

Genus ALCA.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* straight, arched, large, very much curved at the point; both mandibles laterally sulcated, and covered for half their length with short feathers. *Nostrils* near the lower edge of the upper mandible partly concealed by feathers. *Wings* short, narrow, and in one species unequal to the purpose of flight. *Legs* short, situated far backwards. *Toes* three before, webbed as far as the claws; hind toe wanting; front of the tarsi and toes scutellated. *Tail* short, pointed, and consisting of twelve or sixteen feathers.

G R E A T A U K.

Alca impennis, Linn.

Le Pingouin brachiptère.

In this noble species of Auk we recognise a close approximation to the true Penguins, which form the genus *Aptenodytes*: being, like them, destitute of the powers of flight, its narrow slender wing serves more as an oar for aquatic progression than for any other decided purpose; unless, perhaps, in assisting the bird to scramble up the rocks, on the ledges of which it deposits its single egg, which is, indeed, the only time at which it makes the solid earth its abode.

The seas of the polar regions, agitated with storms and covered with immense icebergs, form the congenial habitat of the Great Auk: here it may be said to pass the whole of its existence, braving the severest winters with the utmost impunity, so that it is only occasionally seen, and that at distant intervals, even so far south as the seas adjacent to the northernmost parts of the British Islands. It is found in abundance along the rugged coasts of Labrador; and from the circumstance of its having been seen at Spitzbergen, we may reasonably conclude that its range is extended throughout the whole of the arctic circle, where it may often be seen tranquilly reposing on masses of floating ice, to the neighbourhood of which in the open ocean it seems to give a decided preference. Like the common Razor-billed Auk, it exhibits an annual change in the colours of its throat and neck, the jet black of these parts giving way to white in winter. Deficient as the Great Auk may be in the powers of flight and of easy unconstrained progression on the land, these deficiencies are amply compensated by its extraordinary capability of diving and its express adaptation to the watery element: here it is truly at ease, following its prey and sporting in the midst of the waves. Its food consists exclusively of fish of various species, which, however rapid they may be in their motions, it captures with the utmost facility.

Its single egg is deposited on the naked rock, either in some natural fissure or crevice just above the reach of the highest tides; its colour white tinged with buff, marked with spots and crooked lines of brownish black. The young take to the water immediately after exclusion from the egg, and follow the adults with fearless confidence.

There exists but little or no difference between the size or plumage of the sexes. In summer the whole of the upper surface is black, with the exception of a large white space before the eyes and the tips of the secondary quill-feathers; the whole of the under surface white; bill and legs black, the former being marked with oblique transverse furrows of a lighter tint.

The Plate represents an adult in its summer dress about two thirds of the natural size.