

PELIDNA CINCLUS.

Dunlin.

Tringa Schinzii, Brehm?

—— *alpina*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 64.

—— *cinclus*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 251.

—— *variabilis*, Meyer, Taschenb. Deutschl. Vög., tom. ii. p. 397.

Numenius variabilis, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 141.

Pelidna variabilis, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 98.

—— *cinclus*, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 50.

DURING the months of autumn and winter the sea-shores of most parts of our island are constantly enlivened by flocks of Dunlins, which at one moment are winging their way out to sea, and at the next sweeping round towards the beach, showing their grey-brown backs as they go away, and their silvery-white breasts as they approach; at another time the oozy mud-flats are covered by these little birds of elegant form, sprightly actions, and a disposition at once tame and unsuspecting. Flocks of the like kind are also to be seen in all similar situations on our larger tidal rivers; and every one who has been fortunate enough to tread in summer the blooming heather, and inhale the invigorating air of our northern hills (the Cheviots and the Grampians), must have seen a little restless black-breasted bird flying towards him, or endeavouring to entice him from one part of the moor to another. This is the same bird in a different state of plumage. What wonderful transformations are the Sandpipers and Plovers subject to! How differently are they clothed at opposite seasons of the year! and how well does the dress of each season accord with the colouring of the objects by which the bird is surrounded! How charmingly do their rich summer dresses harmonize with the hues of the flowering heaths and other gaily-coloured plants of their alpine home, when all nature seems to exult in what she has accomplished even in those lonely wastes, the stillness of which is only broken by the plaintive pipe of the Golden Plover and its "page," as the subject of the present paper has been called! and at this period it has also received the trivial names of Purre, and Redbacked Sandpiper, while at the opposite one it is known as the Dunlin, Ox-bird, and Stint. A glance at the accompanying Plates, on which the bird is figured in its summer and in its winter dress, will at once enable the reader to see how greatly it differs, and how different is the kind of situation it frequents at those opposite periods of the year. In the former they will not fail to observe the scattered flock hurrying off from one of their natural enemies, the Merlin: the two birds in the foreground are scarcely awake to their danger; and one is in the act of stretching its wing, in case its pinions need be called into play. It will be unnecessary to state that the second Plate represents the bird in its summer dress; for the little richly coloured and interesting young of a few days old, and the elegant plant known by the name of *Pinguicula*, both indicate the season it is intended to illustrate.

Speaking of the vast numbers of Dunlins occasionally seen at one time, the late Mr. Thompson, of Ireland, says, "On the 27th of January, 1847, I saw a flock of not less than 2500, and about 300 yards from them another of 1500. The larger body rising into the air, and going through their brilliant evolutions, attracted the attention of every one on the adjacent highway, most of the people standing still in admiration of them. Descending from on wing, they all swept down in the same direction, and covered an extent of land in such a manner as to remind me of grain thrown from the hands of the sower, until it reaches the ground and is scattered over its surface. Every bird of the multitude, on alighting moved at the same moderate pace, between walking and running, about equidistant from each other; and their heads being all similarly elevated, they had a most formal and singular appearance. All, too, were, as usual when congregating at any season, uttering their notes, which sounded most pleasingly musical. The voices of a host of Dunlins occasionally gives as good an illustration of multitudinous sound as I can well imagine. On the 24th of December, 1840, after the tide had ebbed for a considerable way, I saw more Dunlins close to the road before Fort William than I had ever previously observed in so small a space. There could not have been less than 5000. As many as 3000 were in a dense flock, busily feeding and keeping up a thrilling concert—like grey linnets previous to roosting; the others were somewhat more scattered. The great body first appeared glancing in the sun, then it broke up into a dozen flocks, which rose and fell in the air like molten silver. One of the finest effects is when the background is so dark that the birds are only to be seen in silvery whiteness, flashing their under plumage upon us. The uncertainty as to where they may next appear—like that of lightning from an extensive mass of thunder-cloud—adds much to the effect. Only for a space 'brief as the lightning in the collied night' can they be observed under such circumstances."