

BERNICLA RUFICOLLIS.

Red-breasted Goose.

Anas ruficollis, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 511.

— *torquata*, S. G. Gmel. Reise, tom. i. p. 181, tab. 14.

Anser ruficollis, Pall. Spic. Zool., tom. iv. p. 12, tab. 4.

Bernicla ruficollis, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.

IF the *Bernicla ruficollis* be not one of the gems of ornithology, it certainly is the finest species of its own particular family; for no other Goose excels it in the richness of its colouring or the fantastic character of its markings. That a member of this usually sombre-coloured family of aquatic birds should be so finely adorned, is somewhat astonishing, and cannot but have attracted the notice of every ornithologist. In its structure, contour, gait, and carriage while walking over the green sward, its actions are as pleasing as it is trim in appearance and beautiful in colouring. Of the extreme rarity of the species every ornithologist is fully aware, since few collections in Britain, and still fewer on the Continent and in America, can boast of possessing examples. Why is this (when, unlike the *Alca impennis*, it is still an inhabitant of our globe, and probably as abundant in the country where it is destined to dwell as any other species of wild Goose is in its own particular locality)? Because that country is a distant one and, moreover, a part of our globe which, if not inaccessible to man, is so sterile and inhospitable as to offer but little inducement for any one to visit it: the most northern regions of Siberia most writers agree in stating to be the true home of the Red-breasted Goose—a country unequalled for the rigours of its winter-season and for being so pestiferously hot at the opposite period of the year. From this, its summer home, the bird probably migrates in winter towards the great rivers and morasses of the more southern parts of Siberia, the Amoorland, China, and Persia, a few wanderers sometimes extending their peregrinations still further in the same or a more westerly direction, and finding their way to Turkey, the mouths of the Nile, Holland, France, Italy, and even Britain, where it appears to have occurred more frequently than in any of the countries around it. Temminck states that in Russia it is found about the estuaries of the Rivers Ob and Lena. Latham says it breeds there and retires south in autumn, and also affirms that it frequents the Caspian Sea, returning north in small flocks as the summer approaches. At the time Mr. Yarrell wrote, two instances had been recorded of its occurrence in Scandinavia, one in Holland, one in France, and one in Germany; more recently one has occurred in Italy, a specimen having been obtained on the 12th of February 1869, between Scarperia and Borgo San Lorenzo, twenty-two miles (or thereabouts) from Florence: *vide* 'The Ibis' for 1869, p. 242, where Dr. H. H. Giglioli states that "it was an adult male, in full plumage; and this is, I believe, the only well-authenticated instance of the occurrence of this rare eastern Goose in Italy."

The first British-killed specimen was taken near London, at the beginning of the severe frost of 1766; it passed into the possession of the celebrated collection formed by Marmaduke Tunstall, and is now one of the most important specimens in the Museum of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Another, taken alive near Wycliffe, in Yorkshire, about the same time, soon became familiar, was kept among other Ducks in a pond, but, though it associated freely with them and seemed partial to one in particular, never produced young. It continued alive for some years, and then lost its life by an accident. Besides the above, others have been killed near Berwick-upon-Tweed, and in Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, and Devonshire. Respecting the Norfolk specimen, Mr. Stevenson informs me that "the only example of this rare species in Norfolk appears to be that noticed by Messrs. Sheppard and Whitear, and also by the Messrs. Paget, as having been purchased by the late Mr. Lilly Wigg, at Yarmouth, which, by some unfortunate mistake, was plucked and eaten. It was said to have been shot at Halvergate, in 1805. Mr. Hunt, of Norwich, in his 'British Ornithology,' states that he was assured by Mr. Wigg that he purchased the bird in the Yarmouth Market; other contemporary local naturalists give the same account of it, but I can furnish no further authority. Mr. Gurney, however, tells me that he had *feathers* of this bird given to him by Mr. Sparshall, who received them from Mr. Wigg."

In the Museum at Leyden there are two beautiful examples (an old and a young bird), which, I believe, were captured in Holland; and I have one now before me, which has been kindly placed at my disposal, for the furtherance of the present work, by A. W. Crichton, Esq., who obtained it from Mr. Stafford S. Allen, a gentleman whose travels and collections, formed in the neighbourhood of the Nile, are so well known. Mr. Frank, of Amsterdam, assured me that he had every reason to believe, from information which he considered to be authentic, that some few years since at least half-a-dozen