

BERNICLA LEUCOPSIS.

Bernicle Goose.

Anas leucopsis, Temm. Man. d'Orn., p. 531.

Anser leucopsis, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 921.

—— *bernicla*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. & Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 37.

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

FEW sights are more attractive to the lover of nature than a "skein" of wild geese passing through the air—a string of wandering birds which have quitted some far-off locality, and are journeying onward to a haven better suited to their requirements than the one they have left. How wonderful are the migrations of these birds, and at what great heights are they sometimes performed! The smaller birds probably make their journeys at a similar altitude to that of the "skeins" of geese which occasionally pass over the Metropolis, or of the flights of cranes which periodically cross the Rhine; but birds so small as the Swallow and the Wheatear cannot be seen at such an elevation, and therefore are not noticeable.

Flights of wild geese are equally interesting to the sportsman and to the gunner, whose only regret is that the birds mostly pass on without resting; they do, however, sometimes alight on an estuary, marsh, or extensive field, but are not allowed to remain there long without molestation. During the winter the Bernicle Goose is a common bird in the British Islands, and is equally abundant on the continent of Europe, particularly in Jutland, Holstein, Holland, and some parts of France; it also sparingly occurs in many countries further east. According to the best authorities, it arrives in September and October, is more generally diffused over the western than the eastern coasts, and departs for more northerly regions early in the spring, few or none remaining after the middle of March. "Its migratory journeys are performed during both night and day, in considerable flocks, and invariably along the sea-coast, skirting the land around headlands and bays, and passing only when necessitated over the open sea. Their roosting-places are also on the sea-coast. Their flight is strong and powerful, and a considerable noise is produced by the wings on their alighting." (Morris, 'Brit. Birds,' vol. v.)

As I have had little or no opportunity of observing this bird in a state of nature, I must here, as in many other instances, draw upon the labours of some of my contemporaries. Speaking of the bird as seen by him in Scotland, Macgillivray says:—

"This very beautiful bird more frequently retires to the sea than to the lakes during its periods of repose, or when driven from its feeding-grounds. A large flock then presents a beautiful spectacle, and the birds sit lightly on the water, and when advancing elevate their necks. Not less beautiful do they appear when on wing, now arranged in long lines, ever undulating, at one time extending in the direction of their flight, at another obliquely or at right angles to it, sometimes in an angular figure, and again mingling together. Their voice is clear, and rather shrill, but strikes agreeably on the ear when the cries of a large flock are heard from a considerable distance. They can on occasion run with very considerable speed, but ordinarily walk sedately and prettily. Their food consists of grass, especially the juicy stems of *Agrostis alba*, as well as the blades and roots of other plants. They also feed in marshes, and by the margins of pools and small lakes. The nest is said to be formed of grass, and to contain six or eight eggs. I have examined several specimens from Parry's Arctic Expeditions. Of two presented to Professor Jameson, one is two inches and seven-eighths long, an inch and eleven-twelfths broad; the other is two inches and six-eighths long, an inch and seven-eighths in breadth: they are of an elliptical form, both ends equal, and of a greyish white tint."

Thomson informs us that the Bernicle Goose "is a regular winter visitant to Ireland, where its favourite places of resort are the extensive sandy parts of the coast which are exposed by the receding tide, bordered by short pasture, or having islets of this nature rising here and there above its level surface." "Its greatest haunt" known to him "is an immense sandy shallow bay on the coast of Louth, bordered by an extensive tract of pasture and marshy ground called Lurgan Green, from which it is called Lurgan-Green Bernicle over a considerable part of the island. There immense numbers spend the whole of the year, except the period appropriated to the reproduction of their species, when they are absent for about five months, from the middle of April to that of September. I have rarely passed this locality *en route* from Belfast to Dublin without seeing vast flocks of these birds (numbering sometimes between 300 and 400), either on the sands or the greensward raised but little above them. I have seen them within shot of the coach, and as regardless of its passing as a flock of tame geese—indeed more so, for the latter would have had the impudence to cackle, while the Bernicle had the good taste to remain silent. They were never feeding