

caves of the Hebrides. In the morning they may be seen at South Town, in Harris, covering the sea to a considerable extent on their passage from the caves of Liuir and Toe-head to their fishing-stations in the sound. I have counted a hundred and five in one flock; and the number exceeded this considerably, as many were under water at the time. When commencing the act of diving, they rise with a spring entirely out of the water. The nest is generally bulky, but sometimes very scanty, formed of fuci, twigs, heath, and grass rudely put together, nearly flat or with a shallow cavity containing two, frequently three, and sometimes four eggs, never more, bluish white in colour, subelliptical, and very narrow in proportion to their length, but varying greatly in size as well as form, some being extremely narrow, others of considerable breadth; their general form is oval, one end being always decidedly smaller and sometimes even pointed. Their length varies from two inches and seven twelfths to two inches and three twelfths, the breadth from an inch and seven twelfths to an inch and five twelfths. They are generally soiled by the feet of the birds, like those of the Gannet and Grebes. At first the young are bare all over, and of a purplish black colour; presently, however, they are covered with a brownish black down, soft but not close, and leaving the head, part of the neck, and the abdomen bare; then the feathers gradually sprout, the birds rapidly increase in size, and in seven or eight weeks are fledged. They are at first fed with half-digested fish, disgorged by their mother, and at length, becoming very plump, are esteemed delicate food by the Hebridians.

“There is a large cave on the west coast of Harris, celebrated for the number of Shags which reside in it, and so lofty that a boat can enter to a considerable distance without having the masts taken down. I have several times visited it in the breeding-season, when the birds had numerous nests on the sides. On approaching the mouth of the cave, we see a considerable number of Shags conspicuously perched on the little shelves and projections, their dusky figures strongly relieved by the whitened surface of the rock. Some fly overhead as we approach; but more drop into the water, like a stone. On looking down we see them rapidly wending their way under the boat, flying with outspread wings. The Shags being now alarmed, are seen writhing their long necks as they gaze upon us. Presently a shot is fired! another! The dead birds drop on the water; the living plunge headlong into it; many advance on wing, but being frightened by the upraised oars dart into the water. After all the uproar several remain standing near their nests, as loth to quit them. I have often crept into one of these caves, which has a narrow passage from the land, and, advancing stealthily, have seen eight or ten Shags below, at the distance of a few yards. On the arrival of the mother, the young open their bills wide, stretching up their necks with a wriggling motion, and receive their food from her mouth. The nest, as well as the rocks around, is covered with white dung; and a disagreeable stench, as of putrid fish, emanates from them. It does not appear that this species often visits lakes or rivers; nor is it ever met with far out at sea, its favourite fishing-stations being the eddies of channels, bays, and estuaries. Great numbers frequent low rocks or insular crags for the purpose of resting at some period of the day, generally between ebb and high water. There they preen themselves, spread out their wings in the sun or wind, and repose in a standing posture with contracted neck. In dry weather I have often seen individuals, while swimming, erect themselves in the water, and, spreading out their wings, remain in that posture for a long time.

“It is equally abundant in Orkney, where Mr. Low says he has ‘observed sometimes five hundred in a flock, especially when they have fallen in with a shoal of small fish.’”

Thompson says that this species is resident in Ireland, inhabiting all quarters of the coast, and gives a similar account of its habits and manners.

It is surely unnecessary to give a detailed description of so well-known a bird; but it may be well to mention that the young, during their first autumn, have the greater part of the under surface white, and are destitute of the decorative crest.

The figure represents an adult in summer plumage, about three fourths of the natural size.