

ARQUATELLA MARITIMA.

Purple Sandpiper.

Tringa maritima, Brünn. Orn. Bor., no. 182.

—— *nigricans*, Mont. Linn. Trans., vol. iv. p. 40, pl. 2.

—— *striata*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 110.

—— *arquatella*, Pall. Zoog. Rosso-Asiat., tom. ii. p. 190.

—— *Canadensis*, Lath. Ind. Orn., Supp. p. 65.

—— *littoralis*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 652.

Totanus maritimus, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 146.

Tringa (Arquatella) maritima, Baird, Cat. of N. Amer. Birds in Mus. Smiths Inst., p. xlvii. no. 528.

THIS bird, although nowhere very numerous in the British Islands, is nevertheless sufficiently abundant in autumn, winter, and spring to entitle it to be regarded as a common species; it is sometimes met with in flocks, but more often in smaller numbers, in all the rocky parts of our shores, from north to south, from Cornwall to the Orkneys, and apparently evinces no preference for the eastern over the western coasts. It is less numerous in Ireland than in England and Scotland. As the Dunlin loves muddy flats, and the Stint shingly shores, so the Purple Sandpiper delights to be among kelp, sea-weed, and shelving billow-washed beaches; its short tarsi, long stout toes, and short bulky body, as compared with the slender Dunlin, Stint, and other shore-loving Sandpipers, indicate that it differs from them in its mode of life. In confirmation of this induction, I may mention that Mr. Gatcombe, of Plymouth, writes:—"I have observed a peculiar habit in the Purple Sandpiper when feeding on the rocks during rough weather. On seeing a large wave approach, it crouches and holds on the rock, allowing the spray to dash completely over it, and, on the wave receding, rises and displays the greatest activity in picking up its food until another wave compels it to crouch again." At the period the Purple Sandpiper visits us its trivial name is very applicable; for not only does the whole of the upper surface assume a purple tint, but the feathers of the back and rump are tinged with violet: a change of colour, however, is very perceptibly going on before the bird leaves us in spring, and by midsummer its plumage is so metamorphosed as to give it the appearance of a totally different species. From the crown of the head to the lower part of the scapularies all the feathers are edged with chestnut and white, while the purple winter colouring of their centres has given place to brownish black. In this dress, however, it scarcely ever, if ever, appears in the British Islands; but in such a garb it is seen in Iceland, Spitzbergen, Greenland, and probably in the whole of Arctic America; for every voyager who has written on the avifauna of those regions speaks of it as a common summer-resident there. Messrs. Evans and Sturge, who visited Spitzbergen in 1855, say:—"The Purple Sandpiper (*Tringa maritima*, Brünn.) was very abundant in Coal Bay, on the south side of Ice Sound; and we found four of their nests on the high fjeld. Beautiful little nests they were, deep in the ground, and lined with stalks of grass and leaves of the Dwarf Birch (*Betula nana*, L.), containing mostly four eggs, of an olive-green, handsomely mottled with purplish brown, chiefly at the larger end. We watched this little bird with much interest as it waded into some pool of snow-water or ran along the shingle, every now and then raising its wings over its back and exhibiting the delicate tint of the underside, at the same time uttering its loud shrill whistle."—'Ibis,' vol. i. p. 171.

Holbøll, in his 'Fauna of Greenland,' says that it breeds throughout that country, that it "disappears from the sea-coast at the beginning of June, and resorts to the tableland on the mountains, where it remains a short time in small flocks, and then goes in pairs to the breeding-places, which, though always at some distance from the sea, are never far inland; it lays four eggs, and is very careful of its young ones." That it also breeds in the Færoe Islands is certain, the late Mr. Wolley having sent thence to Mr. Hewitson eggs from which the old bird was shot, and informed him that it there "breeds sparingly on the very tops of high mountains, where I found its young at the end of June still unable to fly. One pair I remember particularly was in the very midst of a colony of Skuas; they stood upon large stones, in an easy attitude, but evidently watching our movements. From this spot I have now for two years had their eggs."

"Mr. Dann remarks," says Yarrell, "that, unlike the others of this tribe, the Purple Sandpiper does not altogether quit the Scandinavian coast in winter; as the ice accumulates and the sea freezes up, it betakes itself to the outermost range of islands and rocks with which that coast is so numerously studded, feeding among the sea-weed left bare by the slight fall of the tide, on the marine insects which it finds at the edge of the water. I have procured specimens throughout the winter on the Swedish coast, and during very severe frosts. It is perfectly fearless. During windy weather, when not feeding, it seeks shelter in the crevices of the rocks. Its plumage in winter is very thick, and the bird appears much larger than in summer."