

EUDROMIAS MORINELLUS.

Dotterel.

Charadrius morinellus Linnæi et auctorum.

——— *Sibiricus*, Gmelin, Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 690.

——— *Tataricus* et *Asiaticus*, Pallas, Reis., vol. ii. pp. 714 et 715.

Eudromias morinellus, Boie, Gray, Blyth, &c.

Morinellus Sibiricus, Bonaparte.

In the British Islands, and doubtless in all parts of the European continent, the Dotterel is strictly a migrant, arriving in the spring as regularly as the Swallow, and as regularly wending its way back southwards in August and September to winter, without doubt, in Northern Africa. It is during its spring passage, between the 15th of April and the 15th of May, that the Dotterel may be looked for in England, where it always evinces a decided preference for high open downs, extensive fallow fields, and the summits of mountains. The Mendip Hills in Somersetshire, the Chilton ridges in Berkshire, the chalk hills of Bedford, Hertford, and Cambridgeshires, and the Yorkshire wolds are among the many places that are annually visited by these birds. In such localities they may be seen in small parties of three or four in number, or in "trips" of ten or twenty: they are now gradually passing to their breeding-grounds on the hill-sides of Cumberland, the Grampians, and other elevated situations still further north. On the continent of Europe, the low country of Holland does not offer them a congenial home, and hence they are seldom seen there; they do, however, as in England, regularly pass over Italy, France, and all parts of Germany. The law, I believe, is that they proceed from south to north, and *vice versa*; and thus those that pass over France are *en route* to their summer home in Norway and Lapland, while those further east, in Turkey and the Crimea, are on their flight for the steppes of Russia and Western Siberia. In the autumn they as regularly return, some to winter in North-eastern Africa, others in Asia Minor, Arabia, &c. The furthest point east, from which I have received specimens, is the Crimea. According to the late Mr. Thompson, the Dotterel is rare in Ireland, and in North America it is never seen. If I had devoted years to the study of this bird, I could not have acquired more information respecting it than was communicated to Mr. Yarrell by my old friend the late J. C. Heysham, Esq., of Carlisle; and I feel I should be wanting in respect to the memory of this lover of nature were I not to transcribe the entire passage from Mr. Yarrell's 'History of British Birds':—

"In the neighbourhood of Carlisle," says Mr. Heysham, "Dotterels seldom make their appearance before the middle of May, about which time they are seen in flocks which vary in number from five to fifteen, and almost invariably resort to heaths, barren pastures, fallow grounds, &c., in open and exposed situations, where they continue, if unmolested, from ten days to a fortnight, and then retire to the mountains in the vicinity of the lakes to breed. Their most favourite breeding-haunts are always near to or on the summits of the highest mountains, particularly those that are densely covered with the woolly Fringe-moss (*Trichostomum lanuginosum*, Hedw.), which, indeed, grows more or less profusely on nearly all the most elevated parts of this Alpine district. In these lonely places they constantly reside the whole of the breeding-season, a considerable part of the time enveloped in clouds, and almost daily drenched with rain or the wetting mists so extremely prevalent in these dreary regions; and there can be little doubt that it is owing to this peculiar feature in their economy that they have remained so long in obscurity during the period of incubation. The Dotterel is by no means a solitary bird at this time, as a few pairs usually associate together, and live, to all appearance, in the greatest harmony. They do not make any nest, but deposit their eggs, which seldom exceed three in number, in a small cavity on dry ground, covered with vegetation, and generally near a moderate-sized stone or fragment of rock. In early seasons old females will occasionally begin to lay their eggs about the 26th of May; but the greater part seldom commence before the first or second week in June. The males assist the females in the incubation of their eggs. How long incubation continues I have been unable to ascertain, but I am inclined to think that it rarely lasts longer than eighteen or twenty days. A week or two previous to their departure, they congregate in flocks, and continue together until they finally leave this country, which takes place sometimes during the latter part of August, at others not before the beginning of September. A few birds are no doubt seen after this period, but they are either late broods or birds that are returning from more northern latitudes. Having spent a considerable portion of several days on Robinson, in company with a very able assistant, searching for the eggs of the Dotterel, I had, of course, ample opportunities of observing their manners. On the 3rd of July we found three or four pairs near the most elevated part of this mountain; and on all our visits thither, whether early in the morning or late in the afternoon, the greater part were always seen near the same place, sitting on the ground.