NYCTEA NIVEA.

Snowy Owl.

Strix nyctea, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 132.

— nivea, Daud. Traité d'Orn., tom. ii. p. 190.

— candida, Lath. Ind. Orn., Suppl. p. 14.

— wapacuthu, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 291.

— arctica, Bartr. Trav., p. 285.

Nyctea erminea, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. vii. p. 251.

— cinerea, Steph. Cont. Shaw Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 63.

Surnia nyctea, Edmonst. Mem. Wern. Soc., vol. iv. p. 157.—Thomps. Ann. Nat. Hist. vol. i. p. 241.

Noctua nyctea, Boié, Isis, 1822, p. 770.

Nyctea nivea, Brehm, Isis, 1834.

—— candida, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 217.

The Snowy Owl belongs to a great group of birds, so universally dispersed that I believe no portion of the world is destitute of one or other of its members. This universal distribution of the Strigidæ, some of which are nocturnal, while others are diurnal, is no less interesting than are the diversities of structure observable among them: some are adapted for the capture of living prey of large size, others for seizing the smaller quadrupeds and birds, and others again for insects and their larvæ. Thus the huge Athenes of Australia destroy the Koalas, the Phalangers, the smaller Kangaroos, Perameles, and other less important Marsupials; the Huhua nipalensis of India is said by Mr. Jerdon to prey on hares, cats, rats, and fish; and in Africa we find the Scotopelia Peli, whose great size and extraordinarily developed talons, we may be assured, are adapted either for a similar purpose or, perhaps, for the destruction of the Colobi and other Monkeys of that country. In the northern regions of the Old World, we have the two powerful species of the genus Bubo. Of the natural food of these Great Owls we know but little, except that they are said to feed on fawns, hares, rats, and small quadrupeds, and birds of many kinds, particularly Ptarmigan and Grouse. The members of the restricted genus Strix are more universally dispersed than those of any other form of the entire family, and feed almost exclusively on mice and other small Rodents. The diurnal Owls, forming the genus Noctua, prey upon birds and insects; and it is probable that the numerous minute species found in South America are mortal enemies to the Trochilidæ, in confirmation of which I may mention that these little birds show their aversion to the Owls, by attacking them with the utmost fury whenever they come in contact with them. To generalize further on the Strigidæ as a whole would be out of place; and I have merely made these few remarks on their distribution and varied habits for those of my readers who are not professed ornithologists, and to state that the Snowy Owl is a denizen of the ice-bound regions of northern Europe, Siberia, Iceland, Greenland, Labrador, and the country north of Davis's and Barrow's Straits between America and the unknown land; it also tenants the icebergs which become separated from the mainland and float towards warmer regions: the Snowy Owl finds a plentiful supply of food in the numerous birds which settle on these floating masses; here, in company with Polar Bears, with which it shares the seal and the walrus, it spends much of its time; and its whole structure, colouring, and thick plumage are wonderfully adapted for such a mode of life. Cold has no effect upon it; on the contrary, it is what it covets. During the breeding-season it proceeds further south, and seeks the milder countries of Norway, Finland, Russia, and the fur-countries of America. On the bleak moorland, where none other but the Lapp or the Esquimaux sets his foot, the Snowy Owl performs the duty of reproduction, its nest being placed on the ground, and its numerous progeny reared among Hares, Lemmings, Ptarmigans, &c., which afford them an abundance of nutriment.

Dr. Falconer has called my attention to a passage in Wrangel's 'Expedition to the Polar Sea:'—" Saw a flight of geese going N.N.W., and a White Owl (Strix nyctea), on the 1st of May, 150 werst, i. e. 100 miles, beyond the Paranon Rocks, and north of the coast-line of Arctic Siberia." At page exxiii, he says that "the Owl is a carnivorous bird, and follows the White Bear to feed on the remains of his prey," meaning that he follows the Bear out upon the ice away from the land.

In the British Islands, therefore, my readers will be prepared to learn that it is only a chance visitor; still its visits are by no means unfrequent, as the following notices of its occurrence (which I give on the authority of their outhors) will tostify

of their authors) will testify.

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