

ART. VIII. ON SOME OF THE RARER BIRDS OF NOVA SCOTIA.
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ALTHOUGH instinct may be considered the primary cause of the periodical migrations of birds, yet the occurrence of severe gales of wind at the time of such migrations, has the effect of moving the migrants to localities, in some cases, far distant from those intended to be visited. Migratory birds are naturally led to visit northern latitudes in spring, for the double purpose of procuring suitable breeding-places, and the proper kind of food to nourish their young ere they arrive at an age when more substantial substances can be taken by them; while their journey south in autumn is a matter of positive necessity, from the entire absence of insect life, and food of nearly all descriptions, while winter reigns with its accustomed severity over the more northern portions of our western hemisphere.

Nova Scotia being situate on the north-eastern extremity of America, and joined by a mere neck of land to the main, appears to be a favourite point for birds to pass over on their course to and from their usual breeding haunts, in the secluded interior of Labrador; and so punctual are they in their movements each season, that unless some unusual change of weather takes place about the time, they arrive at their casual haunts in Nova Scotia almost to a day. The Wild Goose (*Anser Canadensis*) and Golden Plover (*Charadrius marmoratus*), are two instances of the kind. The former, which is the common wild goose of America, makes its appearance in Nova Scotia generally about the first week in March, passing in large flocks at a great height in the air, in a northerly direction. They descend when a favourable resting place attracts their attention, but soon pass onwards on their northern voyage. I am informed that some of these birds do not leave the island of Prince Edward, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, a little to the north of Nova Scotia, until about the first week in June; but I imagine this occurrence takes place only when the previous winter has been long protracted, and the accumulated ice in the Gulf gives warning to the birds that the far north is not fit for

their reception. I have known them to be as late as the 1st of April in passing north, although this is a very unusual occurrence. This was in 1863. They return south about the 1st of September. The golden plover merely makes Nova Scotia one of its resting places during the autumnal migration, for very few are observed in spring. It arrives very punctually, generally on or about the 22nd of August, and in considerable numbers. It stays about a week, and then passes to the south. It is worthy of remark that the golden plover, in its progress towards its northern breeding places, takes the land-route, passing over the eastern portion of the United States, while on its passage north it takes the ocean-route. This latter course is well authenticated by the remarks of that observant naturalist, Mr. J. L. Hurdis, in "The Naturalist in Bermuda," who gives the testimony of several well-known masters of merchant vessels, in regard to the vast flights of these birds met with at sea during their several passages from Nova Scotia to the West Indies during the month of September, in various years.

Their arrival in the West India Islands is also clearly established by the same authority. The island of Antigua is annually visited about the beginning of September by countless multitudes of plover; and on one occasion they made their appearance in such multitudes in St. John's, the chief town of the colony, that the inhabitants were seen in every direction shooting them from the doors and windows; indeed, so numerous were they, that boys destroyed them with sticks and stones, and shooting them soon ceased to be considered sport. They remained in the island for ten or fifteen days only, taking their departure south as soon as the weather became settled. The island of Martinique is also visited by amazing numbers of these birds. In Barbadoes, during a south-west gale, on the morning of the 12th September, 1846, these birds were so numerous that they were struck down with stones, and thousands were shot. Mr. Hurdis considers that after visiting the West India Islands, the plover finally settle down for the winter months in Venezuela and Guiana, and other northern portions of South America.

I have alluded, at the commencement of this paper, to the effect of gales of wind upon the arrival of birds at particular

positions, where they otherwise are rarely, if ever, observed; and I cannot omit to notice, in connection with this subject, the unusual opportunities afforded me and my brother naturalists, Major Wedderburn and Mr. Hurdis, while residing in the Bermudas, of observing the effect of wind storms upon various species of North American migratory birds. During the months of September and October, particularly the latter month, the vast numbers of birds, of very different species, which invariably made their appearance after a heavy gale from the north west, proved beyond a doubt, that while on their southern passage down the eastern coast of America, they became the sport of the tempest, and whirled hither and thither at its mercy, got at last happily cast upon the sunny isles of Bermuda, while thousands of their fellows no doubt met with a watery grave.*

Over 130 species of North American birds, never known to breed or even reside for more than a few days in these islands, have been observed at different times after heavy northern gales, and some of them which we know to be strictly boreal forms could not have migrated so far south of their own accord. The Snow Bunting (*Emberiza nivalis*), and the snowy owl (*Strix nyctea*) are examples that might be added to.

During my observations both in Europe and America, I have found that occasionally a bird, perhaps of a different kind altogether, will accompany a flock of other birds on their migration, and live with them on the best of terms. Such birds, termed "stragglers," generally prove to be the greatest rarities, for it must be by the merest accident that one solitary bird manages to get separated from its kind and travel perhaps thousands of miles to a country perfectly foreign to its accustomed habitat.

Of the rarer birds of Nova Scotia, which up to the present time have come under my observation, I may mention the following:—

GREAT AMERICAN WHITE EGRET; (*Ardea alba*.)—Of this magnificent bird I only know of one specimen having been ob-

* Many birds on landing, in the Bermudas are so weak, that a person may take them with the hand.

served in Nova Scotia, which was shot in the summer of 1867, on the shore of Halifax Harbour, and is now in my collection.

SNOWY HERON, (*Ardea candidissima*.)—Although not so rare as the former species, it may be considered uncommon, as I believe there are few recorded instances of its capture. A very fine specimen was shot by Mr. George Drillio, of Halifax, some few years ago, in a marsh up the country.

KING EIDER, (*Anas spectabilis*.)—This fine bird, which is common in the far north about Hudson's Bay and the north coast of Labrador, occurs but rarely on our shores. The only specimen that has come under my observation was shot in March, 1863, near Halifax Harbor, and was kindly presented to me by Mr. J. R. Willis. It was a male bird.

CURLEW SANDPIPER, (*Tringa subarquata*.)—On the eastern coast of America, this bird ranges from Labrador as far south as Florida; but it appears to be but little known on the Nova Scotian coast, and may be classed among our rarer species. Dr. Bernard Gilpin, of Halifax, kindly forwarded me a specimen that had been shot by his son at the mouth of Halifax Harbour, in September, 1868.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER, (*T. pectoralis*.)—This species may be considered rare on our coast, although much more common than the former species. It is found as far south as the West Indies. I am also indebted to Dr. Gilpin for a specimen of this bird.

SCHINZ'S SANDPIPER, (*T. Schinzii*.)—This northern species, which, however, is found occasionally as far south as Florida, is another of our rarer sandpipers. Like as is the case with the former species, a few stragglers join the flocks of common sandpipers on their migrations up and down the eastern coast of America, and thus fall to the gun of our shore sportsman.