

ANSER BRACHYRHYNCHUS, Baill.

Pink-footed Goose.

Anser brachyrhynchus, Baill. Mém. de la Soc. d'Emul. d'Abbev., 1833, p.
—— *phœnicopus*, Bartl. Proc. of Zool. Soc., 1839, p. 3.

FROM time immemorial wild geese of several species have migrated to the British Islands as regularly as the Cuckoo and the Swallow, but with this difference of object: the Cuckoo and Swallow have come here to breed and perpetuate their kind; but the geese have sought our shores and river-flats as an asylum for the winter, just as the Fieldfare and Redwing do in localities suited to them. From the time of Willughby and Ray to the early part of the present century, but little has been recorded about these important birds; and their distinctions were involved in obscurity; now, however, they are well known; and I believe I shall be perfectly correct in stating that the British Islands are either regularly or occasionally visited by seven species, viz. the Grey Lag (*Anser fesus*), the Bean-Goose (*A. segetum*), the Pink-footed (*A. brachyrhynchus*), the White-fronted (*A. albifrons*), the Bernicle (*Bernicla leucopsis*), the Brent (*B. brenta*), and the Red-breasted (*B. ruficollis*). The first of these is the only one that remains and breeds with us, and is doubtless the origin of our common domestic goose; the five succeeding are winter visitors only, and the last an accidental one.

The Pink-footed Goose was made known as a British bird by Mr. Bartlett at the first meeting of the Zoological Society in 1839, when he characterized it under the name of *Anser phœnicopus* from the colouring of its legs and feet, without being aware that M. Baillon, of Abbeville, had previously (in 1833) pointed out its specific distinctions, and assigned it the name of *A. brachyrhynchus* from the shortness of its beak, a term which, from its priority, is now generally adopted.

In all probability the Pink-footed has always been the most common of our migratory geese, but, until the dates above mentioned, was confounded with its near ally the Bean-Goose, the two species being very similar in size and general appearance; they are readily distinguishable, however, by the difference in the colouring of their legs and feet—those of the Bean-Goose being yellow, and those of the other pink.

The *A. brachyrhynchus* arrives on our shores early in October or the beginning of November, and at once resorts to all suitable localities, and remains there, if unmolested, until the spring, when, like all the other migrating geese, it quits the country, many of them proceeding to regions within the Arctic circle so far north that man has not yet been able to follow them, nor to ascertain what is the nature of the great nurseries of this family of birds.

“Since the specific distinctions of this short-billed Goose,” says Mr. Stevenson in his ‘Birds of Norfolk,’ “were first pointed out by M. Baillon in 1833, and subsequently by Mr. Bartlett in 1839, it has proved to be both a constant and abundant winter-visitant on our Norfolk coast, although to a great extent confined to the western side of the county, and especially to certain localities in the neighbourhood of Holkham.

“The earliest record of its identification in this county is apparently the notice by Yarrell of a specimen killed at Holkham, in January 1841, by the present Earl of Leicester, out of a flock of about twenty, since which time this goose has proved to be by far the most common species that frequents the Holkham marshes. Of its habits in that neighbourhood the following notes have been kindly supplied me by Lord Leicester.

“As long as I can recollect, wild geese frequented the Holkham and Burnham Marshes. Their time of appearing in this district is generally the last week of October, and their departure the end of March, varying a little according to the season. Till November they rarely alight in the marshes or elsewhere in the neighbourhood, but are seen passing to and from the sea. Where they feed in October I know not, as I have reason to believe that they do not obtain much food off the muds, like the brents, but live mainly on grass and new-sown wheat. From early in November till their time of departure for the north, the Holkham marshes have almost daily some hundreds of geese feeding on them. There are periods of a week or a fortnight when the greater portion of them go elsewhere; but rarely all go. When on the marshes they are mostly in one or two flocks, but in stormy weather, or even on certain still days, for some unaccountable reason they break up into small lots. My keepers informed me that one day, about the middle of November 1870, which was perfectly calm, they were flying about in small lots very low, and that a great many might have been killed.’

“Referring to the goose shot by himself in 1841, and identified by Yarrell as the pink-footed, his lordship adds, ‘Of the many geese killed here before then, I have reason to believe from their habits they were nearly all the same as those now here—the pink-footed; and of the many hundreds killed since, with the exception, I believe, of only one bean-goose and a few white-fronted, they were all pink-footed. The greatest number killed in one year was in the severe winter of 1860-61, when one hundred and thirty-eight were killed, all pink-footed.’

“Mr. Dowell, who is also well acquainted with the habits of this species and has shot several at different times, informs me that they feed in flocks of from one or two to six or seven hundred on the uplands by day, and he