

remarks that the males do not appear to attach themselves to the females till the second year, when they have acquired the adult plumage; and I have also observed this to be the case on the Northumbrian coast, where these birds are common upon such parts as present a barrier of sand-hills, the chosen breeding resort of this species. In addition, however, to those that reside permanently on our shores, we are visited by considerable numbers during their periodical flights to and from the more northern countries of Europe. In the beginning of March I have sometimes seen hundreds together upon a favourite locality, where they have continued for a few days, and then departed for higher latitudes, this being the time of their return from their equatorial or winter migration. The rabbit-burrows, with which the sand-hills of the coast are so often perforated, are the places that the Sheldrake usually selects for nidification; and in such of these as have been deserted by the original inhabitants, the females form their nests of bent-grass and other dry vegetable materials, sometimes as far as ten or twelve feet from the entrance, lining them with fine soft down plucked from their own breasts. They lay from twelve to sixteen eggs, of a pure white, or with a very faint tinge of green, and of an oval form, being equally rounded at both ends. These are incubated for thirty days before the exclusion of the young, this being the period common to most of the *Anatidæ*. During this time the male keeps an attentive watch in the immediate vicinity of his mate; and when hunger calls her from her charge, he instantly takes her place and covers the eggs till her return. As soon as the young are hatched, they are conducted, or, as more frequently happens, carried in the bill by the parents to the water's edge; and upon this their native element they immediately launch, seldom quitting it till fully fledged and well able to fly. Bewick observes, that if the family in their progress from the nest to the sea should happen to be interrupted by an intruder, the young ones seek the first shelter, and squat close down, whilst the parents, directed by the instinctive feeling that so universally prevails throughout the feathered race at this interesting period, adopt the same kind of stratagems as the Partridge, wild Duck, &c., feigning lameness and inability of flight, in order to attract attention and divert the pursuit to themselves. As the Sheldrake is much prized as an ornamental appendage to large pieces of water for its handsome form and varied plumage, the inhabitants of the coast are in the practice of watching the old birds to their nests during the early part of the breeding-season, and digging up the eggs. These are placed under a hen or tame Duck; but great care and attention is requisite in rearing the young, and it is seldom that more than three or four survive from a hatching of a dozen eggs. They soon become tolerably tame and answer to the call of the person who feeds them; when fully fledged, however, being very active birds, they are apt to stray away, and, if left with their pinions un mutilated, generally in time fly entirely off, though I have known them return, in two or three instances, after an absence of many months . . . Upon the approach of spring, the fleshy knob at the base of the upper mandible, which during the autumn and winter is scarcely perceptible, begins to swell and acquire a beautiful *crimson* hue, and at its full development is nearly as large as a marble. At this season, also, the males pay particular court to the females, erecting themselves and uttering a shrill whistling note, repeated with great quickness, and attended with a frequent movement of the head; they are also very jealous and irascible at the approach of any other bird to their mates. The food of the Sheldrake, in its wild state, consists of marine vegetables, molluscous shell-fish, insects, &c.; but when domesticated thrives well upon grain, and indeed upon the usual fare of poultry."

"On examination of the gizzards of nine birds killed in Belfast Bay, Strangford Lough, and Dundrum Bay, in winter weather of all kinds, and in the months of March, April, and May," says Thompson, "I found them all to contain a number of minute univalve shells, with some sand or gravel. A few of these, from the two first-mentioned localities, were entirely filled with *Paludina muricata*, a most abundant species. The tenth individual, shot in Belfast Bay, in February 1849, during mild weather, had its stomach wholly filled with minute mollusca, *Montacuta purpurea*, in profusion, *Skenæa depressa*, and a few *Paludina muricata*. Its crop was full of the two former species, chiefly of very small *Skenææ*, it alone containing not less than 9000 of these shell-fish; the stomach produced still more, so that 20,000 of these minute mollusca were estimated to be in the bird at the same time. The *Skenæa* is about the size of clover-seed, or one-eighteenth of an inch in diameter; the *Montacuta*, when large, is one-twelfth of an inch broad. The bird was very fat, as might be expected from such nutritious diet, the same on which the Grey Mullet (*Mugil chelo*) attains a great size in this bay."

Prince Frederick, of Holstein, tells me that in his country the Sheldrakes habitually lay their eggs in the earth-burrows of the foxes, with which they live in harmony—but will not go into the holes of the badger, as that animal will eat their eggs; and hence, I suppose, has arisen the specific term *Vulpanser*, and the trivial name of Fox-Duck or Fox-Goose, sometimes given to this bird.

The Plate represents a male and a group of young, of the size of life.