I ought not to have adopted Edmonston's name of *islandicus* for this species, inasmuch as that of *leucopterus* had long previously been assigned to it by Faber; but this latter term being equally descriptive of the white-winged *Larus glaucus*, it appeared to me so inappropriate that I did not feel justified in employing it. The Glaucous and the Iceland Gull are in all particulars so much alike, except in size, that one description would serve for both. What the Lesser Black-backed Gull is to the Greater, such is the present bird to the Glaucous. This circumstance has not failed to call forth remarks from some of the authors who have written on the genus *Larus*, questioning the propriety of separating them; still, I imagine, there is scarcely a living ornithologist who would think of regarding the Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls as the same, or the Glaucous and the Iceland species as identical. In a state of nature they have never been known to mix or breed with each other, although they frequent similar latitudes and countries. The white-winged Gulls are the Arctic representatives of the more southerly Black-backed Gulls. In winter, when the severity of the weather in Baffin's Bay and other polar regions is at its height, the white-winged birds beat a retreat to the shores of the British Islands; and hence at that season all four of the birds above-mentioned may be found in our seas, and in some instances intermingle for a short time.

As regards the habits and economy of the Iceland Gull, what has been written respecting those of the preceding species (*Larus glaucus*) is equally descriptive of those of the present bird, save and except that the larger and stronger bird will prey upon living animals of a larger size than his weakly congener. From what we have been able to gather on their nidification and the number and colouring of their eggs, a great similarity exists; and in the changes of plumage between youth and maturity they are as nearly identical as possible.

"The present species," says Selby, "in all its stages of plumage from adolescence to maturity, bears the closest resemblance to the Glaucous Gull, and can only be distinguished by its striking inferiority of size and by the greater length of its wings, which reach, when closed, upwards of an inch beyond the end of the tail, whereas in the other they scarcely reach that part. Like its prototype it is a winter visitant to the Shetland Isles and the northern part of Scotland; and a few stray as far as the Northumberland coast, where I have obtained three or four specimens, but all in the immature plumage. Its habits are stated by Edmonston to be more lively and active than those of the Glaucous Gull; and it displays more elegance of form. It is common on the Iceland coast, to which, it is probable, many of those who winter with us and in similar latitudes retire to breed. It feeds upon fish, the flesh of whales, and other carrion."

The only remark I need make on the above passage is that, upon the authority of Professor Newton, the Iceland Gull does not appear to breed in Iceland, but is a winter visitant, only arriving, according to Faber, towards the end of September, and mostly leaving by the end of April; and I may add that it migrates much further south than the shores of Northumberland. Mr. Rodd speaks of a very fine nearly adult example which was obtained on the Scilly Islands; and there are many other recorded instances of its having been procured in various parts of England.

Mr. R. Gray thus writes respecting this bird in his 'Birds of the West of Scotland':—"Although the Iceland Gull is by no means a common bird on our Scottish coasts, it has been frequently met with both on the eastern and western shores. From Shetland to Berwickshire immature birds are seen or killed almost every winter; and the same may be said of its appearance from the coast of Skye to the south of Ayrshire. The late Mr. Thompson mentions, in his 'Birds of Ireland,' that he had procured two specimens from Ballantrae, on the borders of Wigtownshire, where they are seen every winter, and that his friend, Mr. Sinclair, had also seen six or eight of these birds in the Island of Arran. The species, indeed, appears to be a regular visitor to the Clyde and the shores of Ayrshire, as I have observed it for years in succession