

## ALCA TORDA, Linn.

### Razorbill.

*Alca torda*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 49.

— *pica*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 210.

— *Balthica et unisulcata*, Brünn. Orn. Bor., pp. 101, 102.

— *glacialis*, Brehm, Vög. Deutsch., p. 1004.

— *Islandica*, Brehm, ib., p. 1005, tab. 46. fig. 2.

*Utamania torda et pica*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 42.

Now that the Great Auk (*Alca impennis*) is gone, and will no more cleave the waters of the great deep, the Razorbill is the sole representative of a genus forming a part of a great family of sea-birds peculiar to the northern hemisphere. Unlike its celebrated ally, it is still very numerous, and will doubtless for a long time remain to gladden the waters with its presence, as it does the sea-girt rocks along our shores at the season of reproduction. Still its numbers must be yearly diminishing; for hundreds are wantonly killed by persons living in the neighbourhood of its breeding-places, or by excursionists who visit its rookeries during the months of spring and summer. The wild and savage scenery of these romantic places doubtless have many charms for pleasure-seekers; but I wish they were more friendly to this and the other rock-resorting birds that come to our coast during the season of reproduction. To enumerate all the places in the British Islands where this bird may be found from May until August would be superfluous. The Londoner who flies to our southern coasts to invigorate his frame must have seen it at the Foreland, or on the cliffs of the famed Beachy Head; and the visitor to the Isle of Wight, at the Needles; while Weymouth and every rocky promontory thence to the Scilly Islands will afford the same gratification to those who may wish for it; far round to the westward too, along the shores of Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, it is everywhere to be met with. Besides the British Islands, the Razor-bill frequents the rocky shores of Norway and Iceland, but, according to Mr. Alfred Newton, does not proceed so far north as Spitzbergen, or at least no authenticated specimens have been procured in that high northern locality. It has been seen in Davis's Straits, and it is one of the commonest of the rock-birds of Nova Scotia and other parts of North America as far south as New York; that it also extends its range to the north-west of America is likely; for we learn from the 'Fauna Japonica' that an individual was procured by the Dutch voyagers on the coast of Japan. Southward of Britain it proceeds as far as the Mediterranean; but I question if it be met with any further in this direction.

The graphic description of the habits of this species given by Macgillivray is by far the best that has yet appeared; and as I believe it is comparatively unknown, I shall offer no excuse for transferring it to my pages.

"In autumn great numbers of Razorbills make their appearance on the bays and estuaries of most parts of Scotland and England. As the season advances they become more numerous to the southward, and in winter the northern coasts are almost deserted by them. In the firths and other inlets, when frequented by shoals of young herrings or other fishes, they are often seen in great abundance, and in fine weather are often met with in the open seas. Toward the end of spring they collect in parties and proceed to certain breeding-places, which are always abrupt cliffs along the shores, or precipitous islands, where they nestle along with the Guillemots and Kittiwakes. Of this kind are St. Abb's Head in Berwickshire, the Bass Rock, and Fowlsbeugh near Stonehaven. The Hebrides afford many such retreats, one of the most interesting of which is the little island of Berneray, called by mariners Barray Head, about ninety miles from the coast of Ireland on the one hand, and St. Kilda on the other, and one of a group of islets named the South Isles of Barray. The Island of Berneray is of an elliptical form, about a mile in length, and upwards of half a mile in breadth. It presents the appearance of a mass of rock, considerably inclined, the northern side dipping into the water, and the southern exhibiting an abrupt section rising to the height of several hundred feet. Viewed from the sea the rock presents an imposing spectacle, exhibiting masses of inclined, perpendicular, and projecting cliffs, smooth, largely cleft, or minutely fissured. When I visited it the whole face of the precipice, to the extent of half a mile, was covered with birds, which had assembled there for the purpose of breeding. Only four species were seen by me—the Guillemot, the Razorbill Auk, the Puffin, and the Kittiwake. These birds inhabit the cliffs not promiscuously, but with a degree of regularity and distinction which seems not a little wonderful. On the grassy summits breed the Puffins, burrowing in the turf. From thence to halfway down is the space selected by the Auks, while in the remaining division are stationed the Guillemots and Kittiwakes, the latter coming almost to high-water mark. The Auks and Guillemots lay each a single egg, which is placed on the bare rock. On a shelf about three yards in length,