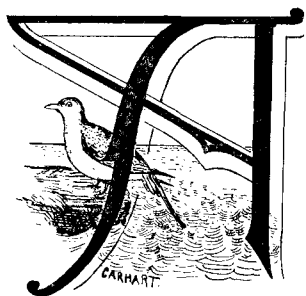


NIDIFICATION OF THE SKUAS.

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AMONG the family of Gulls, none are more interesting than the Skuas or Jaegers. They are the pirates of the sea-coast, being very bold and insolent, and in many cases do not take the trouble to fish for themselves; but, watching the fishing operations of the Gull, seize their opportunity of assailing a successful fisher and compelling him to disgorge his prey which they take to themselves. They not only pitilessly persecute the Kittiwake and other Gulls in order to obtain their own food second-hand; but also destroy and devour the eggs of other birds. Four species of Skuas are found both in Europe and in North America; but it is in Europe where these birds are most frequently met with. True, they breed within the Arctic Circle in North America; but most of the eggs in collections are from Europe.

The largest of this family is the Skua Gull, called in England the Common Skua, though the Richardson's Skua is really the most common species. It is not known to breed in North America, and now only nests in two localities in the British Islands; namely, Unst and Foula, two of the Shetland Isles; but is annually becoming scarcer in these two places.

This Skua always makes its nest on the ground, usually some elevated spot. The nest is well constructed as a rule, and is made of grass and moss. Sometimes it consists of a depression in the ground, with a little grass and moss for a lining.

The eggs are two in number, never more, and vary somewhat in color. They are usually a dark olive-brown, blotched with darker brown and umber, some having a greenish ground color.

This bird is very numerous in Iceland, from which place I receive scores of eggs from my collector every season. In Scotland a pair of these birds have been known to drive off the Golden Eagle from their nest of young.

The Pomarine Skua or Jaeger is the next in size, and might be considered cosmopolitan, being found in Europe, America, Africa and Australia.

In winter it is frequently seen on the English and Scotch coasts ; but does not breed in the British Islands. It resorts to Iceland and Greenland to nest and rear its young.

The nest is always on the ground and is similar to that of other Skuas. My collection contains a series of eggs from Iceland and Greenland. They differ in size, shape and color ; some eggs from Greenland are like small specimens of the Great Skua ; others from Iceland are similar in shape and color to those of Richardson's Jaeger ; but are larger in size. While some are very pointed, others are quite round like those of the Skua Gull. Average size, 2.45x1.75 in.

The Richardson's Skua is the most numerous of the family and breeds plentifully in the Scotch Islands, especially in the Orkneys and in Shetland ; but does not nest in England.

This bird, like the rest of its family, is a robber and lives on putrid food and devours the eggs of other Gulls. However, it boldly and bravely defends its young from any other bird or animal, and often feigns lameness to decoy an intrusive man or dog from its nest.

The nest is made of heather grass and moss, on some elevated spot in marshy ground, sometimes on a hillside, and never contains more than two eggs.

A large series of these eggs before me vary considerably in size. They are always very pointed at the smallest end, and are of a greenish olive-brown, spotted with dark brown and umber. Some eggs have a pale olive-green ground. The average size is about 2.20 long by 1.60 broad.

The last of this family is the Long-tailed Jaeger or Buffon's Skua. It was formerly confounded with the Richardson's Skua ; but Mr. Farrel pointed out the difference. It does not breed in the British Islands ; but retires to the Arctic regions for nesting purposes. It is plentiful in Lapland.

The eggs are not distinguishable from those of the Richardson's Skua in color ; but are usually smaller, averaging in size about 2.00 in. long by 1.45 in. broad.

