

## TOTANUS CALIDRIS.

### Redshank.

*Scolopax calidris*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 245.

*Totanus calidris*, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 216.

—— *littoralis* et *striatus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., pp. 636, 637.

*Tringa gambetta* et *striatus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. pp. 671, 672.

—— *variegata*, Brünn. Orn., no. 181.

*Gambetta calidris*, Kaup, Natürl. Syst., p. 54.

I KNOW of no sound more exhilarating to the naturalist engaged in an expedition to the breeding-haunts of this pretty species than that of its wild piping call, as it falls upon his ear when he first treads the shingly spits or sandy embouchures of rivers which it has selected whereon to deposit its eggs and rear its young. The restless males flit here and there before him and perch, one on a stone, another on a gate, a third on the gable-end of a deserted cottage, or fly around over his head, with their coral-red legs depending at right angles to their bodies, or streaming out behind. During the month of May such scenes as these might have been seen in the days of my youth in a hundred places between the shingly flats and morasses on the coasts of Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk, from the mouth of the Thames to the Humber, but, according to Mr. Stevenson, are not so frequently to be witnessed at the present time. Similar scenes present themselves in many other parts of England, in some situations in Scotland, and still more numerous in Ireland. In winter most of the low, flat coasts of the British seas constitute a favourable abode for it, the receding tides furnishing it with an abundance of food, such as sea-worms, mollusks, crustaceans, and marine insects. Besides incubating in the situations above described, the bird occasionally breeds far inland, in warrens, and on wet, soppy commons. Premising that it is both a summer and a winter resident with us, I may state that it is also an inhabitant of North Africa, Asia Minor, India, China, Formosa, and Japan.

Selby, Macgillivray, Yarrell, and indeed every writer on our native birds, from Montagu to Stevenson, have each wielded their pens respecting the Redshank; what, then, can I have to add that is new? Shall I not rather avail myself of part of the account given of it by Thompson, which Mr. Stevenson affirms is the best that has yet appeared, with the addition of any remarks from other authors which may be of interest?

"This bird appears to be much more numerous around the shores of Ireland than those of Great Britain; for even in the north it is very numerous in all kinds of weather, though autumn is the season of their greatest profusion. Oozy shores covered with the *Zostera marina* seem to be preferred; and this may possibly be at least one reason of the great abundance of Redshanks on the Irish coast, where there are so many bays of this description. But they are by no means limited to such localities. There is considerable variety in the nature of the estuaries and loughs of Antrim and Down, Dublin Bay, Wexford, and Cork Harbours, the bays of Kerry and Connemara, &c.; yet all are frequented by very great numbers. Even to the low and jagged rocky shore, when exposed by the fallen tide, these birds are partial, minute crustacea and other objects which constitute their food being plentiful in such places. This species appears in flocks in Belfast Bay early after the breeding-season. On the 18th of July young birds have been shot; and occasionally great numbers have arrived before the end of the month. From this period they remain, without any diminution of their numbers, except of those that may be killed; and they are too wary to admit of any great sacrifice in this manner, at least with the ordinary gun. The most I have heard of being killed with it at one shot were twenty-five; but the swivel-gun sometimes makes awful havoc among them: 108 were killed at one shot early in September 1846; and a day or two previously 112 fell at a single discharge. When the flowing tide puts them off their feeding-ground, rather than be driven within shot of any ambush on the shore, they adopt the Curlew's custom of retiring to rocky marine islets several miles distant. Thither they follow the 'flights' of that cautious bird, stationed a little apart from which I have seen several hundreds congregated, patiently awaiting the falling of the tide. When much disturbed they likewise betake themselves to the comparative solitude of Strangford Lough. To see a flock of not less than a thousand spring direct from the beach high into the air until they attain the elevation of the intervening hills which have to be crossed, and, then, in rapid flight, bear straight onwards to Strangford, is an interesting and beautiful sight. During late years these flights have been taken less frequently, the birds having discovered a tract of good feeding-ground, about two miles in length, on the Antrim side of the bay. They remain there daily in great numbers, about the time of high water, for eight months of the year. What may seem timidity or fear on the part of the