

## PODICEPS NIGRICOLLIS.

### Eared Grebe.

*Colymbus nigricollis*, Brehm, Blas. List of Birds of Europe, Engl. edit. p. 24.

— *recurvirostris*, Brehm.

*Podiceps auritus*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., tom. ii. p. 705, et tom. iv. p. 451 (not Linnæus).

I AM somewhat surprised that so many of my brother naturalists should fall into the error of assigning to this bird a northern habitat; I question if Linnæus ever saw it, and I believe that his *Podiceps auritus* has reference to the Slavonian Grebe of English authors. Yarrell adds to the confusion by stating that the bird is also found in the Falkland Islands and some parts of the United States, which it certainly is not. Under these circumstances, and with a doubt still remaining in my mind as to its identity with the *P. auritus* of Linnæus, I have no alternative but to follow Dr. Blasius, and adopt the specific term of *nigricollis* assigned to it by Brehm, retaining of course the trivial name of Eared Grebe, by which it has always been known amongst us.

In the British Islands the *Podiceps nigricollis* has been more frequently killed in summer than in winter, although I know of numerous instances in which it has been shot in the latter season. These lacustrine birds are truly interesting; for how varied and how differently adorned are the species of the minor subdivisions of this somewhat limited family. Those persons who do not study ornithology as a whole, but confine their attention to the birds of a single country, are not prepared for the fact that all our Grebes, although kept in this work under the one generic title of *Podiceps*, are representatives of as many genera as there are species, and that in Australia the present bird is represented by the *P. poliocephalus*, our little Grebe by the *P. gularis*, and our Great Crested Grebe by the *P. australis*; in other countries, too, similar representatives occur. This will prepare my readers for the fact that these forms are very generally dispersed, some being confined to the high northern latitudes, while others dwell in more temperate and even warmer climes, as is the case with the bird now before us. In England, which it visits annually, it frequents the southern and eastern counties, rather than the northern; in Holland and Germany it is not more numerous than with us; in some parts of France, in Spain, and Italy it becomes more common; while in northern Africa, from Morocco to Egypt, no water-bird can be more abundant, wherever meres and great reed-covered sheets of water occur. Every one who has visited that country, and particularly Algeria, testify to its abundance and wide-spread distribution. Dr. Heuglin found it breeding in Egypt, and the Rev. H. B. Tristram in Algeria. The notes respecting this species by the latter gentleman I find so interesting, that I make no apology for transcribing them.

“Every here and there we came upon a nest of the Little Grebe (*Podiceps minor*), and occasionally upon that of the Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*); but it was rather late for both these species, which build before the end of April, and already several broods had been hatched. Still fifty eggs of one, and about a dozen of the other, was not a bad morning's take. At length, in a little secluded opening, entirely surrounded by tall reeds, through which we had the greatest difficulty in forcing the punt, we came upon a colony of Eared Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*), the chief object of my search. There appears to be this singular difference between the Eared and the Crested or Lesser Grebes—that while the two latter, though abundant throughout the Lake, are not strictly gregarious, the former builds in societies more densely crowded than any rookery. It is also later in its nidification; for, of nearly fifty nests I examined, not one was incubated, though most contained their full allowance of four or five eggs. The nests, formed like those of other Grebes, were raised on artificial islets, frequently almost touching each other, and sometimes piled on stout foundations rising from more than a yard under water. The eggs are a trifle smaller than those of *P. slavonicus*, which appear to do duty for them in many collections. We shot several of the birds, which, of course, were in very fine plumage, but we were not a little puzzled by the sudden disappearance of several which had fallen dead within twenty yards of us. At length, on pushing out in our punt into the open water, I detected the Water-Tortoises carrying off at great speed our wounded and dead birds, and, following the streak of blood through the water, at length seized one struggling with his captor, who maintained so tenacious a grasp that I hauled him on board along with the bird, and took care to secure him too for my collection. With this proof of the carnivorous propensities of the Water-Tortoise, I am inclined to believe that the havoc in the nests of Coots and Ducks may often be attributed to this plunderer. Nor are the Water-Tortoise and the Purple Gallinule the only ‘oophagi’ against whom these poor birds have to combat in the struggle for perpetuating their species. A Water-Snake frequently takes up his abode in a Coot's nest and boldly drives off the rightful proprietor. An empty nest seems to be his favourite dwelling-place; and