

## SOMATERIA SPECTABILIS.

### King Duck.

*Anas spectabilis*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 89.

*Somateria spectabilis*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 564.

*Fuligula spectabilis*, Bonap. Syn. Birds of Unit. States, p. 389.

In size, general contour, and in the colouring of some parts of its plumage, the King Duck resembles the Eider; but different indeed are the form and colouring of its bill, and the hue of its legs and feet. How successfully by varying ornamentation does nature furnish characters by which one species may be distinguished from another! In their habits and entire economy the two birds are said to assimilate as closely as they do in general structure and appearance. However far north the Eider may proceed, the King Duck is found still further towards the pole, and is probably much more common in the high northern latitudes than its congener, who makes the comparatively warm islands of Britain one of its breeding-places, which the King Duck never does. In a word, the Arctic regions, both of the Old and New World, are the natural home of the present species; and its visits to England, Scotland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, the United States of America, and California must be regarded as merely accidental.

"The King Duck has acquired a place in the list of our British Birds," says Mr. Hewitson, "by having appeared two or three times upon our coast. It is abundant in Spitsbergen; and Holbœll expresses his surprise that it is very seldom seen in Iceland, whilst in Greenland it is spread over the whole country, although its proper breeding-zone lies further north than the part of the country inhabited by Europeans. It is found breeding, though very rarely, in the sixty-seventh degree of latitude, but is not numerous south of seventy-three degrees. In its habits it very much resembles the common Eider. It migrates in the same direction, but begins later in autumn to move towards the south. Its spring migration also begins later, although it has to go a greater distance northwards, probably because the sea is not earlier open. The young birds occasionally become victims to their unwillingness to move south, by remaining till the sea is everywhere ice-bound. In its powers of diving, this species far surpasses all the other Greenland birds; it also remains the longest time under water. It uses its wings in diving, and descends to the depth of two hundred yards, remaining as much as nine minutes under water. These remarks are translated from Holbœll's 'Faunæ Groenlands,' which is singularly deficient in that information as to its nesting-habits which would have been the most valuable."—*Hewitson, Ill. of Eggs of Brit. Birds*, vol. ii. p. 417.

"Vast numbers of this beautiful Duck," says Sir James Clark Ross, "resort annually to the shores and islands of the Arctic regions in the breeding-season, and have on many occasions afforded a valuable and salutary supply of fresh provisions to the crews of vessels employed in those seas. On our late voyages comparatively few were obtained, although seen in very great numbers. They do not retire far to the south in winter, but assemble in large flocks. The males by themselves and the females with their young brood are often met with in the Atlantic Ocean, far distant from any land, where the numerous crustaceans and other marine animals afford them abundance of food." Upon this passage Mr. Hewitson remarks:—"The great distance from land at which these birds were met with by Capt. Ross may be explained by the statement of Holbœll as to their vast power of diving, who says also that it is wonderful with what instinct they discover banks in deep water."

In Asia the King Duck is found on the coasts of Siberia and Kamtschatka; and in North America it is plentiful about Hudson's Bay and Labrador, but, according to Audubon, rarely advances further south along the eastern coast of that continent than the neighbourhood of the Bay of Boston.

From Otho Fabricius we learn that the natives of Greenland hunt the King Duck, both for their down and skins, in the following manner:—On discovering a flock upon the water, the natives assemble in their canoes and begin shouting and making as great a noise as possible; this sudden outcry so frightens the birds that, instead of flying away, they begin to dive; the moment they come to the surface they are again pursued; and, after three or four of these chases, the birds begin to be so tired that they are easily taken and killed. The flesh is accounted excellent, and the gibbous part of the bill an especial delicacy; the skins are sewn together, and made into various comfortable articles of clothing.

Mr. Hewitson says the eggs are five in number, somewhat less than those of the Eider, and usually, though not always, of a bluer tint, and sometimes of a deep blue-green. They are about two inches and a half in length by one inch and three quarters in breadth.

Mr. Newton, in his 'Notes on the Birds of Spitzbergen,' says:—