

## OIDEMIA PERSPICILLATA.

### Surf-Scoter.

*Anas perspicillata*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 201.

*Oidemia perspicillata*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 219.

*Melanitta perspicillata*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 564.

*Fuligula perspicillata*, Bonap. Syn. of Birds of United States, p. 389.

*Pelionetta perspicillata*, Kaup, Natürl. Syst. p. 107.

“THE sea and its living wonders !” What a vast field for the contemplation of the naturalist is embodied in those words ! for how variable and extraordinary are the productions of the watery portion of our globe, and how deeply are they imbued with interest—whether we regard the forests of *Fuci*, which grow in its shallower portions, the extensive beds of corallines which are building up a base for some future continent, the myriads of those lower organisms shedding phosphorescent light, the *Physaliæ*, the Gasteropoda, the fishes of innumerable forms, or the gigantic whale ! nor less remarkable are the numerous kinds of birds which habitually frequent its surface, the aerial Frigate-Birds, the buoyant Albatroses, the tripping Petrels, the diving Penguins, the rock-loving Puffins and Guillemots, and others, as numerous and as varied as those of the dry land. To say that animal life is feebly represented in the ocean, or that a voyage over its surface is necessarily monotonous, is untrue ; for even in its midst both birds and the lower forms of life are extremely numerous, and it is well known that every part of its shores is tenanted by a vast variety of different genera and species, whose structure is as ill-adapted for the wide expanse as the Albatros is for the roaring rollers which the bird here represented loves to frequent, and whence it is called Surf-Duck or Surf-Scoter. This remarkable species may surely be included among the “ sea’s living wonders ;” for how extraordinary is the form of its bill and head, how brightly are they coloured, and how curiously are they marked ! Those who have not had opportunities of seeing the bird in a state of nature will scarcely believe that any duck is so fantastically adorned ; yet such is really the case ; and fresh-killed specimens will outvie my drawing in every respect. In America this bird is very abundant along the shores of the eastern coast, from Florida to Labrador ; but being a northern species, it frequently crosses to the seas of Norway, Denmark, and Holland, and also to those of the British Islands, where it has been killed sufficiently often to entitle it to a place in our avifauna. Ornithologists are divided in their opinions as to whether the Surf-Scoter found on the north-western portion of America be the same as the one frequenting the eastern coasts ; if they be indetical, then the bird probably ranges over all the northern shores of the globe.

For a knowledge of the habits and economy of the Surf-Scoter, we must refer to the interesting pages of the celebrated American writers Wilson and Audubon. According to the former, “ this duck frequents the shores and bays of the sea, particularly where the waves roll over the sandy beach. Their food consists principally of small bivalve shell-fish, spout-fish, and others that lie in the sand near its surface. For these they dive almost constantly, both in the sandy bays and amid tumbling surf. Their skins are remarkably strong, and their flesh coarse, tasting of fish. They are common in winter along the whole coast, from the river St. Lawrence to Florida, but leave us early in May for their breeding-places in the north.”

“ While proceeding,” says Audubon, “ towards the sterile country of Labrador, in 1833, I found the waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence alive with ducks of different species. The nearer we approached the coast the more numerous did they become ; and, of the many that presented themselves to our anxious gaze, the Surf-Duck was not the least abundant. It is true that in the noble bays of our coast, in the Sound between New York and the Hook, on the broader waters of the Chesapeake, and beyond them to the mouths of the Mississippi, I had seen thousands of Surf-Ducks ; but the numbers that passed the shores of Labrador, bound for the far north, exceeded all my previous conceptions. For more than a week after we had anchored in the lovely harbour of Little Macatina, I anxiously searched for the nest of this species in vain. At length I found that a few pairs had remained in the neighbourhood ; and one morning while searching for the nests of the Red-breasted Merganser over a vast oozy and treacherous freshwater marsh of about three miles in length, two miles distant from the harbour, and fully five and a half from the waters at the Gulf of St. Lawrence, I suddenly started a Surf-Duck from her treasure. The nest was snugly placed amid the tall leaves of a bunch of grass, and raised fully four inches above its roots. It was entirely composed of withered and rotten weeds, the former being circularly arranged over the latter, producing a well-rounded cavity, six inches in diameter by two and a half in depth. The borders of this inner cup were lined with the down of the bird, in the same manner as the Eider’s nest ; and in it lay five eggs, the smallest number I have ever found in any duck’s nest. They were two inches and two-eighths and a half in length, by one