HERRING GULL.

Larus argentatus, *Brunn.*

Le Goêland à manteau bleu.

The Herring Gull is very abundant along the shores of Great Britain, as well as those of the European Continent. It remains with us during the whole of the year, occasionally visiting our lakes, rivers, and inland waters. The British Islands and the coast of Holland may be considered nearly the extent of its range southwards. M. Temminck informs us, that although the young are occasionally found along the shores of the Mediterranean, the adults are very seldom to be seen there. They breed along the rocky parts of our own coast, particularly at the Isle of Wight, from Fresh-water Gate to the pointed rocks called the Needles; the coasts of Wales, Scotland and the adjacent islands; as well as the lengthened and precipitous coast of Norway and the shores of the Baltic generally. At the time of incubation, these birds assemble in numerous companies, often associating with Guillemots, Razor-bills, and Puffins. They compose their nest of marine vegetables, which is placed on the ledges of rocks, or elevations covered with herbage, as samphire, grasses, &c., the female laying two or three eggs, about two inches and a half long, by one inch and three quarters in breadth, of a greenish olive colour spotted with black and ash brown; in the depth of ground colour and disposition of the markings there is, however, great variety. Independently of the variation in plumage which this bird undergoes in passing from youth to the adult state, there is another change which annually takes place in mature birds,—a deviation from the usual law which under similar circumstances is found to occur.

In the winter, the head, neck and chest no longer retain the pure white which forms the livery of the breeding season, but each of the feathers which cover these parts becomes streaked with a longitudinal mark of brown, so as to give it a mottled appearance; the rest of the plumage remains unaltered. The top of the back and scapulars are of a pure blueish ash; the quills black, each feather tipped with white; the rump, tail and whole of the under surface uniform white; beak yellow; the under mandible has the angular projection of a bright red; the naked skin round the eyes yellow; irides delicate straw yellow; legs and feet flesh-coloured. Length about twenty-two inches. It is not before the third year, at least, that the Herring Gull attains its perfect state of plumage. The young at first have the head, neck, and all the under parts grey mottled with light brown; the upper parts light ash-brown; tail-feathers whitish at the base, becoming gradually brown to their termination; quill-feathers blackish brown just tipped with white; beak dark brown or horn-colour; naked circle round the eye and irides brown; feet blueish brown. From this stage they may be seen in all their intermediate degrees, up to that of maturity, which may be considered as perfect in the fourth year;—it is, however, more than probable that before this ultimate change they commence breeding, as we have seen them at nest with the remains of the colours of nonage intermingled with the white and blue of maturity.

Our Plate represents an adult male, and a young bird in the second year, two thirds of their natural size.