

LARUS FUSCUS, Linn.

Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Larus fuscus, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 55.

— *flavipes*, Meyer, Taschenb., tom. ii. p. 469.

Laroides melanotus, harengorum, et fuscus, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 747, 748, 749.

Leucus fuscus, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 86.

Clupeilarus fuscus, Bonap. Consp. Gen. Av., tom. ii. p. 220.

Dominicanus fuscus, Bruch, Monogr. in Caban. Journ. für Orn. 1853, p. 100, sp. 6.

THE Lesser and the Greater Black-backed Gulls of the European avifauna are so precisely alike in form and colouring, that it is by the great difference in their size alone that they can be distinguished from each other. Generally speaking, these two nearly allied but really distinct species (for such, notwithstanding their similarity, every ornithologist considers them) frequent different rocks for the purpose of breeding; and though in some localities they are associated, still there are others, and even countries, where one is found while the other is entirely absent; for instance, the Lesser Black-backed Gull is not mentioned as occurring in Iceland, where the greater species is common; and the same may be said with respect to America. As regards the coasts of the British Islands, it is to be found on every part of them at one season or another. It nests on many parts of the rocky shores of Ireland, as shown by that careful observer Thompson, who mentions the Gobbins, on the north coast, the Horn in Donegal, the coast of Connaught, the largest of the Sovereign Islands, near the harbour of Kinsale, the cliffs near Howth, in the county Dublin &c. as places in which it is known to breed, and enumerates several other localities in which its nests have been found. In Scotland, according to Macgillivray, it is generally dispersed along the coasts, and permanently resident—but in some districts is of rare occurrence, and in the northern more so than in the southern, probably from their being more adapted for affording secure breeding-places. It is usually not uncommon, in the winter season, in the Firths of Tay, Forth, and Clyde, where very few, however, remain to breed. Mr. Selby mentions that himself and Sir William Jardine obtained the eggs and young of this species upon one of the islands of Loch Awe, and observed many colonies in Sutherlandshire, one upon Loch Shin, and another upon one of the islands of Loch Laighal. It breeds also in the Hebrides, Orkney, and Shetland. In England it is numerous, at all seasons, on the Northumberland coast and those of the south-eastern, southern, and western counties, and also in Wales. Professor Nilsson states that it is common about the Baltic and on the coast of Norway; and Mr. Wheelwright shot one example in Lapland. It also occurs in Holland, France, Belgium, Dalmatia, the islands of the Adriatic, and in Italy. Loche states that it is found in Algeria; Messrs. Elwes and Buckley noticed it on the Black Sea; the Rev. H. B. Tristram on the Lake of Galilee, in Palestine, and mentions that it is plentiful on the coast of Syria in winter; Dr. von Heuglin states that he saw several pairs, throughout the year, on the Red Sea and in the Gulf of Aden; Mr. Yarrell mentions that it is also found in Barbary and Egypt, and that specimens have been received from Trebizond, in Persia; and, lastly, we know that it visits India, but appears to be rare in that country, since Dr. Jerdon says he only obtained a young bird far inland, near Jaulna, in the Deccan, but did not again meet with the species, and is not aware of its having been procured by any one else.

“The flight of this bird,” says Macgillivray, “is peculiarly elegant, easy, and buoyant, with the wings considerably curved. Its ordinary cry is loud, mellow, and somewhat plaintive, and when a number join in emitting it, which they sometimes do when assembled for repose on an unfrequented beach or island, may be heard at a great distance, and is then far from being unpleasant. It also emits occasionally a cackling or laughing cry, more mellow than that of the Greater Black-backed Gull. It searches for food on the open sea, in estuaries, on the beaches, and frequently on the land, sometimes flying to a great distance from the coast. Small fishes, crustacea, echini, shell-fish, land-mollusca, and earth-worms are its habitual food; but it also eats of stranded fishes, and devours young birds. When shoals of herrings are in the bays, creeks, or estuaries, it may often be seen in great numbers, intermingled with other gulls; but when reposing, whether on the sea or on the land, it generally keeps separate, in small flocks.

“In May they betake themselves to unfrequented islands, headlands, and sometimes to inland lakes, often in considerable numbers, and there remain until their young are able to fly, although they make extensive excursions around in search of food. Their nests, composed of withered grass and other herbage, are placed in hollows formed in the turf, or in superficial chinks of the rocks. The eggs, generally three in number, differ considerably in size and much in colour, but are usually about two inches and nine twelfths in