

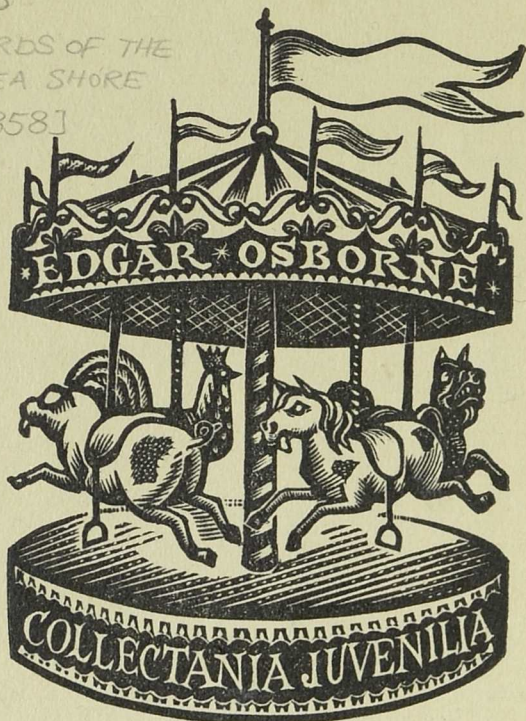
THE
BIRDS
OF THE
SEA SHORE.



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[1858]



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BIRDS
—
OF THE
SEA SHORE
ILLUSTRATED.

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LONDON:
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE;
SOLD AT THE DEPOSITORIES,
GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS;
4, ROYAL EXCHANGE; 16, HANOVER STREET, HANOVER SQUARE;
AND BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

THE HERON. (*Ardea Cinerea.*)

THE Heron is a long, lank, awkward bird, and yet its plumage gives it, on the whole, an agreeable appearance. Without its feathers, it looks as if it had been starved to death. It seldom weighs more than three or four pounds, although it measures above three feet in length, and five in breadth, from tip to tip of the extended wing.

In the breeding season Herons collect in large numbers, and build their nests on trees with stick, lined with dry grass, wool, or whatever other warm material they can get. But though they build and roost on trees, we may nevertheless place them with our sea birds, as they live almost exclusively on fish, and may constantly be seen near our shores, fishing in the marshes or streams which empty themselves into the sea. There a solitary Heron may be often observed, standing, like a silent and patient creature, up to his knees in water, even in the most severe weather, watching for its prey, which its keen eye soon perceives, and which it strikes with its sharp bill. Herons have prodigious appetites, and swallow an immense quantity of fish, which is rapidly digested.

The female lays from four to five eggs, of a pale greenish-blue colour.

HERON



THE DUNBAR SANDPIPER. (*Tringa.*)

THESE are interesting little birds, which appear in great numbers on the sea-shore in various parts of Great Britain. They feed on insects, sea-worms, and the small shell-fish that are found in such numbers on our beaches. They run very nimbly close to the edges of the flowing or retreating wave, incessantly wagging their tails, and busily engaged all the time in picking up the food which their instinct tells them they shall find so fresh at the margin of the waves; and while thus employed, it is easy to watch the habits of these active and fearless little birds.

On taking flight, which they always do in flocks, they give a kind of scream, and skim along the surface of the water with great rapidity, never making their flights directly forward, but in large semi-circles, sometimes looking quite silvery, at other times black, according as their backs or breasts are seen.

The female lays four eggs on the bare sand, just above high-water mark, without any nest, but places them all close together, with the pointed ends meeting. At night, or in bad weather, she never leaves them; but in fine weather she is frequently off them while feeding.



THE DUNBAR SANDPIPER.

THE STORMY PETREL.

(*Thalassidroma Pelagica.*)

THE Stormy Petrel is a bird well known to us as a frequenter of our shores, where it has obtained the familiar name of "Mother Carey's Chicken." It is about the size of a Swallow, and not altogether unlike it in appearance. Provided with long wings and web feet, it can both fly and swim with ease, and has also the power of walking or running on the water, from whence, it is said, it derives its English name of *Petrel*, from St. Peter walking on the sea. They are not favourites with sailors, as their appearance is supposed to show the approach of a storm.

Their whole bodies are so filled with oil, that the inhabitants of the Hebrides actually make them into candles by merely thrusting a rush through their bodies, and bringing it out at the beak, when it is found to burn brightly.

W. S. S. PETER



THE PUFFIN. (*Mormon Fratercula.*)

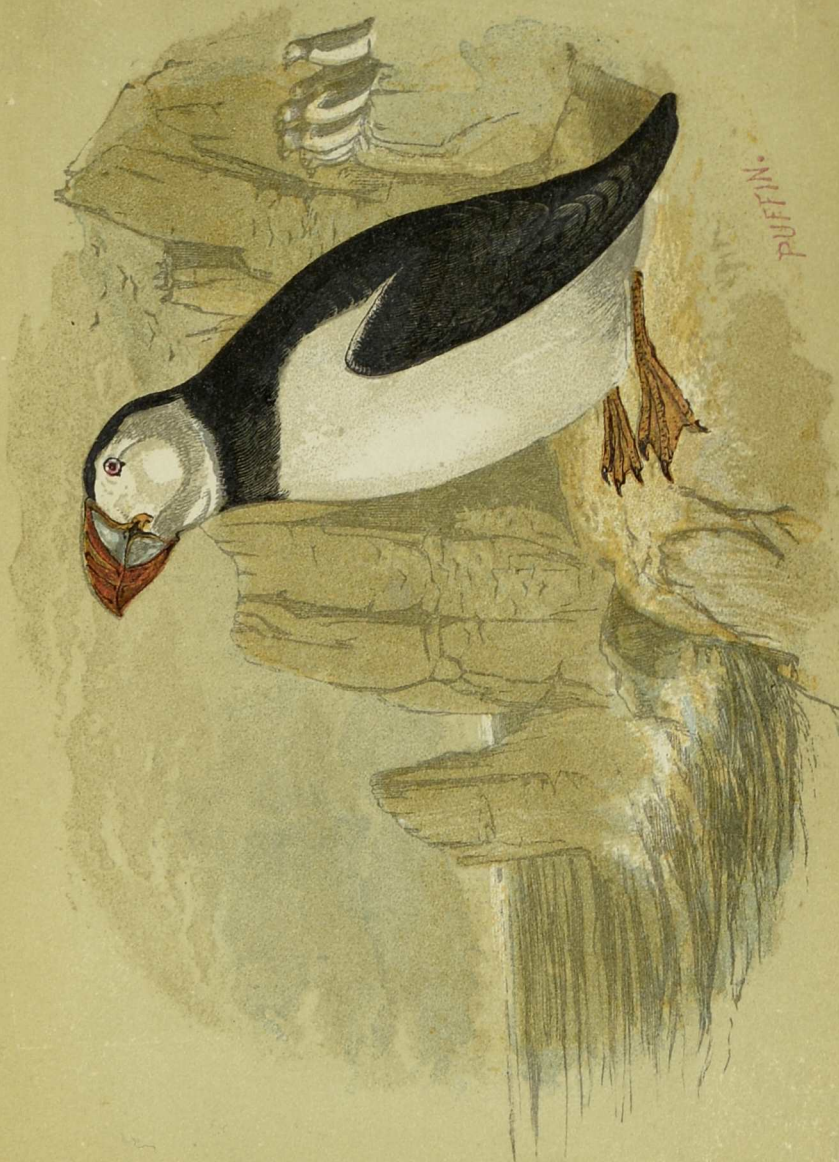
THE Puffin, although not found generally on our shores, yet collects in prodigious numbers on some favourite spots. One of the most frequented is Puffin Island, near Beaumaris. The southern coast of Pembrokeshire likewise abounds with them.

It has a curiously-formed beak, somewhat resembling the Parrot's, and hence it is sometimes called the Sea Parrot.

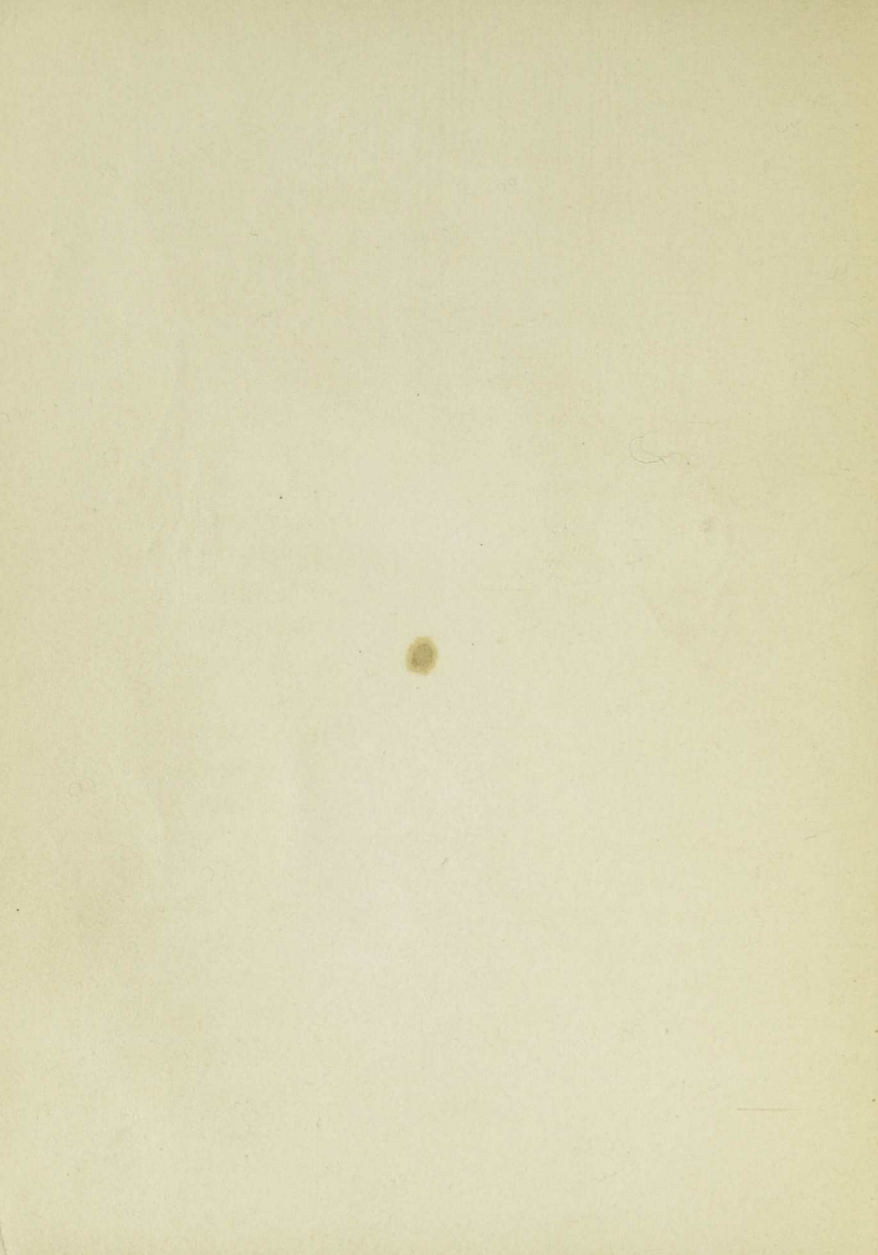
The Puffin, like other birds of the same genus, takes wing with difficulty, but when once risen, flies rapidly. Its walk is wriggling and awkward.

Various kinds of fish, such as small crabs, shrimps, sprats, and even sea-weeds, are said to be the food on which they live; but from the appearance and strength of the bill, it is probable they feed also on much larger shell-fish. The female makes no nest, but lays her single whitish-coloured egg on the bare earth, in a hole dug for the purpose by herself and mate, or in those that they find ready made for them by the rabbits, whom they easily dislodge. The bite of this bird is very severe.

They collect in large numbers in April or May, hatch their young in July, and remain tending them with great care till the middle of August, when they all disappear at once.



PUFFIN.



THE GANNET, OR SOLAN GOOSE.

(*Sula Bassana.*)

THE Gannet is about the size of a Goose, and almost entirely white in plumage. In summer these birds betake themselves in great multitudes to particular cliffs, and especially rocky islets at a small distance from the land. The Bass Island, a large rock in the Firth of Forth, near Edinburgh, is a very favourite resort of theirs, though they may also be found on many other parts of our coast.

The Gannet builds a kind of rude nest, formed by a few pieces of withered, bent, floating reeds and sea-weeds, or what it can get, in which the female lays one or two eggs, of an elongated form, a whitish colour, and with a rough and unglorious shell. Both birds sit alternately on the eggs, while the other fishes for food.

When the young are old enough to move, they disperse themselves over the sea, but they do not migrate. Like other birds of the same species, they are so abundantly provided with air cells that they become as light and buoyant as a bladder. No sea, therefore, can overwhelm them, but they float like corks over the most angry waves, and go to incredible distances.

THE GANNET



V. DICKES

THE CORMORANT. (*Carbo*.)

A BIRD constantly found on our coasts. It is about the size of a Goose, though with a narrower body and longer tail. Its feet are webbed, the claw of the middle toe being indented like a saw.

It is a most voracious feeder, and can gorge half its own weight in fish in one day, and is frequently so loaded that it rises with difficulty, and is so stupified, that when the rock on which it is perched is within reach it can easily be caught.

It is most expert in catching its food, either on the wing, or while swimming or diving. It seizes the fish crossways in its bill, but manages to turn it in the water, or, should that fail, to toss it into the air, catching it, as it comes down, head foremost, and so swallows it with ease.

These birds usually collect in flocks on the tops and inaccessible parts of the rocks which overhang or are surrounded by the sea, on which the female makes her nest of the withered sea-weed, sticks, and grasses which are cast on shore by the waves. She lays four or more eggs, about the size of a hen's, but longer in shape, and of a greenish-white colour.

The eyes of the Cormorant have a remarkably wild stare; they are placed near the bill, and look like two little greenish glass globes.

CORMORANT



THE GREBE. (*Podiceps.*)

THIS bird is well known for the soft and silvery down with which its breast is covered, and which is so favourite a material with ladies for their muffs and tippetts. This down is as important an article of comfort to the Grebe as to the ladies, for from its great closeness and fineness it is impervious to cold or wet, a providential provision for a bird which remains constantly in the water, even in the severest winter. These birds are completely waterproof. Not a damp feather can be found on a Grebe, even though it may have been diving under water for an hour together. Their feet are likewise beautifully adapted to their way of life, for they act both as oars and rudder, enabling them to *row* instead of *paddle*, by striking out both feet at once; they swim beautifully on the surface, but under water they make use of their wings, and their motions resemble those of frogs. They rise from the ground with difficulty, and therefore keep much at sea, for which reason they generally swim against the wind. Their food consists of the spawn and fry of fish, insects, crustacea and mollusca. They build their nests in holes on the rocks, and generally lay three or four eggs.



CRESTED GREBE.

THE TERN, OR SEA SWALLOW.

(*Sterna Hirundo.*)

So called because, having very long and pointed wings, with forked tail and short feet, they resemble Swallows. Though perfectly web-footed, they never swim, but catch their food, which consists of small fishes or insects, by gently touching the surface of the water with their beaks. They generally lay three or four eggs, preferring a shingly shore for that purpose, where the bird sits on them in the usual manner. They are very tame, and allow themselves to be approached very closely without showing any fear, and if three or four are collected together, and one is shot, the others will remain with the dead body, uttering over it a soft mournful cry. The appearance of these birds is very attractive.

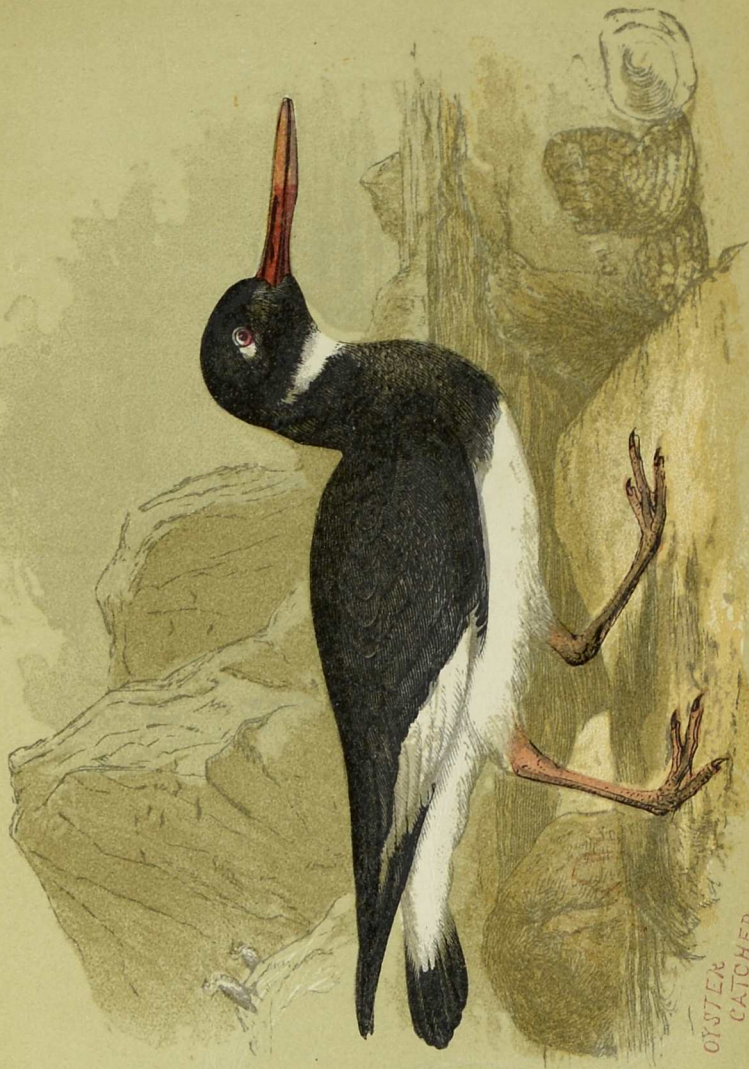


COMMON NODDY

THE OYSTER CATCHER.

(*Actematopus Ostralegus.*)

THE Oyster Catcher, or *Sea Pie*, so called from its black and white plumage, is also a common bird on our coasts. They live on the rocks, or on the shore, and feed on marine insects, for which they may often be seen actively searching at low water. They feed also on the small shell-fish adhering to the rocks, such as limpets, mussels, &c. Oysters, too, form a principal article of food with them, from whence they take their names. When the oyster-shell is partially open, (which it is at particular times of the tide, when the oyster is feeding,) the bird can easily insert its wedge-shaped beak, and thus wrench it open. Limpets it twitches from the rock with great certainty by an oblique tap with its bill. It lays its eggs on the bare ground, for the nest scarcely deserves to be so designated, consisting only of small shells and shingle, but it is contrived generally to be placed under shelter of some tuft. The eggs, few in number, are always arranged in a cruciform order, the four points meeting in the middle, and are a pale brown olive colour, with dusky patches. The pie-balled glossy plumage of this bird contrasts well with its long bright orange beak and legs, and crimson irides.



OYSTERCATCHER.

THE GUILLEMOT. (*Uria*)

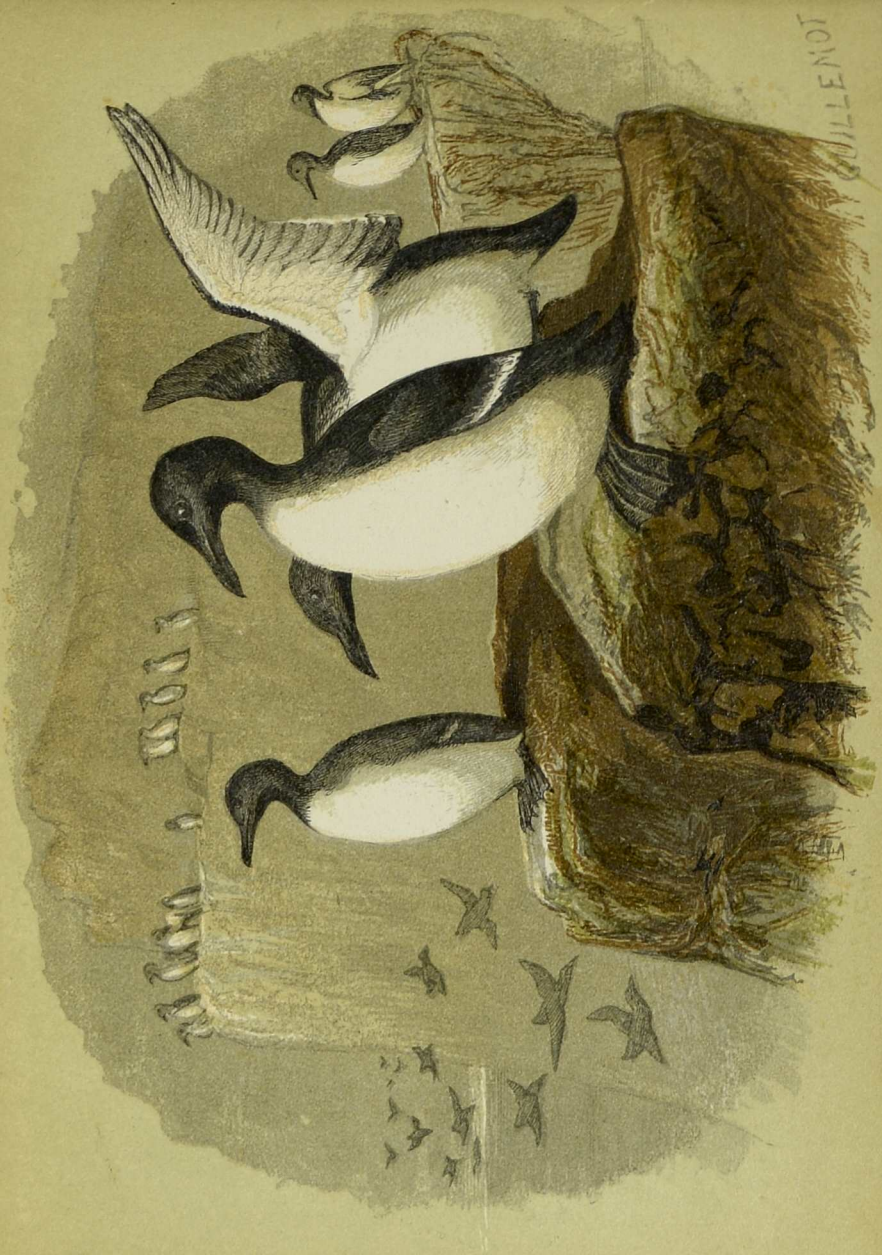
THE Guillemot breeds on our coasts during the spring and early summer, and leaves the land usually in August, by which time, probably, the young are strong enough to make their flight northward, where they remain almost entirely at sea, remote from the coast.

Their wings are so short and narrow that they fly with difficulty above the surface of the sea, and they are obliged to flutter even to reach their nests, which are always placed on ledges or in clefts of the rocks.

They frequent the southern coast of Pembroke-shire very much, and may be seen there in great numbers on the island of Shomar, &c. There is likewise one particular rock, not very far from Tenby, inhabited by these birds in such numbers as to take its name from them. It is called Eligug Stark, Eligug being the local name for this Guillemot.

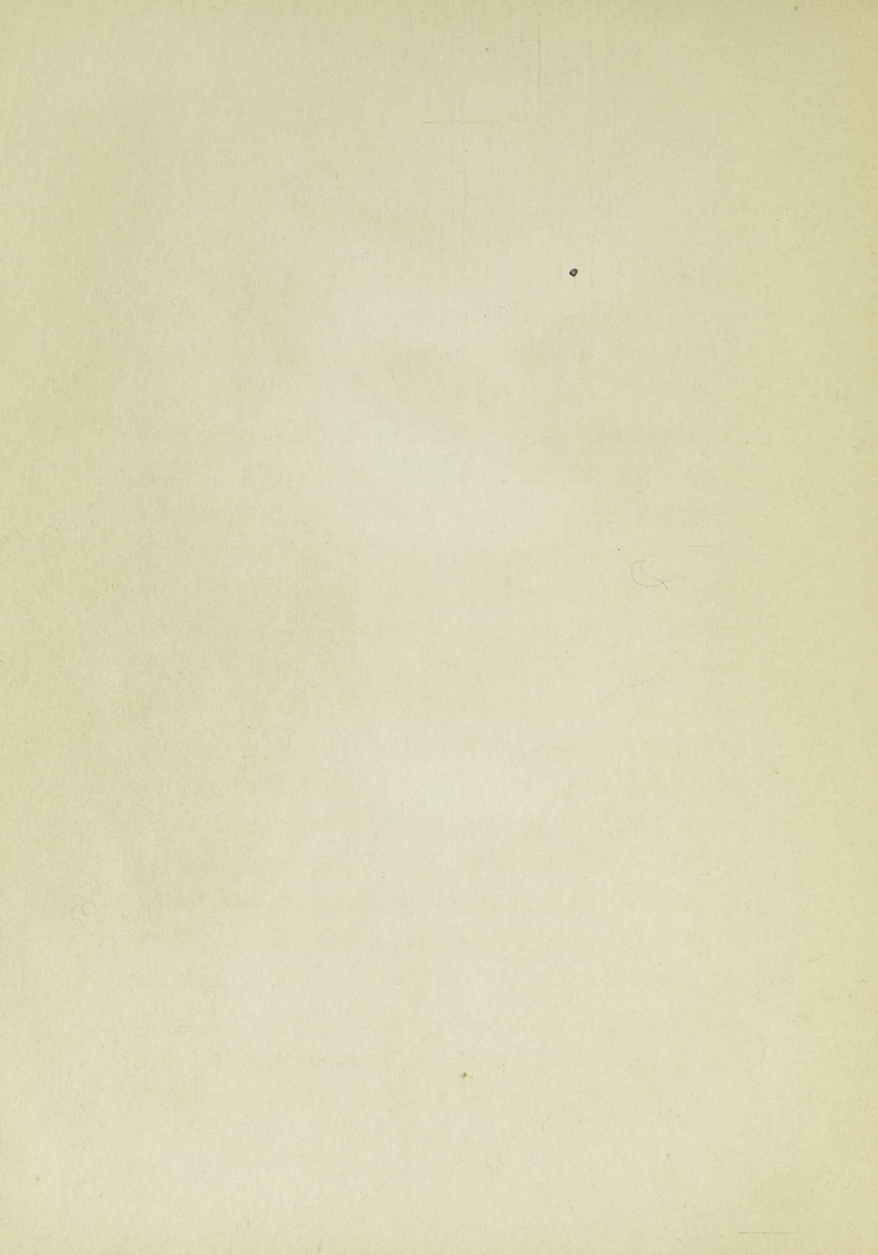
This rock rises abruptly from the sea; every ledge is occupied by long rows of birds in a constant state of restless activity, while on the top they stand as thickly as they can be placed, keeping up the most incessant wild jabbering noise. The sea below is at the same time, if the weather is fine, thickly dotted over with myriads of these little birds, either floating on the water or diving for their food.

Their eggs are generally of a bluish colour, spotted with black, long and pointed at one end, and very large in proportion to the size of the bird.



GUILLENOT

ROCKY ISLAND



THE GULL. (*Larus*.)

THERE are no birds on our coast more familiar to the sight than the Gull, of which there are no less than thirteen different kinds. The Black-backed Gulls (*Larus Marinus*) are most voracious creatures, and are so little particular in their choice of food, that they are called the Scavengers of the Sea. No kind of carrion comes amiss to them; but they will also carry off young rabbits, when they can get them. They have been seen to seize and fly away with them to sea, where they eat them at their leisure. They make their nests of dried grass on the top or sides of rocks, where they lay their oval-shaped eggs, dark olive green, with dusky spots. They are much more shy and wary than other Gulls, and seldom come within gunshot. The Kittywake (*Larus Redactylus*) breeds in immense numbers in the early spring, making its nest in such parts of the cliffs as are inaccessible, except by a rope from the top; it is built of grass and mud. The Kittywake lays two or three eggs, much smaller and lighter in colour than the other Gulls'.



THE GULL

THE DIVER. (*Colymbus.*)

THE general resort of these birds is the open sea, though they may occasionally be found at the mouths of rivers and large lakes. In structure and habits they bear a great resemblance to the Grebe. Like them, the water is their proper and peculiar province, and whether swimming on its surface, or diving in its depths, they have as much control over their movements in that element as other birds have in the air. They never come to land but in the breeding season, and even then it is small islets or jutting rocks which they choose for that purpose. Their broods are not large, as they never lay more than two eggs, which are big in proportion to the size of the bird. The young ones take to the water immediately on breaking the shell. The most beautiful of this species is the Red-throated Diver, of which the upper part is white, the lower part dusky till the third year, when the neck becomes red. This bird sometimes appears at the mouth of the Thames, but is most common in the Orkney and Shetland Isles, where it breeds in great numbers. It lives on fish, of which it devours an incredible quantity. It has a very wild note, and screams or howls in anticipation of the storm, which it knows will bring in its prey in abundance, even before the approach of it can be perceived by the fishermen, accustomed as they are to watch for such signs in the skies.



F. REMNANT & SONS,
BINDERS.

