

MERGULUS ALLE.

Little Auk.

Alca alle, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 50.

Uria alle, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1815, p. 611.

Mergulus melanoleucos, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 42.

Alca candida, Brünn. Orn. Bor., p. 26.

Mergulus alle, Vieill. Gal. des Ois., tom. ii. p. 237, pl. 295.

——— *arcticus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 994.

Arctica alle, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 1841, p. 98.

In the British Islands, the Little Auk mostly occurs during the seasons of autumn and winter, while its principal summer haunts are Spitzbergen, Iceland, Greenland, Baffin's Bay, and Davis's Straits. As far as our intrepid voyagers have proceeded, even to the eighty-first degree of north latitude, numbers beyond computation were observed enlivening the scene with their presence. "So numerous were they," says Captain Beechey, "that we have often seen an uninterrupted line extending full halfway over Magdalen Bay, or to a distance of more than three miles. This column, on the average, might have been about six yards broad and as many deep. There must have been nearly four millions of birds on the wing at one time." "The incredible numbers of these species," says Meyer, "that have been seen by voyagers on the surface of the northern seas are very remarkable; it is said that they cover the surface of the water and the floating masses of ice as far as the eye can discern, and, when they take flight, actually darken the sky. This species is so entirely a sea-bird that it is only seen on land or in the immediate vicinity of the coast during the breeding-season, and at other times hardly ever within fifteen or twenty miles from the shore."

Col. Sabine, in his 'Memoir on the Birds of Greenland,' observes that "the Little Auk was abundant in Baffin's Bay and Davis's Straits, and in latitude 76° was so numerous in the channels of water separating fields of ice, that many hundreds were killed daily, and the ship's company supplied with them."

"This pretty little bird," says Mr. Alfred Newton in his 'Notes on the Birds of Spitzbergen,' "is numerous almost beyond belief on the greater part of the coast. Parry's Expedition met with it as far to the north as the party travelled, and in August found it in great numbers between lat. 81° and 82° N. Its breeding-places, though at a less height than those of its allies, are still far from being easily accessible; but I found one to within a few feet of which I could climb and superintend the capture of the young. Mr. Lamont, in his entertaining work 'Seasons with the Sea-horses,' states his opinion that it is the mutings of this bird which produce the well-known 'red snow.' I do not at all agree to this; for, setting aside that the cause of that singular appearance has been fully determined, and that it occurs in regions where there are no birds of the kind, the mutings of the Roche or Little Auk are like anchovy paste, while the red snow, or such of it as I saw, is of an entirely different colour, being a dull crimson."—*Ibis*, 1865, p. 521.

The same author states, in his note to Sabine Baring Gould's 'Iceland, its Scenes and Sagas,' that according to Faber it occurs in that country all the year round, but only breeds on Grimsey, where Faber found it in 1820, and Proctor in 1837. This is probably one of the most southern of its breeding-quarters; for although it has been said to breed at St. Abb's Head and other parts of Scotland, I believe we have no reliable evidence of the fact. "Although periodically driven upon our shores," says Mr. Hewitson, "and sometimes in considerable numbers during the winter months, this beautiful little bird has its home much further north. It is abundant on some part of the shores of Greenland, where it breeds, and whence both the birds and eggs have been brought to this country by the sailors employed in the Greenland fishery. Mr. Proctor, who met with it in Iceland, says that it is very local there, and makes no nest, but deposits its single egg upon the bare ground, amongst and under the large stones which have fallen from the cliffs above. The birds allowed him to turn over the stones and take them off their eggs; he found twelve or fourteen eggs on the 2nd of July, far advanced in incubation. Most of these were slightly spotted with rust-colour, but only a few of them very distinctly." In 'McClintock's Voyage' it is stated that the "Rotche or Little Auk, lays its single egg upon the bare rock far within the crevices, and beyond the reach of Fox, Owl, or Burgomaster Gull." The egg figured by Mr. Hewitson measures one inch and seven-eighths in length, by one inch and three-eighths in breadth, and is of a pale bluish white, with a few speckles of rusty yellow principally at the larger end. The egg is very large for the size of the bird—so large, in fact, that it would seem impossible that it should be laid by so tiny a creature; for it fully equals that of a Bantam, a bird nearly six times the weight of the Little Auk.

The above account forms the pith of the information that has been recorded respecting the bird in its