

ENICONETTA STELLERI.

Steller's Duck.

Anas dispar, Sparrm. Mus. Carls., fasc. 1. tab. 7 & 8.

— *occidua*, Bonn. Enc. Méth. Orn., part 1. p. 130.

— *Stelleri*, Pall. Spic. Zool., tom. vi. p. 35. tab. 5.

Fuligula dispar, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 206.

Polysticta Stelleri, Eyt. Rare Brit. Birds, p. 79.

Stelleria dispar, Bonap. Geog. & Comp. List of Birds of Europe and N. Am., p. 57.

Eniconetta Stelleri, G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 1840, p. 75.

— *dispar*, Gray & Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 624.

Somateria Stelleri, Alf. Newt. in Proc. of Zool. Soc. 1861, p. 400.

THE present highly interesting bird is a member of a great group of Diving Ducks which is peculiar to the northern regions of Europe and America—a group which, in accordance with the advanced state of ornithological science, has been divided into almost as many genera as there are species. Of these the genera *Eniconetta*, *Lampronetta*, and *Somateria* are preeminently oceanic in their habits, seldom, if ever, breeding far from the sea, and have a structure and character of plumage admirably adapting them for procuring their food beneath the surface of the water. They all frequent deep bays and shallow parts of the ocean, where they readily obtain shelled Mollusks, Crustaceans, and the other marine creatures which form the staple of their diet. The members of these genera are mostly distinguished for the richness of their colouring and the beauty of their markings: and thus we find ornamentation among the birds of the northern regions, as well as in those frequenting the tropics. I may instance among others the King Duck, with its highly coloured bill and frontal appendage, the well-known Harlequin, and the *Lampronetta* with its spectacle-like markings. Steller's Duck also has many pleasing features to recommend it to our notice.

The native habitat of this bird is the boreal regions of the Old World, from the North Cape in Norway to Behring's Straits. Like so many other Siberian birds, it also visits the north-western portions of America. Steller obtained specimens in Kamtschatka; the late Mr. Wolley and his travelling companion, Alfred Newton, Esq., procured examples in Eastern Finmark; and Von Middendorff found it breeding on the flat "tundras" of the Taimyr, in Northern Siberia. All who have had the good fortune to see the Steller's or Western Duck, as the bird is frequently termed by English ornithologists, affirm that it assembles in companies more or less numerous, and that its actions and economy resemble those of the Eiders: in confirmation of this statement, I transcribe the notes on this bird published by Mr. Newton in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London' for 1861, accompanying which is a figure of the egg of this and several other rare birds.

"Towards the end of June and in July 1855, when in East Finmark, in company with Mr. W. H. Simpson and the late Mr. John Wolley, we saw several small flocks of this species at various places along the Waranger Fjord; but we could never detect an old male in the breeding-plumage, and I imagine that one is seldom to be found there in summer; but in winter and spring adults certainly occur. . . . Though we made unceasing inquiries, we could not ascertain that Steller's Duck breeds in any part of Norway or in the adjoining districts of Russia. In its habits it seems to resemble the common Eider, as much as it does in general appearance; and those I saw were only to be distinguished, at a distance, from the females or young males of that species by their smaller size. They were generally found swimming near the shore, sitting at low water on the seaweed-covered rocks, or flying near the surface from point to point. On one occasion, just as we had crossed a small but rapid river, a few hundred yards from its mouth, a large flock came flying down over the water. They passed quite close to us, but our guns were not at hand. I presume they had been feeding higher up the stream; but at no other time did I ever see them at any distance from the shore."

That a species which frequents the seas fringing the northern shores of Norway should occasionally extend its visits to the British Islands is no more than might be expected; and we have at least two well-authenticated instances of its having been killed in England. The first was shot at Caistor, near Yarmouth, on the 10th of February 1830; this specimen was presented to the fine Museum at Norwich by the Rev. George Steward. The other was obtained at Filey, in Yorkshire, on the 15th of August 1845, by Mr. G. Curzon, of Weston Lodge, Derbyshire. Both these specimens are males, and rank among the rarest objects of our avi-collections.

The nests found by Von Middendorff on the 25th of June contained from seven to nine newly laid eggs,