

PLATALEA LEUCORODIA, Linn.

Spoonbill.

Platalea leucorodia, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 56.

——— *nivea*, Cuv. Règn. Anim., tom. i. p. 482.

——— *leucorodius*, Glog. Schles. Fauna, p. 50.

Platea leucorodia, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 33.

THE Spoonbills constitute an exceedingly well-defined genus of Grallatorial birds, comprising six or seven species, one or other of which inhabit Europe, Africa, India, Japan, and Australia. Generally speaking, only a single species frequents any one country; in Australia, however, there are two, the *Platalea regia* and *P. flavipes*; in Japan there are also said to be two, *P. major* and *P. minor*; while the faunas of North and South America are adorned with but a single species, the beautiful *P. ajaja*. In structure the genera *Platalea*, *Ibis*, and *Tantalus* are all closely affined; but the modification in the form of the bill leads each to assume a somewhat different mode of life, action, and economy; they all, however, frequent low humid and marshy situations, and live on the various inhabitants of such watery wastes. The Ibises and Tantali feed almost exclusively upon frogs, small fish, and mollusks, for the seizing of which their bills are admirably adapted; the Spoonbills, on the other hand, although sometimes partaking of the same kind of food, feed more exclusively on small crustaceans and shelled mollusks, aquatic worms, and seeds of water-plants, for the gathering of which their bills are equally well adapted. Most of, if not all, the Spoonbills are subject to a change of plumage at the nuptial season, which appears to be equally shared by both sexes; the *P. leucorodia* of Europe and the *P. regia* of Australia assume at that time a beautiful and full crest of lengthened feathers; and an assumption of ornamental feathers or colouring takes place on some part of the body in the other members of the genus.

In times gone by, the Common Spoonbill (*P. leucorodia*) was abundant in many of the marshy districts of England during the months of summer, and regularly bred in some of them, especially in those of our eastern counties; and that it still resorts to its old haunts, though in greatly diminished numbers, is evidenced by the fact that scarcely a year passes away without one, two, or more being seen or killed in the marshes of Romney or the broads of Suffolk and Norfolk; these occurrences, however, are too numerous to be detailed here. Whenever during the vernal and autumnal migration of the Spoonbill, the direction of the wind happens to be favourable for a journey to Britain, a few are almost certain to visit our shores. Once landed, persecution awaits them; every gunner is their enemy, and they are not allowed to rest until the fatal shot terminates their wandering. Every writer on British Birds has recorded numerous instances of its capture in our islands, from Scilly to Orkney and Shetland, from Norfolk, in the eastern part of England, to the most western county of Ireland; these I shall not repeat, but proceed to give some of the additional information I have more recently acquired, ending with an interesting letter respecting the bird's breeding in Holland, sent to me by P. L. Selater, Esq.

Mr. Gatcombe records in the 'Zoologist' for 1863 that on the 3rd of November, 1862, "three Spoonbills were killed at one shot, out of a flock of four, on the banks of St. Germain's River, in the vicinity of Plymouth. They were all young birds of the year." Mr. Bond informed me of two that were shot on the 12th of October, 1864, near Lydd, in Kent—and of two others, a male and a female, killed at Kingsbury Reservoir, Middlesex, on the 23rd of October, 1865, respecting which Mr. J. E. Harting has favoured me with the following particulars;—

"They were first observed at Kingsbury Reservoir, close to the edge of the water, and, on being disturbed and shot at, flew to some little distance and alighted near a flock of geese in a field, adjoining a farm-yard. It is thought that one of the birds was slightly wounded, and, dropping down to rest, was followed by the other. Had this not been the case, I think both birds would have gone away. However, they were pursued by two gunners, who, finding that they were very shy and could not be approached directly, employed a third person to go round through the farm-yard and drive them, whilst they concealed themselves in a favourable position under a bank, where some overhanging bushes formed a good screen. This plan had the desired effect; for the birds came right over them and were both killed. I was informed by one of the gunners, and by two or three labourers who saw these Spoonbills on the wing, that they flew something like Herons, but much faster, and with the neck stretched out at full length, like a Duck, instead of being thrown back, Heron-like, between the shoulders. They were not heard to utter any note.

"I found on examination that they were male and female birds of the year. The bill, of a brownish flesh-