

## SULA BASSANA.

### Gannet, or Solan Goose.

*Pelecanus bassanus*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 52.

—— *maculatus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 579.

*Sula bassana*, Briss.; Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.

—— *major*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 812.

*Moris bassanus*, Vieill.

*Dysporus bassanus*, Illig. Prodr., p. 279.

It must be of interest to every lover of nature to observe the varied forms of birds, and to dwell upon their especial adaptation to certain modes of life; and among the different groups none are more worthy of such notice than those included in the order Natatores. Although the Gannets, Auks, and Gulls are seen together inhabiting and breeding on the same rock, they are all structurally different, and are each admirably suited for its own particular acts and economies. The Gannet differs much from all other birds, even from the species constituting the other genera of its own family (the Pelecanidae). Of the great family to which this bird belongs, comprising the genera *Phalacrocorax*, *Plotus*, *Pelecanus*, *Atagen*, and *Sula*, there are above fifty species spread over the rocky shores of the globe. Of these, about five are true Gannets, the one under consideration being the largest of the genus and the most widely dispersed, on which head there could be no question if the Australian species (which by some authors is regarded as distinct) were identical; certain it is, however, that our bird is found all over the seas of Europe and North America, and is nowhere so common as in Britain, where its distribution is so general that to specify any particular locality in which it may be found is unnecessary. In winter it may be seen fishing on every part of our shores; as spring advances it resorts to particular rocks, such as the Bass, Ailsa, and St. Kilda, where it lays its single egg and tends its solitary young one during the greater part of the summer. That so large a bird as the Gannet should lay only one egg would warrant the conclusion that to feed a greater number of young would tend to the undue destruction of our edible fishes, and the balance of nature would thereby be greatly interfered with.

The sexes of the Gannet, when fully adult, are alike in colour, and similar to the front bird figured on the accompanying Plate; but during the first autumn and a great part of the second year they are dark brown, speckled with white, in which state of plumage they are mostly killed and eaten by the inhabitants of St. Kilda and some of our Scottish brethren on the east coast, their supplies being generally furnished by the Bass rock, situated at the mouth of the Firth of Forth.

The following details respecting the habits and economy of this bird will prove of interest:—

Macgillivray states:—"The Gannets arrive [at the Bass] about the middle of February or the beginning of March, and depart in October; some years a few individuals remain during the winter. The nests are composed of grass and sea-weeds, generally placed on the bare rock or earth, elevated in the form of a truncated cone, of which the base is about twenty inches in diameter, with a shallow terminal cavity. On the summit of the island are numerous holes in the turf, formed by the Gannets in pulling away grass and turf for their nests. They are placed in all parts of the rocks where a convenient spot occurs, but are much more numerous towards the summit. Some of them, on the face of the rock or in a shallow fissure and having been occupied for years, are piled up to the height of from three to five feet; but in this case they always lean against the rock. The egg, which is solitary and presents nothing remarkable in its position, is of an elongated oval form, white, dull, with a chalky surface, usually sullied or patched with yellowish-brown dirt. It is subjected to what might appear rough usage; for the bird in alighting, flying off, or when disturbed by the intrusion of human visitors, tosses it about and often stands upon it. All the movements of the Gannet on land are very awkward: it hobbles and waddles when it tries to walk, stares at you with its goggle white eyes, opens its ugly black throat, and emits a torrent of crackling sounds."

"During the summer months," says Mr. R. Gray, "this well-known bird is an abundant species over the whole coast-line of the west of Scotland. From Ailsa Craig vast numbers distribute themselves in the day-time from the south of Wigtownshire to the northern shores of Argyle; while from St. Kilda even larger flocks become dispersed throughout the Hebridean Sounds, extending even to the lochs of Skye and the still more distant shores of western Ross-shire. Again, the coasts of Lewis, the North Minch, and the shores of Sutherland and Caithness are frequented by wandering Gannets from Suleskeir, or North Barra, as it is sometimes called, a small island lying about ten miles west of Rona, the