

CHARADRIUS PLUVIALIS, *Linn.*

Golden Plover.

- Charadrius pluvialis* (winter) et *apricarius* (summer), Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 254.
Pluvialis apricarius, Bonap. Compt. Rend. de l'Acad. des Sci., tom. xliii. (1856) p. 34.
——— *aurea minor*, Briss. Orn., tom. v. p. 47.
——— —, Macgill. Hist. Brit. Birds, vol. ii. p. 94.
——— *auratus*, Suckow, Naturg. der Thiere, tom. ii. p. 1592.
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In commencing the history of the Golden Plover, shall I speak of it in an Epicurean sense, as being one of our best birds for the table, and as playing a part in commerce equal to that of the Snipe and the Woodcock? shall I approach the subject with an account of its habits and economy during the months of winter, when it assembles in flocks, and runs over our fallow fields and barren heaths? or shall I speak of it in the mountain-home where it spends the summer among flowery ling and heather-bells, where it sends forth its pipe to the antlered monarch, trips beside the blue hare, or tilts with the Grouse that may approach too near its nesting-place? At this period its vesture of black is beautifully relieved by streaks of white and spangles of yellow, and the bird is in its greatest beauty. Few persons are aware that the Golden Plover undergoes a seasonal transformation. Linnæus and many of the older authors considered that these very distinct plumages were indications of specific distinctness: but it is my place to depict the remarkable differences which occur in the summer and winter liveries of some of our native birds; and the present is one of them.

I believe the opinion is entertained that purity of colour and richness of markings depend in a great measure upon elevation, the clearness of the atmosphere and the non-obstruction of the rays of light; whether this be correct or not, I have always found that the greater the elevation a bird frequents, be it a Ptarmigan or a Plover, the richer are the tints of its plumage in summer, and the greater the contrast of its winter dress. These features, too, are still more apparent among continental than island examples; thus the Ptarmigan and Golden Plovers of Norway are far finer, and undergo a more complete change in summer and winter, than those of Scotland or Ireland. The like is the case with other birds, of which I could cite numerous instances, were it necessary. I enter into these little digressions, because I believe they are not without their interest, and for the sake of variety; for the habits of our native birds have been so repeatedly and so ably described, that the subject is well-nigh exhausted.

About the fall of the leaf, or when autumn presages the coming winter, the Golden Plovers, both adults and young, leave the misty mountain-side, and, assembling in flocks, visit every portion of the central and southern districts of England, from the Cheviots to Cornwall. It may now be seen in all the open moorlands, fallow fields, commons, and great marshes, such as those which occur in Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk, on the sandhills near the sea-shore and the muddy flats left by the receding tide. Its great powers of flight enable it to pass over vast distances with such rapidity that, while at one moment it may be seen on the sea-shore, in half an hour's time it is miles away on some upland waste. The bird has now put on its winter livery, is very fat and in fine condition for the table, but continues to improve in this respect from the commencement of the autumn frosts until the ensuing February, when an entire change in its disposition occurs. "Coming events cast their shadows before:" the return of the sun induces it to remove to other localities, and to prepare for the performance of a more important duty—that of breeding. The assumption of the summer dress now commences with the appearance of black feathers on its previously white breast and throat, both sexes being under the same influence. By the end of April or the beginning of May most of the Golden Plovers have left the lowlands, some resorting to the Cheviots, others to the Grampians, the wilds of Sutherlandshire, and as far north as favourable situations occur, some even proceeding to Iceland. In Ireland the habits of the bird are precisely the same as in our own island, inasmuch as it spends the summer among the hills, and the autumn and winter on the lowlands and the sea-shore. Mr. Alfred Newton affirms that the bird certainly breeds in Yorkshire, and probably in Derbyshire also. Macgillivray has given so graphic a description of the habits of the Golden Plover, as witnessed by him in the summer, that I shall not hesitate to transcribe it here. "Amid the wild scenery of the rugged hills and sedgy valleys, the mellow notes of the Plover come gently and soothingly on the ear, and you feel, without being altogether conscious of its power, that it soothes the troubled mind as water cools the burning brow. As you listen to it, now distant, now nearer, and see the birds, with short flights, approaching as if to greet you, though in reality with more fear than confidence, with anxiety and apprehension, the bright sunshine that glances on their jetty breasts is faintly obscured by the white vapours that have crept up from the valley, and presently all around us is