

'Transactions of the Wernerian Society of Edinburgh'. . . . I have recently been favoured by Dr. Edmonstone with the following notice respecting this beautiful bird:—"The first time I saw it was in 1808, when an individual had been shot by a lad, and hung up as a scarecrow. My next opportunity of seeing one was in the spring of 1812, when I succeeded in shooting the individual, the skin of which I presented, about a month or two afterwards, to my friend Mr. Bullock. He had seen the bird in Orkney in 1812; but this was the first specimen he had obtained, and it was the first recorded instance of its being killed in Britain. It continued to be exhibited in his collection till its dispersion."

Mr. Stevenson, of Norwich, informs me that "this beautiful species has occurred in Norfolk in several well-authenticated instances, although an interval of nearly thirty years elapsed between the appearance of the earlier specimens and those more recently obtained. Two examples are recorded in Hunt's 'Norfolk Birds' to have been taken in this county—one in April 1814, and another in January 1820. Of these, the former was killed at Felbrigg, the latter at Gunton, both in the vicinity of the coast near Cromer. From that time I can find no record of its appearance until 1844, when a fine specimen was shot at Beeston, also near Cromer. In the early part of 1847 a large White Owl was seen more than once in the neighbourhood of Brooke; and in 1849–50 no less than three were met with in different parts of the county in the short space of six months. Of these, the first was seen, but not shot, at Swannington, during the autumn of 1849; the second, a young male, was also shot at Beeston; and the third, a young male, though more advanced in plumage, was killed at St. Faith's, in February of the same year. I know of none since."

Similar instances might be given of the accidental occurrence of this bird in nearly every county of England and of its still more frequent occurrence in Ireland; but these visits do not appear to be regulated by any fixed laws: to detail, therefore, where every specimen has been killed, would be useless; but I may mention that the 'Morning Advertiser' of November 10, 1859, contained the following paragraph respecting this bird:—

"Snowy Owl (*Surnia nyctea*).—A very perfect specimen of this beautiful Owl was lately shot on the open moor at Knockie, in Invernesshire; it was stalked and shot with a rifle at eighty yards' distance. The extent of the outspread wings is 4 feet 9 inches; length 22 inches; weight 3 lbs. 5 oz.; plumage pure white, barred and spotted with dark brown."

Speaking of the Snowy Owl, as observed by him in Lapland, Mr. Wheelwright says:—

"Considering the number of eggs—eight or nine—that the Snowy Owl lays, and the wild inaccessible nature of the country in which its nest is usually built, I cannot help wondering that this bird is not more common on these fells; but if we take into consideration the immense fell-tract stretching from the Dovrefell, in Norway, right up to the North Cape, and think of the thousands of acres whereon human foot never treads, but over which these birds have almost an undisputed range, our wonder ceases. The old birds appear rarely to leave the high fells; and if we want them, we must seek them in their wild mountain home. They appear, however, to make periodical migrations after the Lemming, and therefore, in some seasons, are common in districts where they have perhaps not appeared for years. Still I fancy the Snowy Owl is more local than erratic.

"An opinion is held here that the Snowy Owl becomes whiter in the winter (which I think very probable), and that the female is always purer in colour than the male. It is clearly a diurnal bird; for any day when we went out on the fells we could see the White Owl perched on a distant rock watching us, or beating over the fells with a stately measured flight—always, however, out of gunshot. Its shriek, when on the wing, resembles a loud 'krau-au,' repeated three or four times; but it is seldom heard except when the bird is excited. Some of the movements of this bird are very extraordinary, and I once saw one fall from a considerable height on to the ground, where it lay for a time perfectly motionless, with outstretched wings, as if it were shot. I tried to creep up within gunshot; but it rose out of distance, and sailed away, uttering a wild loud cry, "Rick, rick, rick," as if mocking me.

"The egg of the Snowy Owl measures just the same in length as that of the Eagle Owl ($2\frac{1}{4}$ inches); its breadth is $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch, that of the Eagle Owl being 2 inches full. The nest was nothing more than a large ball of reindeer moss, placed on the ledge of a bare fell. The old birds appeared to guard it most jealously; in fact the Laps often kill them with a stick when they are robbing the nest."—*Field*, Jan. 31, 1863.

The Snowy Owl bears confinement remarkably well, as evidenced by the state of contentment in which several examples have lived, in the Gardens of the Zoological Society, for many years.

Much variation occurs in the plumage of this species, some individuals, of both sexes, being entirely white, while others are more or less numerous marked and barred with brown.

The front figure in the Plate represents a female, in the barred (and probably adult) state of plumage, about two-thirds of the natural size.