

DESCRIPTION OF A NEW NORTH AMERICAN
SPECIES OF ARDETTA.

BY CHARLES B. CORY.

Ardetta neoxena, SP. NOV.

SP. CHAR.—Top of the head, back, and tail dark greenish black, showing a green gloss when held in the light. Sides of the head and throat rufous chestnut, the feathers on the back of the neck showing greenish black tips. Breast and underparts nearly uniform rufous chestnut, shading into dull black on the sides; wing-coverts dark rufous chestnut; under wing-coverts paler chestnut. All the remiges entirely slaty plumbeous. Under tail-coverts uniform dull black.

Total length, 10.80; wing, 4.30; tarsus, 1.40; culmen, 1.80.

HABITAT. Florida. Okeechobee region?

In the specimen above described two of the flank feathers on one side are white; but this may be attributed to albinism. There is no trace of a stripe on the sides of the back, as in *A. exilis*. The bird in question is claimed to have been shot in Southwest Florida, and was brought to Tampa with a number of other species, including *A. exilis*, *Anas fulvigula*, and *Ajaja ajaja*. It is without doubt perfectly distinct from any other known species.

RECENT LITERATURE.

Grieve on the Great Auk, or Garefowl.—The bird the portrait of which adorns the title-page of 'The Auk,' has exercised a remarkable attraction on monographers, for not a year has passed since Professor Blasius's exhaustive treatment of the subject, before we receive Mr. Grieve's sumptuous quarto volume on 'The Great Auk, or Garefowl.*'

In order to give the reader an idea of the scope of this work we give the headings of the different chapters into which the book is divided, as follows: I, Introduction; II, The Distribution of the Great Auk—The living bird in its American Habitats; III, The Living Great Auk in its European

*The Great Auk, or Garefowl | (*Alca impennis* Linn.) | Its History, Archæology and Remains | By | Symington Grieve | Edinburgh | London | Thomas C. Jack, 45 Ludgate Hill | Edinburgh: Grange Publishing Works | 1885. 4to., pp. xii + 141 + App. 58. With 4 plates, several wood-cuts, and a map.

Habitats; IV, The Remains of the Great Auk—Introduction to the subject—Discoveries in North America; V, The Remains of the Great Auk in Denmark and Iceland; VI, British Remains of the Great Auk—Keiss in Caithnessshire; VII, British Remains of the Great Auk (*continued*)—Oronsay in Argyllshire; VIII, How was Caistealnan-Gilleau formed, and to what period does it probably belong? IX, English Remains of the Great Auk; X, The Habits of the Garefowl, and the Region it lived in; XI, Information Regarding existing Remains of the Great Auk, with Lists of all recorded Skins, Bones and Eggs—Tables giving the Totals of each Variety of Remains in different Countries—Also Information about Skins, Bones, Eggs, Imitation Remains, and Illustrations of Remains; XII, The uses to which the Great Auk was put by Man; XIII, The Names by which the Great Auk has been known, and their Philology; XIV, The Period during which the Great Auk lived—Conclusion.

To us the chapters treating of the remains preserved in the museums and of the former habitat of this remarkable bird are of principal interest. The author gives the total number of skins known as 79 or 81, the uncertainty being due to doubt whether there be one specimen or none in Iceland, and whether five or six in the United States. Professor Wilh. Blasius enumerates only 77 "mit einiger Sicherheit."* Later in 1884 the same author† made known an additional specimen, that of Mr. Vian in Paris, thus raising the number to 78. It would, therefore, appear as if Mr. Grieve had made at least one new specimen known, but such is not the case, for by some sort of a mistake the author gives *two* specimens as being in the "Smithsonian Institute," Washington, while the fact is, that there is only one specimen in Washington, viz., that in the National Museum under the care of the Smithsonian Institution.

As to the specimen doubtfully referred to Iceland, we can offer no suggestions, but through the kindness of Mr. J. A. Allen we are able to add some valuable information in regard to the example in the New York Museum, and also to the mythical mutilated skin, which "has been said" to be in the same Museum. The origin of the myth that there are two specimens in the New York Museum is evident from the following footnote in Mr. Grieve's book (App. p. 19): "Professor Newton, writing to me on 15th April, 1884, says that D. G. Elliot, according to his own account, bought the specimen without the feet, formerly in Mechlenburg's possession, for the Central Park Museum in New York. Accordingly, there must now be two specimens in that museum, though this point requires still to be cleared up.—W. Blasius." In order to clear up this point I addressed a letter to Mr. D. G. Elliot, who, under date of December 26, 1885, very kindly wrote me as follows: "Yours of 24th is at hand. Somewhere among my papers I have a full account of the specimen of *Alca impennis* now in the Central Park Museum, but I cannot lay my hands upon it at present, and as I am about to leave for the South for a month's absence, I shall have to answer your questions as best I may without it.

* Journ. f. Orn. 1884, p. 114 and p. 165.

† Tagebl. Naturf. Versamml. Magdeburg, 1884 (p. 321).

- "1. I never bought but one specimen.
- "2. That is the one in the Museum, and I bought it from Mr. Cook.
- "3. I never heard of a second specimen and do not believe there was one.
- "4. To the best of my recollection, my specimen was without feet, though I am not positively sure, as it is now a good many years since I purchased it."

Simultaneously I had asked Mr. J. A. Allen, the Curator of Mammals and Birds of the New York Museum, for information, and as his answer goes a good way to explain the case, I take the liberty to reprint it in full, as follows: "There is only one specimen of the Great Auk in the American Museum of Natural History, and this Museum* has never had any other. The reference by Professor Newton to an imperfect specimen, without feet, obtained by Mr. D. G. Elliot, doubtless relates to the Labrador Duck, of which there is here just such a specimen, received from Mr. Elliot. It was mounted by the taxidermist, J. G. Bell, of this city, who supplied the feet of some other Duck. This specimen is still in the museum, and has its defects and the character of the restoration indicated in writing on the bottom of the stand."

To make perfectly sure, I requested Mr. Allen to examine the specimen of the Great Auk carefully, and here is his answer, dated January 4, 1886: "In accordance with your request I have carefully examined the specimen in relation to its feet, and so far as I can judge the feet belong to the specimen, and are not those of some other species, as has been presumed. They are certainly not the feet of any Loon or Duck, or any other water bird with which I am acquainted, and correspond with what I should expect to find the feet of the Great Auk to be. So far as I am able to judge they are genuine. Indeed, I am unable to see any indication that they are not a part of the skin itself."

It seems now unquestionable, that the bird in the New York Museum is not the skin "without the feet and breast plumage," which was sold by Herr Mechlenburg in Flensburg to Siemsen, a merchant in Reykjavik, Iceland (Grieve, App. p. 11). Nor can it be the skin with only one leg, which was in Bryce Wright's possession, if this really be a different one from the above (Journ. f. Ornith. 1884, p. 114). The 'defect skin' is, consequently, not in New York, but the question still remains, what has become of it? Once I thought that I had the solution, as in one of his letters to me Mr. Allen says: "Mr. Cory of Boston, has, I think, a Great Auk in his collection which is in part 'made up.'" I am in the position, however, to positively declare, that this is not the missing skin, either. Mr. Charles B. Cory has, a few moments ago, orally informed me, that what he possesses is only a *fragment of skin of the breast, and a few odd feathers* said to be from the Great Auk, which he bought some years ago of a dealer a little outside of London, and for which he paid £2. So much for the specimens in American Museums. There are, consequently, in this country only four specimens, as enumerated by Dr. Blasius, and not five or six.

* Referred to above as the Central Park Museum.

In regard to the other specimens mentioned in Mr. Grieve's Monograph, I shall only note, that the specimen which formerly was in Mr. Nicolai Aall's collection in Naes, near Arendal, Norway, is now in the Museum of the University in Christiania, and that it has been remounted recently.

Both in Blasius's list and in that of Mr. Grieve, the "Harvard University Museum" (= Museum of Comparative Zoölogy, Cambridge, Mass.) is credited with the possession of two skeletons "prepared from mummy Great Auks obtained at Funk Island. during 1864." Mr. J. A. Allen, then curator at the Museum, wrote me under March 18, 1885, as follows:—"We have but *one* specimen of the Great Auk, and that is to be rated as a skeleton. It is, in reality, a so-called 'mummy,' and is from the Funk Islands. Only a portion of the bones have yet been laid bare—one wing and one leg—the rest is still covered with the dried flesh. In some unaccountable way it is commonly and erroneously supposed that we have two of these Great Auk mummies."

Mr. Grieve's Monograph is accompanied by a 'Chart showing the supposed distribution of the Great Auk or Garefowl.' We shall not pass an opinion on the manner in which "the supposed limit of region in which the Great Auk lived" has been drawn generally; but when the author includes the entire Norwegian coast, from the Swedish frontier to North Cape, with all its islands and fjords, he certainly has not been aware of Prof. Robert Collett's investigations, who, as early as 1872, in an article written in the English language (Remarks on the Ornithology of Northern Norway), showed that there was no conclusive evidence of a single example of this species having occurred within the confines of the country. Since then Prof. Collet has made it probable, that the Garefowl has really *once* been seen in Norway, but in a locality considerably to the east of the limits of Mr. Grieve's map (Mitth. Ornith. Ver. Wien, 1884, Nos. 5 and 6).

Altogether Mr. Grieve's book forms an attractive volume, full of interest and useful information. But on looking over the long series of monographs and monographic essays devoted to the Great Auk, we are justified in raising the question: Might not the time, ingenuity, and money invested on them have been applied to other branches of ornithology with greater results? Or, are there not questions of more importance to solve than whether there are 78 or 79 skins of the Great Auk in existence? If the same amount of painstaking scrutiny and exactness had been directed towards elucidating geographical distribution, individual variation, etc. etc., the benefit to our science might have been considerably greater.—L. S.

Meves on the Size and Color of the Eyes of European Birds.—We have just received what appears to be a book filling a gap in ornithological literature, viz., Wilhelm Meves's List of European Birds* with indications

* Die Grösse und Farbe der Augen aller Europäischen Vögel, sowie der in der palæarctischen Region vorkommenden Arten in systematischer Ordnung nach Carl J. Sundevall's Versuch einer natürlichen Aufstellung der Vogelklasse von Wilhelm Meves. Halle a. S., Verlag von Wilhelm Schlüter. (No date on title page, but preface dated "Januar 1886.") 8vo., pp. iv + 74.