

# HISTRIONICUS TORQUATUS.

## Harlequin Duck.

*Anas histrionica* et *A. minuta*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 204.

*Clangula histrionica*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 564.

*Harelda histrionica*, Keys. und Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 87.

*Fuligula histrionica*, Bonap. Syn., p. 394, no. 345.

*Cosmonessa histrionica*, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 40.

*Phlyaconetta histrionica*, Brandt, Mém. de l'Acad. Imp. Sci. de St. Pétersb., 1849.

*Histrionicus torquatus*, Bonap. Compt. Rend. des Séances de l'Acad. Sci., tom. xliii. séances des 15 et 22 Sept. 1856.

*Anas (Harelda) histrionica*, Schrenck, Vög. des Amur-Landes, p. 483.

THIS fantastically marked Duck is a native of the northern parts of both hemispheres, excepting continental Europe: at the same time it is somewhat restricted in its habitat; in winter it frequents shoal bays and inlets of the sea, and on the approach of spring resorts to inland waters and the more turbulent streams and torrents, for the purpose of nidification. In its affinities it is almost as nearly allied to the Smew as it is to the Golden-eye, and, so far as we yet know, is the only member of its genus. From its summer quarters stragglers, which are generally females or young males, wander in winter into more southern latitudes, visit Vancouver Island and the north-western portion of the American continent, the south-eastern coasts of the United States, and occasionally reach the Baltic countries and Britain. Respecting its occurrence in our islands, much confusion exists, owing to the mistakes made by even our best ornithologists in regarding immature examples of other species, such as the Long-tailed Duck (*Harelda glacialis*), as female or youthful specimens of the Harlequin Duck. I fear, therefore, that much that has been written has to be discarded, and little added in favour of its having a place in our avifauna; such a claim, however, feeble as it may be, it certainly possesses.

Mr. J. H. Gurney, Jun., with an amount of pains-taking which does him the utmost credit, has lately furnished me with a list of the reported occurrences of this bird in our islands, accompanied by some very judicious remarks.

The result of his investigation tends to prove that the Harlequin Duck has only been found in our islands in two instances,—the first of which was recorded by Colonel Montagu, in his well known ornithological dictionary, published in 1802, on the authority of Mr James Sowerby, in whose collection of the rarer British birds he had an opportunity of examining both sexes killed in Scotland, on the domain of Lord Seaforth; the other, a male, was shot by Major W. Ross King, off Buchan, on the coast of Aberdeenshire. "I learn from Major King," says Mr. Gurney, Jun., "that it was obtained immediately after several days' storm from the north-east, that it was swimming a short distance only from the shore, and that it appeared to be either wounded or much exhausted. In his opinion it would more likely have died than found its way back to its own country. It proved to be in very fair plumage, but in poor condition. Major King skinned it, and had it stuffed; but during his temporary absence it was, unfortunately, so much injured by damp and moths that it had to be thrown away."

Mr. Frederick Bond informs me that he well recollects seeing three or four young females in Leadenhall Market, many years ago, during a very severe winter: unfortunately he did not purchase them. From Mr. Bond's intimate acquaintance with ornithology, I have no doubt the birds he remembered were of this species.

"I am inclined to believe," says Professor Newton, in 'The Ibis' for 1859, "that a good deal of misconception exists as to the geographical range of this species, which I think will be found to be much more limited than is usually supposed to be the case. I am pretty sure that in Europe, with the exception of Iceland, and Western Asia it only occurs as an accidental straggler. As far as Mr. Wolley's experience goes, it is not known as a bird of Lapland, including in the term the north of Norway or Finmark; and I can hardly understand its being, as Temminck states, "abondant dans les contrées orientales de l'Europe" without its occasionally appearing in the district so assiduously worked by my friend; for I presume there can be no doubt that Temminck did not intend to refer to any but the *northern* part of eastern Europe. In more southern Scandinavia it is certainly rare. I cannot find that it is known in European Russia; but it seems to occur accidentally on the Caspian and Sea of Aral. It is also said to be met with about Lake Baikal; and, if the report be true, I think this must be taken, according to our present knowledge, as its normal western limit in Asia; for in the course of Dr. Middendorff's travels it appears to have been found only in the extreme east of Siberia. It probably also occurs in Japan."