

FALCINELLUS IGNEUS.

Glossy Ibis.

Tantalus igneus, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 649.

——— *falcinellus et viridis*, Gmel. ib., p. 648.

Ibis sacra, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 1815, p. 385.

— *ignea*, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 33.

— *falcinellus*, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd. edit. 1820, tom. ii. p. 598.

— *castaneus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 606, tab. 29. fig. 3.

Numenius viridis, S. G. Gmel. Reise, tom. i. p. 167.

Tantalides falcinellus, Wagl. Isis, 1832, p. 1232.

Plegadis falcinellus, Kaup, Natürl. Syst. p. 82.

THE Glossy Ibis, although nowhere very abundant, is so widely spread over the surface of the globe, that it may be said to inhabit, with few exceptions, all the countries of the Old World. Thus we find records of its having been observed on the verge of the arctic circle, Dr. Reinhart informing us that in the summer of 1824 a flock of ten or twelve were observed on the southern extremity of Iceland; and I myself have seen examples from the southern, eastern, and northern coasts of the mainland of Australia. In these widely distant latitudes it is much less numerous than in the intervening countries. In Africa, India, and China it is to be met with everywhere. Although it is not the Sacred Ibis of the ancient Egyptians, it seems to have been held by them in great esteem, as its body embalmed is said to be often discovered in the catacombs.

The food of the Glossy Ibis being reptiles, fish, mollusks, insects, and indeed every living creature of the marsh and the mud-banks of large rivers, it is in such situations alone that it is destined to dwell; great deserts, dry and sterile plains, and open heath-covered countries are not compatible with its nature, and consequently must be regarded as the exceptions to the sweeping assertion that the Glossy Ibis inhabits the greater portion of the Old World. Everywhere, or mostly so, it is a migrant, seeking its sustenance in those situations where heat has generated its peculiar food, in the miasmal marshes to which it resorts. There was a time when our country was much better adapted as a habitat for this bird than it is at present. "In 1845," says Mr. Stevenson, "Mr. Lubbock wrote:—'Fifty years back' the Glossy Ibis 'was seen often enough to be known to gunners and fishermen as the Black Curlew;' but now a straggler or two at long and uncertain intervals is an important event in local ornithology, and the bird itself, if procured, a coveted possession by all local collectors." The gradual draining of the fens and the recovery and cultivation of much of the land bordering our estuaries being detrimental to the existence of the Glossy Ibis, that and many other fen-birds, such as the Spoonbill, the Stork, and the Crane, no longer appear as formerly; but as the little Stonechat clings to the enclosures and reclaimed lands of its native heaths, so do the marsh-birds occasionally revisit the situations to which they formerly resorted, and which, alas! now form bournes from whence they never again return; for doomed, to a certainty, are all such wanderers, the gunner and the collector not being able to resist the temptation of securing such prizes.

It will not be necessary to detail the numerous instances of the occurrence of the Glossy Ibis in England, Ireland, and Scotland which have taken place of late years; but it will be advisable to give such extracts from the writings of previous authors as may afford the requisite information as to its habits and economy.

According to Temminck, the Glossy Ibis is abundant during its migrations in Poland, Hungary, Turkey, the Grecian archipelago, the borders of the Danube, Switzerland, and Italy, and occurs only accidentally in Holland and England, to which may be added North and South Africa, India, and Australia. Dr. Leith Adams says he believes it is occasionally seen in Egypt, which is doubtless the case; but it appears to be rare there, since Captain Shelley remarks that he only met with it on one occasion, near El Kab, on the 23rd of April, when he saw three feeding together at a small pool, and procured two of them.

Mr. Wright says it is a pretty regular visitor to Malta in spring and autumn in small flocks; Lieut. Sperling, that it migrates through that island in the spring, and spreads over the marshes of the northern coast of the Mediterranean. It was met with in the Dobrudscha by Mr. Simpson. Lord Lilford informs us that it is tolerably abundant in Corfu and Epirus in March, April, and May; but he himself only saw one pair, which kept aloof from the other waders, and stalked about after the manner of the Herons.

Dr. Henry Giglioli says the Glossy Ibis passes Pisa pretty regularly in the latter half of April, stopping about a month. He saw three passing over the marshes of Rossore in May.