

suffused with an opaline light, within the confines of which a bird is dimly seen to advance, then another and a third. Presently a breeze rolls away the mist, and discloses a number of these watchful sentinels, each on his mound of faded moss, and all emitting their mellow cries the moment we offer to advance. They are males, whose mates are brooding over their eggs, or leading their down-clad and toddling chicks among the, to them, pleasant peat-bogs that intervene between the high banks, clad with luxuriant heath, not yet recovered from the effects of the winter frosts, and little meadows of cotton-grass, white as the snow-wreaths that lie on the distant hill. How prettily they run over the grey moss and lichens, their little feet twinkling, and their full, bright, and soft eyes gleaming, as they commence their attempts to entice us away from their chosen retreats! The nest is a slight hollow in a tuft of moss or on a dry place among the heath, irregularly strewn with fragments of withered plants. The eggs, of which the full number is four, are placed with their small ends together. They are much larger and more pointed than those of the Lapwing, being, on an average, two inches and one-twelfth in length and one inch and five-twelfths in their greatest transverse diameter. The shell is thin and smooth, of a light-greyish or pale-greenish yellow or cream-colour, irregularly spotted, dotted, and blotched with dark brown, and sometimes having a few light-purple spots interspersed, the markings larger towards the broadest part. The young leave the nest immediately after they burst the shell, and conceal themselves by lying flat on the ground. At this time the female evinces the greatest anxiety for their safety, and will occasionally feign lameness to entice the intruder to pursue her. I have several times seen one fly off to a considerable distance, alight in a conspicuous place, and tumble about as if in the agonies of death, her wings flapping as if they had been fractured or dislocated. The eggs are delicious, and the young birds, when fledged, not less so."

I have incidentally alluded to, but perhaps not spoken sufficiently in detail of, the great difference in the dress of the Golden Plover at opposite seasons of the year. I may add, then, that the whole of those parts of the plumage which are black in summer become white, or white intermixed with yellow, in winter, and that the golden colouring of the newly moulted feathers becomes exceedingly conspicuous, particularly in the young of the year—a circumstance which has obtained for the bird its well-known name of Golden Plover. Another state of plumage also demands a passing notice—that in which the bird is decked during the first four or five days of its existence. To see the young in the beautiful colourings and markings which then adorn them, their own native hills must be resorted to. The wild aspect of these localities, with their frequent accompaniments of wind, mists, sleet, and rain, would seem to be but little suited to these delicate nestlings; but such is not the case, for they are perfectly hardy, and are in possession of all the energies necessary for their safety from the moment they are hatched. The mossy character, too, of the markings with which they are adorned tend to their preservation, since it closely assimilates in appearance to the surface of the ground and the objects surrounding their birth-place. Should any of my readers desire to view the Golden Plover in all its beauty, let them repair to the Dovrefjeld, in Norway, by the 1st of July, and they will there find it in its gayest dress, with its young just hatched. No fear of disappointment need be entertained; for the bird is very plentiful in this bleak moorland, up to an elevation of from five to six thousand feet. There they will also find the White Grouse, the Redwing, the Fieldfare, the Blue-throated Warbler, and a host of other birds breeding, which will interest them, to say nothing of one of the wildest scenes in nature, backed by the frowning Snehatten in the distance. Should such a journey be incompatible with their convenience or pleasure, let them betake themselves to the Grampians, on many parts of which the bird breeds; but this locality is far less interesting than the one above-mentioned, in Norway, my visit to which will always be remembered with feelings of pleasure.

It might be supposed that a bird possessing such vast means of transport would enjoy a wide range over the face of the globe; but the reverse is the true state of the case; for we now know that the Golden Plovers of China, India, Java, Sumatra, Australia, and America, which were formerly believed to be identical with it, comprise several species, all of which are quite distinct from our bird, whose range extends over the whole of Europe, Asia as far eastward as Affghanistan, and Africa as far south as the equator.

To say that the flight of the Golden Plover is rapid in the extreme, that it overtops the hills in flocks, and descends down the valleys like a shower of stones, that it trips over the ground with the utmost celerity, that it feeds more by night than by day, that its food consists of worms, insects, and their larvæ, that its weight is from seven to nine ounces, that the female exceeds her mate in size, and that she lays four large eggs, would not be adding to our stock of ornithological knowledge, since these points are as well known to every one acquainted with our native birds as to the writer of this chapter.

It will not be necessary to append a lengthy description of the colouring of the adults, since their appearance in summer and winter is correctly delineated on the accompanying Plates; but I may mention that the young birds at two days old are exceedingly pretty, having all the under surface, part of the wings, two stripes down the back, a space under the eye, a line along the forehead, and the back of the neck white, the remainder of the plumage marbled with orange and black; the legs purplish flesh-colour; and the bill rather darker. One of the two accompanying Plates represents a male, a female, and four young birds, all of life-size, in their summer dress; the other represents the bird as seen in its winter costume, with a number of reduced figures in the distance.