

SANDWICH TERN.

Sterna cantiaca, Gmel.

L'Hirondelle de Mer caugek.

Like most others of its race, the Sandwich Tern visits the British Isles only during the warmer part of the year, breeding along our shores; and in some localities, as the coast of Kent, Essex, and the Farn Islands off Northumberland, being in considerable abundance. As the severity of winter approaches, and drives into deeper water the young crustacea and fishes on which it feeds, it leaves us for more temperate latitudes, where its food is ever accessible. It is one of the largest of our British Terns, and, unlike some of the genus, is seldom or never seen along inland rivers or upon the large European lakes. Its locality is very extensive, there being few coasts in the Old World where it is not found. In manners and general economy, it differs in no respect from its congeners, being equally remarkable for rapid flight and all that activity and address which fit it for passing over the rough billows of the rock-bound sea.

The process of nidification—for nest it makes little or none—takes place on the naked rock, the shingly beach, or other situations close to the edge of the water. The eggs are two or three in number, marbled with brown or black on a whitish ground.

The male and female offer but little difference of plumage, both being remarkable for a jet black head in summer, which becomes mottled in autumn, and wholly white, or nearly so, in winter. The young, on the contrary, display a very different state of colouring, exhibiting on the upper surface a succession of arrow-shaped marks of black on a light grey ground. In this stage it has been called the Striated Tern by Gmelin and Latham.

In one particular the present bird is very remarkable, having a black beak (the tip alone being yellow in the adult), black tarsi and toes, whereas most of the species of this genus are uniform in the rich red with which these parts are deeply tinted.

In the full plumage of summer, the adult has the head and occiput jet black; the upper parts delicate blueish ash; the sides of the head, the throat and under parts pure white; the bill black with a yellow tip, and the tarsi black. In winter the head is white; and in the intermediate season the progress of change goes on through various stages of mingled black and white, the black of the head returning with the spring.

The young of the first autumn resemble the parents in the colour of the beak and tarsi, except that the former is black to the tip; the upper parts are light grey, the head being barred with transverse semilunar marks of black, and the rest of the upper surface with arrow-headed spots of blackish brown, the quills alone being clear; the under surface white.

The Plate represents an adult of its natural size, and a young bird of the first year in the mottled livery.