

## LIMOSA MELANURA.

### Black-tailed Godwit.

- Scolopax limosa*, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 61.  
*Totanus limosa et rufus*, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. pp. 244, 253.  
*Limosa melanura*, Leisl. Nacht. zu Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. ii. pp. 150, 157.  
*Limicola melanura*, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. iii. p. 250.  
*Scolopax agocephala*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 246.  
——— *belgica*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., p. 663.  
*Totanus agocephalus*, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom. iv. p. 234.  
*Fedoia melanura*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xii. p. 73.  
*Limosa jadreca*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 32.  
——— *agocephala*, Leach, *ibid.*, p. 34.  
——— *islandica*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 626.

IN England we have two Godwits with very distinctive characters, which at a glance may be distinguished at any age one from the other; and it would be well if the trivial names of Black-tailed and Bar-tailed and the specific ones of *melanura* and *rufa* should be always retained for these well-known birds. It will, however, be seen by the above list of synonyms that Gmelin called the present species *belgica*, Leach *jadreca*, Linnæus and Bechstein *agocephala*; by most modern ornithologists, however, the term *melanura* is employed; and I accordingly adopt it.

Where a bird breeds, or has for centuries bred, that country must be regarded as the home of the species; Britain therefore is one of the homes of the Black-tailed Godwit. The Rev. Mr. Lubbock, when speaking of the marsh-birds in his 'Fauna of Norfolk,' says:—"Five species in particular used to swarm in our marshes—the Godwit, the Ruff, the Lapwing, the Redshank, and the Black Tern. These last bred in countless multitudes in a large alder-carr at Upton, near Acle, and dispersed themselves over the country for miles, while the Redshank in the breeding-season flew dashing around the head of any intruders on his territories, and endeavoured, like a Lapwing, to mislead strangers from the nest; higher in the air and flying in bolder circles, uttering a louder note was the Black-tailed Godwit, called provincially 'the Shrieker,' from its piercing cries. The bird is now almost extinct in this part of Norfolk; it used to breed at Buckenham, Thyrne, Horsey, and one or two other places." Lubbock's book was published in 1845; the interval that has since elapsed has not, as might have been expected, enabled other writers to add to the list of the breeding-places of the birds spoken of; and if either of them have bred in the localities mentioned it is certainly not the Black-tailed Godwit, the draining of the meres and the increase of the gunners preventing it from continuing to do so.

Whether associations be handed down among birds as among human beings, we know not; but, although the Godwit is no longer permitted to breed in the marshy districts of our eastern coast, it as regularly pays them a visit as the season runs round, and the bird is accordingly frequently seen and killed during the vernal and autumnal periods of the year in Suffolk, Norfolk, and Lincolnshire. The low shores of all the estuaries of England, Scotland, and Ireland having muddy flats are also visited by it. It must still breed in Holland; for its eggs form a considerable article of trade between that country and Leadenhall Market, where they may frequently be seen in the month of May exposed for sale, like those of the Lapwing, for the purposes of the table: their numbers, however, are becoming less and less every year; and probably the time is not far distant when the marshes of Holland and Friesland, like those of England, may not be tenanted by the Black-tailed Godwit.

In Ireland it appears never to breed; for although Thompson states that it now and then occurs there in great numbers, he makes no allusion to its nesting. That it speedily becomes habituated to the restraints of captivity is certain. "During my visits to the Gardens of the Zoological Society, in the Regent's Park, London, in May and June 1839," says Thompson, "the sight of eleven of these birds in one of the inclosures always gratified me. The first day I saw them was very warm. They were all standing in the same position, on one leg, with the other tucked up so as to be wholly invisible, the bill buried in the feathers, and the eyes closed. The next day that I went was equally fine, and the hour of my visit the same; but they were all actively moving about, and calling as if on the sea-shore. They appeared quite happy. It was interesting to observe their natural habit of driving the point of the bill into their soft oozy feeding-ground, here exemplified by several of them at the same moment probing the layer of straw with which the floor of their residence was covered. On my third visit the day was very cold in the shade, and the wind easterly. They all had their bills wholly buried in their dorsal plumage, and most of them had their eyes