

When first discovered, they permitted us to approach within a short distance, without showing any symptoms of alarm; and frequently afterwards, when within a few paces, watching their movements, some would move slowly about and pick up an insect, others would remain motionless, now and then stretching out their wings, and a few would occasionally toy with each other, at the same time uttering a few low notes which had some resemblance to those of the common Linnet. In short, they appeared to be so very indifferent with regard to our presence that at last my assistant could not avoid exclaiming, 'What stupid birds these are!' The female that had young nevertheless evinced considerable anxiety for their safety whenever we came near the place where they were concealed, and, as long as we remained in the vicinity, constantly flew to and fro above us, uttering her note of alarm. The moulting appears to commence somewhat early with old birds; a male, killed on the 25th of July, was completely covered with pen-feathers, while the belly, from incubation, was still almost bare. The stomachs I dissected were all filled with the elytra and remains of small Coleopterous insects, which, in all probability, constitute their principal food during the breeding-season."

Much as Mr. Heysham has written, and Mr. Yarrell recorded, respecting the Dotterel, neither of them makes mention of the great disparity in the size of the sexes, or of the difference in their colouring, which is the more remarkable as both these points are mentioned by Latham. From the unmistakeable evidence of the more dissection, I have ascertained that the largest and most richly coloured birds are females, and that their average weight is from 5 to 5½ ounces, while the comparatively dull-coloured birds, rarely exceeding 4 ounces in weight, are males. I have often thought that the state of plumage in which they arrive in the spring is merely a seasonal dress, and that their winter garb is not characterized by that rich colouring. It would appear, too, that the young of both sexes, during their first autumn, are destitute of these colours, have the head of a nearly uniform brown, and the lunate marks of the head and chest but slightly indicated.

A history of the Dotterel would be sadly incomplete without a passing sentence on the value of the bird as an article of food and of commerce. During its vernal migration, the Dotterel has from time immemorial been captured and shot for the purposes of the table; and great numbers are annually forwarded to London, where, at this season, it may be seen gracing the shops of the respectable poulterers, such as Mr. Bailey, of Mount Street, Grosvenor Square, and Mr. Fisher, of Duke Street, Piccadilly. The Dotterel in the month of May, when the London season is at its height, and game prohibited, is quite a godsend to the epicure, competing with the fattened Quail and Ortolan, both of which, in my opinion, it far surpasses in succulency and flavour; indeed, I think it may be regarded as the very finest of the British birds for the table, the Snipe, Woodcock, and Grouse not excepted. The autumnal migration of these birds does not afford the same opportunities for procuring them as that of spring; for they return more irregularly, neither do they keep so exclusively to the downs, but disperse more generally over the country; few autumn-killed birds are therefore seen in our markets; besides which, Grouse and Partridges being now abundant, they are less in demand. Like the migratory Quail of the continent of Europe, the young Dotterels of the year far surpass the adults in flavour. I may add that no present is more acceptable to the epicure and the invalid than two or three couples of Dotterels: such a gift has been and still is deemed worthy of royalty, and whoever may have an opportunity of partaking of this delicious viand will not be disappointed.

Though perhaps not so swift as that of the Golden Plover, the flight of the Dotterel is extremely rapid; when disturbed, they take long flights for a mile or more, and then, suddenly wheeling round, often return to the spot whence they had risen. The usual mode of shooting them is to walk quickly round the trip, and gradually to diminish the circle until within range, when they become confused and are readily killed. They move over the ground with great rapidity, grace and elegance characterizing all their movements. They so love to dust themselves in the fallows or on the hill-sides, that a friend of mine, the late Mr. Hewitt, of Reading, informed me he had frequently seen them cover themselves entirely, with the exception of the head, by scratching the dust over them.

The eggs, which are generally three in number, are deposited in a depression of the ground; they are of a yellowish olive, blotched and spotted with dark-brownish black, and are one inch seven and a half lines in length by one inch two and a half lines in breadth.

The female has the crown of the head dark brown, striated with buff, a broad streak of white passing over each eye and uniting at the occiput; throat white, striated on the cheeks and lower part with fine lines of brown; neck and breast olive, bounded below by a narrow fascia of black, succeeded by a broader one of white; below this the abdomen and flanks are rufous, with a large patch of black in the centre of the latter; vent and under tail-coverts white; wings and upper surface olive-brown, each feather margined with sandy buff; primaries dark brown, the outer one with a broad white shaft, and the remainder slightly fringed with white; upper tail-coverts pale olive; base of the tail the same, passing into very dark brown near the extremity, and the lateral feathers largely tipped with white; irides dark hazel.

The Plate represents a male and female of the size of life.