

BOTAURUS LENTIGINOSUS.

American Bittern.

Ardea lentiginosa, Mont. Orn. Dict. Suppl., pl.

—— *stellaris*, var., Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 680.

—— *minor*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. vii. p. 35, pl. 65. fig. 3.

—— *mokoko*, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xiv. p. 440.

Botaurus freti Hudsonis, Briss. Orn., vol. v. p. 449.

—— *lentiginosus*, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xi. p. 596.

—— *minor*, Bonap. Geog. and Comp. List of Birds of Eur. and N. Amer., p. 48.

THERE are at least four or five instances on record of this Bittern having been killed in the British Islands; but it is questionable if it has ever been seen on the continent of Europe—a circumstance which is somewhat strange, and leads one to wonder how those which have wandered hither have found their way from America to this country. If the bird were endowed with great powers of flight or a structure which would enable it to rest on the great waters which intervene between the Old and the New Worlds, the passage would not be a difficult one. By what means, then, does it arrive here? The most plausible theory that presents itself to my mind is that the transit is effected by those birds which are blown off the coast of America resting from time to time on the great masses of floating sea-weed and pieces of timber so constantly occurring in the open ocean and especially in the Gulf-stream, which sets directly on our own shores and those of Northern Europe. If there were not such opportunities for resting, how would it be possible for the little *Regulus calendula* to reach Scotland, or the Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Belted Kingfisher to land in safety on the coast of Ireland? whence these feeble-winged birds never attempt to return, but make the best they can of the strange land they have lit upon until shot down and converted into trophies for the museum, examples for the pencil of the artist, and materials for a page or two in works of science, wherein they are recorded as accidental visitors.

The first recorded British specimen, the one “from which Colonel Montagu’s description and figure were taken, was shot by Mr. Cunningham in the parish of Piddletown, in Dorsetshire, in the autumn of 1804. Mr. Cunningham stated,” continues Yarrell, “that, when in pursuit of some Pheasants among the high banks between the broad ditches of some rich water-meadows about half a mile distant from the river Frome, the bird rose, and he shot it. The flight was rather rapid, and the bird made a noise something like the tap on a drum, which induced him to believe it was the Common Bittern; and as such he sent it to Colonel George, of Penryn, in Cornwall, who was at that time making a collection of birds. The specimen was quite fresh when it arrived at Penryn, where it was preserved; but the sex was not noted. When Colonel George disposed of his collection, this bird was bought for Colonel Montagu, and was afterwards with his other birds transferred to the British Museum, where it is still preserved.”

The second example was made known by Dr. Edward Moore, who in his “Catalogue of the Wading Birds of Devonshire,” published in the tenth volume of the ‘Magazine of Natural History,’ says:—“I have been so fortunate as to obtain a specimen shot at Mothecombe, near Plymouth, December 22, 1829.”

The knowledge of the occurrence of a third example near Christchurch in 1836, was communicated to Mr. Yarrell by the Rev. H. D. Fussell, of Ellingham, near Ringwood, Hants. Yarrell was also told by Mr. J. R. Wallace, of Douglas, in the Isle of Man, that a bird, believed to be of this species, had been procured on that island.

In October 1844 I had the pleasure of handling in the flesh the only specimen yet obtained in Scotland. It was killed on the property of my old and valued friend Sir William Jardine, Bart., in Dumfriesshire, with whom I was at the time on a visit at Jardine Hall.

In 1846 the late Mr. Thompson placed on record, in the ‘Annals and Magazine of Natural History,’ “the occurrence of an American Bittern in Ireland, the first known to have visited this island. The fresh skin being sent to Belfast to be preserved and mounted, came under my inspection on the 14th of November, 1845; and having learnt that it had been sent from Armagh by the distinguished astronomer Dr. T. R. Robinson—whose acutely observant eye had not failed to mark the differences between it and *Botaurus stellaris*,—I wrote to him for all particulars respecting the bird, and received the following information:—“It was shot by my second son, W. R. Robinson, about noon on the 12th of November last, in a bog, part of a flat partially drained tract called Llayde Bottoms, surrounded with hills, and a mile from Armagh. It was put up in sedge, seemed lazy, and flew heavily, not showing the usual wariness of the Bittern, but letting