

## ARDEA PURPUREA, Linn.

### Purple Heron.

- Ardea purpurea*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 236.  
—— *caspia*, S. G. Gmel. Reise, tom. ii. p. 193, tab. 14.  
—— *botaurus*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 636.  
—— *rufa*, Gmel. ibid., p. 642.  
—— *purpurata*, Gmel. ibid., p. 641.  
—— *rubiginosa*, Gmel. ibid., p. 632.  
—— *purpurascens*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 583.  
—— *variegata*, Scop. Ann., tom. i. no. 120.  
—— *monticola*, La Peyr.

IN structure, plumage, and ornamentation this bird is somewhat intermediate between the Common Heron and the Bittern; for it has the lengthened plumes and scantily clothed neck of the former, with the shorter legs and wide-spread toes of the latter. And so it is as regards its habits, manners, and economy. Like the Bittern, the Purple Heron is shy and recluse, frequenting rushy and watery marshes rather than the open country. Its nidification takes place among the reeds or on shrubby alders in the midst of swamps; while, as is well known, the Common Heron, with but few exceptions, nests on trees such as Scotch firs and oaks, at a considerable height above the ground. In number and colouring, the eggs of both birds are very similar. The principal food of the Common Heron is fish; while that of the Purple Heron consists of shrews, mice, frogs, reptiles, and insects—not that it will refuse fish if they come in its way. The Common Heron, with its long straight legs, exposes itself on the banks of rivers and estuaries, whence, always alert, it scans the surrounding districts. The present species, on the contrary, aided by its lengthened toes, skulks among the herbage on the watery beds of reeds and aquatic plants, from which it is not easily made to take wing; and then it only flies for a short distance to a place of greater security. Ornithologists generally admitting that these birds greatly differ, it is somewhat singular that they have never been generically separated and a distinctive name given to the Purple Heron.

However widely spread over the Old World the present species may be, it must only be regarded as a casual visitor to Britain, and its visits as both infrequent and irregular; still Yarrell states that “since the days of Pennant and Montagu many examples, in different states of plumage, have occurred in this country, particularly on the southern coast—one recorded by Dr. Edward Moore, of Plymouth, and others by Mr. Selby and Mr. Hoy; so that no doubt can remain of the propriety of including it in a history of British birds. Mr. Couch, of Polperro, sent Bewick a drawing taken from a specimen which alighted on a fishing-boat two or three leagues from the coast of Cornwall. The bird was caught and brought on shore alive, but soon died. Dr. Edward Moore notices two examples, both young birds, in Devonshire. In February 1839, Plumtre Methuen, Esq., sent me word that he had obtained a specimen shot near Plymouth.” Mr. Selby, who published in 1833, says, “I may mention that, in the month of May 1830, a fine male Purple Heron that was killed in Norfolk came into my possession, and its mate into that of Sir William Jardine;” and in a note, adds, “Since writing the above I have heard of three other specimens, two killed in Norfolk, and another near to London.” Mr. Hoy, in the ‘Magazine of Natural History’ for 1837 (vol. x. p. 116), says:—“Some time in the month of November 1835, a Purple Heron was obtained on the borders of a large piece of water, known by the name of King’s Fleet, near the mouth of the Woodbridge river, in Suffolk. The bird rose from the thick reeds which skirt the water, and was at first supposed to have been a Bittern by the person who shot it. This bird was in the plumage of the first year. From the redness of its colours at this age it may be readily mistaken for the Bittern when first seen. I have known two other instances of this species of Heron occurring in this county. I have also known two or three individuals to have been met with in Norfolk within a few years.” Mr. Thompson has also made known one instance of this bird having been killed in Ireland.

Mr. Stevenson, in his ‘Birds of Norfolk,’ after enumerating and repeating some of the occurrences mentioned by Yarrell, says, “Of late years I have known of but two specimens obtained in Norfolk, both in immature plumage. The first was shot on Hoveton broad on the 1st of July, 1862, by Lord Lilford, who, with a small party, was Flapper-shooting at the time. Another, in my own collection, was purchased in the Norwich market on the 28th of October, 1865; this bird, which was fat, weighed two pounds three ounces,