

BLACK GUILLEMOT.

Uria Grylle, Lath.

Le Guillemot à miroir blanc.

THE northern parts of Scotland and the Orkney and Shetland Islands form a place of general rendezvous for the Black Guillemot, which being less migratory in its habits than its near ally the Foolish Guillemot (*Uria Troile, Lath.*) seldom quits these isolated groups, whose bays afford it shelter during the stormy season of winter, and whose abrupt and precipitous cliffs are equally inviting as a site for incubation. On the ledges of these rocks it deposits its single white egg spotted with black: the young are hatched in about three weeks, and shortly after are conveyed, but by what means is unknown, to the water, an element to which they are so expressly adapted that they are enabled to swim and dive with the utmost facility the moment they arrive on its surface, and to brave with impunity the rough seas which are so prevalent in northern latitudes. After the process of reproduction is over, the adults are subject to a considerable change in the colour of their plumage, apparently caused by a general moult, even to the primaries, which are so simultaneously lost that the bird is for a considerable period deprived of the power of flight. The fine black plumage by which the Black Guillemot is characterized during the summer now gives place to a mottled dress, consisting of half white and half black feathers unequally dispersed over the body, the former colour predominating so much during the rigorous season of winter as to render the bird almost wholly white. Although this style of plumage characterizes, to a certain extent, the young of the year, still the latter may at all times be distinguished from the former by having the tips of each feather, which is white beneath, only fringed with black; by having the white spot on the wings, at all times uniform in the adult, invariably clouded with black; and by the feet being yellowish brown instead of red.

Although a few pairs of the Black Guillemot occasionally breed on the Isle of May in the mouth of the Frith of Forth, still it is evident that the high northern latitudes form its most congenial and natural habitat. It appears to abound in the arctic circle, being equally common in the polar regions of both continents. According to the continental writers, it is less abundant on the coasts of Holland and France than on those of England, but more frequent on those of Norway and the shores of the Baltic. It rarely, if ever, resorts to inland waters.

Its principal food consists of small fish, marine crustacea, &c.

The sexes are alike in plumage, and the adults, in summer, may be distinguished by their having the whole of the plumage of a sooty-black tinged with olive-green, with the exception of a snow-white patch on the centre of each wing; bill black; irides and feet red.

The Plate represents an adult and a young bird of the natural size.