

small flat pieces of stone. Simple and hard though the materials be which compose its nest, it is as particular in its arrangement of them as many of our smaller birds are in the softer and more luxurious composition of their neat and beautiful abodes. Whether the position for the egg is chosen upon the pebbly beach or upon the harder surface of the rock, it is always carefully strewed with these small flat pieces of shell or gravel. The whiter they are, the better they seem to please the taste of the architect, which seems, however, to experience some difficulty in placing them to its liking, and prepares numerous nests before it makes use of one. This I have always noticed with wonder, and in some instances have seen as many as a dozen, all apparently as well finished as the one which contained the eggs." I suspect that nests of this description are only to be met with in certain localities; for the eggs found on the fine sandy borders of some of our inland rivers were placed in a slight depression only; and in the rocky spots of the coast where they are deposited just above high-water mark, but little in the shape of a nest is to be detected. The Oyster-catcher generally lays two, three, or four eggs. Perhaps the normal number may be three, since not more than three, and most frequently two, were found in the nests detected by me in the beaches in Tasmania, where I was surrounded by *Hematopus longirostris* and *H. fuliginosus*, the former of which is very nearly allied to the European species; and we may safely infer that the nidification of the two birds is as similar as their outward appearance.

Macgillivray, speaking of the bird when raiding, as it sometimes does, into the interior of the country, says:—"When by the silver Dee, gliding rapidly along amidst corn-fields, pastures, and fragrant birch-woods, you hear a loud and shrill cry, and, turning round, see a pair of Sea-pies winging their flight up the country, their glossy black and pure white plumage contrasting strongly with every thing round, and their long vermilion beaks giving them a strange and foreign aspect, they never fail to rivet your gaze. Equally attractive are they when running about on some grassy meadow, picking up an insect or a slug, then standing, and again advancing with short quick steps, prettily tripping it among the gowans, then emitting their loud alarm-cries, and flying off to a more distant place or alighting on the pebbly beach.

"While reposing, the Sea-pie stands with its legs quite straight, or uses one leg only, the other being drawn up, the body horizontal, the neck retracted, the head either directed forward or with the bill buried among the feathers of the back. In this position they present a curious appearance when there is a high wind, as in that case each individual directs his breast towards it, and on a sandy beach or level shore they often stretch out in long lines. Its flight is strong and steady, performed by regular beats of the extended wings, with the neck drawn in and the feet directed backwards. Its alarm-note is a single shrill scream; but on some occasions it emits a modulated softened cry of several notes. When wounded so as to be unable to fly, it readily betakes itself to the water and swims off, sitting light and moving with considerable speed."

The eggs, which are deposited in April and May, are of a yellowish stone-colour, spotted with ash-grey and dark brown, and are about two inches and two lines in length by one inch and six lines in breadth. The process of incubation occupies about three weeks; and during that period the male keeps guard, as it were, and becomes very noisy on the approach of danger. The young when hatched are clothed in a greyish brown down.

The Oyster-catcher readily becomes tame, especially when taken young, and then forms an amusing pet, of which a very interesting instance is given in Thompson's 'Natural History of Ireland,' vol. ii. p. 127, to which I must beg leave to refer my readers.

Both Selby and Macgillivray speak disparagingly of the flesh of this bird, the former saying it "partakes of the odour of the food upon which it subsists," and the latter that it is "very dark, abounds in fat of a yellowish colour, has a disagreeable smell, and rather unpleasant taste;" but this is contrary to my experience (which, however, is not great); for those I have eaten have been tender, juicy, and well flavoured; and that they must be partaken of by many persons is certain, since it is very frequently seen in the shops of the second-class poulterers in London; and we learn from Macgillivray that it is as often seen in the markets of Edinburgh, where they are usually sold at two shillings a couple.

The sexes are precisely alike at the same age, both in colour and markings; their throat, which is jet-black in summer, is crossed by a mark of pure white in winter, the absence or presence of which will serve to indicate the period of the year at which a mounted specimen has been killed. The bill is at all times orange in the adult bird, the eye blood-red, and the legs pinky flesh-colour; but their hues are more or less brilliant according to the season; thus in autumn they are not so bright or vivid as in spring, prior to the commencement of the breeding-season, when, like all other birds, they are in their finest costume.

The Plate represents a bird in the summer and another in the winter plumage, a trifle under the natural size.