

FRATERCULA ARCTICA.

Puffin.

- Anas arctica*, Ray, Syn., p. 120, A 5.
Alca arctica, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 211.
— *labradora*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 550.
— *deleta*, Brünn., Orn., no. 104 (young).
Fratercula, Briss. Orn., tom. vi. p. 81, pl. 6. fig. 2.
— *arctica*, Flem. Brit. Anim., p. 130.
Plautus arcticus, Klein, Av., 146. 3.
Mormon arctica, Ill. Prod. Syst. Mamm. et Av., p. 284.
— *Fratercula*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., p. 614.
— *arcticus*, Bonap. Geogr. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 66.

WHEN the naturalist contemplates the infinite variety existing in nature, whether in the complicated structures of inert minerals, the singular formation of the flowers of the Orchids, the grotesque forms and colouring of fishes, or the vast diversity among birds, he cannot fail to be impressed with feelings of admiration and delight, and must necessarily perceive that all these variations are intended to answer some special end and purpose. Thoughts such as these crossed my mind when I took up my pen to commence a history of the Puffin.

What a singular bird it is, this Parrot of the sea! as it has been called—one of the few members of a genus forming part of a large family of aquatic birds, comprising the Puffins, the Auks, and the Guillemots, the denizens of the northern hemisphere, as the Penguins are of the southern—two groups strictly antipodal, and frequenters of the icy regions of the opposite portions of the globe. The further that intrepid navigator, Sir James Ross, went south, the more numerous did he find the Penguins; and the further he proceeded north, the more abundant were the Auks, the Puffins, and the Guillemots. But let us turn to the species which makes our island its home during the summer months. At this period the Puffin visits all parts of the kingdom that afford suitable situations for the performance of the task of incubation—rocky promontories and high chalky cliffs. Here, among Willocks and Razorbills, Gulls and Cormorants, and their usual attendant the Peregrine Falcon, it deposits its single large white egg in a natural fissure of the rock, in a hole scratched for the purpose in the shelving and crumbly part of the cliff, or in the burrow of a rabbit, who often disputes with him the right of occupation. When I wrote my 'Birds of Europe,' some thirty years ago, the Puffin was plentiful at the Needles in the Isle of Wight, Beachey Head, Lulworth Cove, and all similar localities along our southern coast; I fear, however, that few now come there to breed; but on the shores of the other parts of our islands, from Scilly to Wales, from Flamborough to the Orkneys, on those of Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the outermost Hebrides, it is still abundant. On the coasts of the European continent it is, of course, far less numerous, for the simple reason that they afford few situations favourable to it; still it does inhabit the seas which wash the shores of our neighbours, from Hammerfest to Gibraltar; and occasionally penetrates into the Mediterranean. The precise limits of its southward range, however, are unknown.

I have mentioned that the Puffin comes to land for the purpose of breeding, and that it is only here in summer; and I must now state that in winter it generally keeps to the salt water, but may occasionally mount some rocky promontory; the ocean, however, is its proper element, over which it is scattered either singly or in small companies, and constantly engaged in fishing for its daily food over the sunken sandbanks or in the bays and inlets. Its diving—being much greater than its flying-powers, it is as much under as above water, and rarely flies more than is just sufficient to transport it from one part of the sea to another. How admirably adapted for such a life is its wedge-shaped bill, its close, glossy, and adpressed plumage, its long and broadly webbed feet, and its small and feeble wings, which appear barely sufficient to enable it to scale the perpendicular cliffs at the breeding-season!

Speaking of the breeding of the Puffin, Mr. Selby says, "Many resort to the Fern Islands, selecting such as are covered with vegetable mould; and here they dig their own burrows, from there not being any rabbits to dispossess on the particular islets they frequent. They commence this operation about the first week in May; and the hole is generally excavated to the depth of three feet, often in a curving direction, and occasionally with two entrances. When engaged in digging, which is principally performed by the males, they are sometimes so intent upon their work as to admit of being taken by hand, as they also may be during incubation: at this period I have frequently obtained specimens by thrusting my arm into the burrow, though at the risk of receiving a severe bite from the powerful and sharp-edged bill of the old