FALCO CANDICANS, J. F. Gmel.

Greenland Falcon, light race (adult and young).

Falco candicans, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 275.

— grænlandicus, Daud. Traité d'Orn., tom. ii. p. 107.

— fuscus, Fabr. Faun. Grænl., p. 56.

— arcticus, Holb.

Hierofalco candicans, Cuv. Règn. Anim., edit. 1, tom. i. p. 312.

— grænlandicus, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., tom. i. p. 16.

Falco (Hierofalco) candicans, Blas. List of Birds of Eur., Eng. edit. p. 3.

— gyrfalco grænlandicus, Schleg.

THE bird under consideration is the Falco candicans of Gmelin, F. grænlandicus of Daudin, and F. arcticus of Holböll, specific names which at the same time furnish the reader with some idea of the colouring of this species and intimate the countries it inhabits. The native home, then, of this fine Falcon is the high northern regions, within rather than without the arctic circle, from which youthful (and, occasionally, adult) birds wander during autumn and winter to more temperate latitudes; and hence it is that some parts of America and Europe are now and then favoured with its visits. In the course of the present work hints have from time to time been thrown out as to the probability, nay, almost certainty, of the existence of some unknown land near the pole, to which rare birds retire to breed, and, perhaps, fat reindeer resort, as they do to Spitzbergen, for pasture, free from the molestation of man. If there be such an open country, then the present bird, doubtless, also frequents it. For myself I have always considered the very high northern regions to be the principal habitat of this the whitest of Falcons, a bird which possesses features whereby it may at all times be distinguished from its near allies. Even from a very early stage it differs from both the Iceland and the Gyrfalcon, and on attaining maturity acquires characters which neither of those birds possesses; there are also other differences, which indicate its distinctness still more strikingly, namely the light or yellowish-white colouring of the cere, legs, toes, and even the claws, and the fact that the young birds in their early plumage are white or nearly white, while the young of the other two species are very dark. Surely, if these differences are constant, we should not hesitate to adopt the distinctive appellation assigned to it.

"The Greenland Falcon," remarks Professor Newton in his edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds,' "seems to be most plentiful in the inhospitable regions which enclose Baffin's Bay and extend to the westward. From this tract adult birds seldom wander to other lands, though the young, especially in autumn and winter, occur regularly in Iceland, and not unfrequently in the Dominion of Canada from Newfoundland westward, the United States, the British Islands, and even in countries still more remote from the place of their birth. They are, no doubt, driven away by their parents, as is commonly the habit with birds of prey, and follow the large flocks of Waterfowl, which are bred in the north, on their southward migration, though it would appear that the ptarmigan forms the chief sustenance of the old birds. At the same time it must not be supposed that in Greenland the white form only is found. In the southern districts of that country the Iceland Falcon is certainly numerous; and, on the other hand, there is good reason for believing that the Greenland Falcon breeds in some of the northern parts of British America. Writing of what was doubtless this form of Falcon, Sir John Richardson in the 'Fauna Boreali-americana' says:—'In the middle of June 1821, a pair of these birds attacked me as I was climbing in the vicinity of their nest, which was built on a lofty precipice on the borders of Point Lake, in latitude $65\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$. They flew in circles, uttering loud and harsh screams, and alternately stooping with such velocity that their motion through the air produced a loud rushing noise, they struck their claws within an inch or two of my head. I endeavoured, by keeping the barrel of my gun close to my cheek, and suddenly elevating its muzzle when they were in the act of striking, to ascertain whether they had the power of instantaneously changing the direction of their rapid course, and found that they invariably rose above the obstacle with the quickness of thought, showing equal acuteness of vision and power of motion.'

"It has already been said that this Falcon occurs yearly in Iceland; but it does not breed there; and the only instance on record of its having been seen in that island in summer is that mentioned by Herr Preyer in his travels. It has very probably occurred on the continent of Europe; but, owing to the way in which it has been confounded with the cognate forms, the point cannot at present be decided. The same confusion renders useless many of the records of the appearance of large Falcons in the United Kingdom.

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