

ANSER FERUS.

Grey Lag Goose.

Anas anser, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 40.

— *ferus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 510.

Anser ferus, Steph. Cont. Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 28.

— *palustris*, Flem. Hist. Brit. Anim., p. 126.

— *cinereus*, Mey. Taschenb. Vög., tom. 3, p. 552.

— *sylvestris*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 836.

— *vulgaris*, Pall. Zoogr. Rosso-Asiat., tom. ii. p. 222.

— *rubrirostris*, Hodgson?, Swinh. Rev. List of Birds of China in Proc. of Zool. Soc., 1871, p. 416.

THE true habitat of the Grey Lag Goose is the temperate and northern regions of the Old World; as yet it has not been found in any portion of the New. However general its distribution may have been in the British Islands in former times, it is at present confined to the northern part of Scotland, the Hebrides, and may be sparingly seen in Ireland. Indeed it is from this latter country that the specimens which form the subject of the accompanying illustration were received, for which I am indebted to the Earl of Enniskillen, a nobleman well known for his love of science and as a liberal supporter of several of its numerous branches, especially those embracing the study of the living objects by which we are surrounded, and as an investigator of the treasures of by-gone ages. The properties of the Earl of Belmore, at Castle Cool, and of Sir Victor Brooke, at Lisnaskea, co. Fermanagh, have, I understand, from almost time immemorial, been frequented by flocks of wild geese; and it is through the kindness of the former nobleman and his steward, Mr. Hosegood, that Lord Enniskillen obtained for me the very fine pair, male and female, on the 15th of December, 1868.

Mr. R. Gray, in his 'Birds of the West of Scotland,' after speaking of the Grey Lag Goose breeding in many parts of that country, and of their nurseries on the bleak hills of the outer Hebrides, states that "it is common in North Uist, Benbecula, and South Uist, and is found occupying the breeding-stations early in May. Mr. Harvie Brown took a nest of eggs which were hard sat upon, on 2nd May, 1870; but Mr. Elwes, who visited the Long Island in 1868, saw flocks of as many as thirty together later in the season. The nest, which resembles that of a Great Black-backed Gull when found breeding on heath-clad islands, with the exception of being lined with down and feathers, is generally placed in a tuft of coarse grass, or among rank heather, and contains from four to six eggs. When the young are fully fledged, they keep together in family groups for some weeks, and are often seen shifting their quarters from one side of the island to the other."

During a visit to Lochs Shin and Merkland, as well as several parts of the Reay Forest, in the autumn of 1867, I saw Grey Lags and their broods of young in sufficient numbers to convince me that they might be considered a common bird in those parts of the British Islands; and that it was not less abundant on the numerous lakes of the west coast of Sutherland and Ross-shire will be seen from the following extract from a note transmitted to me, after my return to London, by my excellent and kind friend the Marquis of Westminster:—"Loch More, September 4. You will like to hear about the Grey Lag Geese. The forester on the shore of Loch Merkland fired into a lot of fourteen, wounding four; they pursued them in a coble, and procured one, which we ate; they will try to get the others."

I shall close this paper with some extracts from an amusing and, I am sure, very truthful account of one mode of shooting this bird on its native lochs, which appeared in 'Land and Water' on the 15th of October, 1870, under the title of "A Wild-Goose Chase in Sutherland":—

"The breeding-places of the Wild Goose are yearly becoming more circumscribed all over the north; and even in Sutherland, where, perhaps, they were more numerous than elsewhere, they are now confined to one or two districts, the most fertile being a chain of lakes, with islands and rushy margins, running for about eight miles across the interior of the county, from Badinloch to Gernsary. Here the Grey Lag, principally with a few of the Bean Goose and Pink-footed Goose (the latter, however, only rarely), still breed by hundreds. We are inclined to think that the different sorts of Geese do not mix or associate during the breeding-season, but, on the contrary, form separate communities until disturbed, when they take refuge on the water in one large body. They float and plume themselves here in comparative safety all day, and at night land on the grassy feeding-places, eating up and soiling the very finest pasture in such a manner that deer or sheep will scarcely approach it after them. For many a day, with the exception of a solitary boat following a flock and potting a few, none, either young or old, were killed; and some years ago it