

COMMON TERN.

Sterna Hirundo, Linn.

La Hirondelle-de-mer Pierre Garin.

ALL the members of this interesting tribe inhabiting the British Islands are strictly migratory: several species visit us for the purpose of breeding, while others, being inhabitants of more distant countries, are of more rare occurrence.

The Common Tern, although not universally dispersed over our coasts, is nevertheless a very abundant species, being found in great numbers over the southern shores, but more sparingly over the northern, which are almost exclusively inhabited by its near ally the Arctic Tern.

It is now satisfactorily ascertained that the Common Tern does not extend its range to the American Continent, and that its place is there supplied by another species, to which the Prince of Musignano has given the specific appellation of *Wilsonii*, in honour of the celebrated ornithologist by whom it was first described.

How far the Common Tern is distributed over the Old Continent we have not satisfactorily ascertained, but we believe its range is extended from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean, and even to the coast of Africa and India, to which southern and eastern countries it is supposed to retire during our winters.

The Common Tern does not confine itself entirely to the sea, but frequently resorts to inland streams, &c.; and when thus ascending our creeks and rivers these little fairies of the ocean fearlessly fish around our boats, nothing can be more pleasing than to observe their poise and dip. When with their scrutinizing eyes they have observed a fish sufficiently near the surface, they precipitate themselves upon it with an unerring certainty, and a rapidity that is truly astonishing; this mode of capture strongly reminds us of the *Fissirostral* tribe among the land birds, and they may, indeed, be truly termed the Swallows of the ocean, their long and pointed wings, and small but muscular bodies, being admirably adapted for rapid and sustained flight, and affording the means by which they are enabled to traverse the surface of the deep with never-tiring wings.

The Common Tern breeds upon the sand or shingle beyond high-water mark, making no nest, but scraping a slight hollow for its eggs, which are two or three in number, and which vary much in colour, some being of a deep olive green, while others are of a cream colour, but all blotched with blackish brown and ash grey. "In warm and clear weather," says Mr. Selby, "this bird incubates little during the day, the influence of the sun upon the eggs being sufficient; but it sits upon them in the night, and also through the day under a less favourable state of the weather. The young when excluded are assiduously attended by the parents, and are well supplied with food until they are able to fly and accompany them to sea. During the time of incubation the old birds display great anxiety, and are very clamorous when any one approaches their station, in flying round and frequently descending so near as to strike the hat of the intruder."

Forehead, crown, and occiput black; back, wings, and tail pearl grey, the edge of the external quill in the wing being black for three parts of its length; face, sides of the head, neck, and all the under surface white; bill bright red for two thirds of its length, the tip black; legs and feet bright red.

The Plate represents two adults, one in the winter and the other in the summer plumage, of the natural size.