

THE COMMON FULMAR.

†PROCELLARIA GLACIALIS, *Linn.*

PLATE CCCCLV.—MALE.

Though not a large bird, the Fulmar is possessed of considerable strength, and has a powerful and sustained flight. In autumn and winter it is seen on our eastern coasts, from which it retires early in summer, to betake itself to the northern retreats in which it rears its young. I have never seen it farther south than Long Island, but I have often found it on the banks of Newfoundland, and in the space intervening between them and our shores. From the beginning of September to that of May it may be said to be pretty common, especially around the banks, to which the cod-fishers resort, and where it feeds chiefly on the rejected garbage.

One calm day in August, when on a voyage from England to New York, I procured several Fulmars. They came up and alighted near the boat, whenever we threw any thing overboard, and did not seem to be in the least alarmed by the report of a gun. In one instance I shot one on the water, when it was so near that I could distinctly see the colour of its eye. A great number of them were swimming in small detached flocks of eight or ten, their colour at a distance appearing as if pure white, and contrasting beautifully with the dark blue of the sea. They floated very buoyantly, some swimming about with great ease, others to appearance sound asleep. Most of them had the wing and tail feathers ragged, and some were much soiled with greasy matter, which gave them an unpleasant appearance. Those which were caught, on being wounded, emitted quantities of oily matter by their nostrils, and disgorged much of the same substance; but did not attempt to bite, which seemed strange in birds having the bill so powerful and hooked. They fly with less grace than the Shearwaters, proceeding in a direct line, and at a small height, towards the objects on which they feed.

I was much disappointed at not finding the Fulmar along the rocky shores of Labrador, where I had expected to meet with it, as it is regularly observed in spring moving northward in files opposite the entrance of the Straits of Belle Isle. Its passage towards the Arctic Regions has been observed by Captain SABINE on the coast of Greenland. "Whilst the ships,"

he says, "were detained by the ice in Jacob's Bay, in latitude 71° , from the 24th of June to the 3d of July, Fulmars were passing in a continual stream to the northward, in numbers inferior only to the flight of the Passenger Pigeon in America." While on my way to Labrador, I was told that they bred on the Seal Islands off the entrance of the Bay of Fundy. The egg, which is of a regular ovate form, with a smooth brittle pure white shell, measures two inches and seven-eighths in length, by two inches in breadth.

My much esteemed friend Mr. SELBY, in his *Illustrations of British Ornithology*, gives the following account of this species. "The steep and rocky St. Kilda, one of the western islands of Scotland, is the only locality within the British dominions annually resorted to by the Fulmar, the rest of the Scottish and our more southern coasts being rarely visited even by stragglers. Upon St. Kilda these birds are found in vast numbers during the spring and summer months, breeding in the caverns and holes of the rocks; and, from the various uses to which the down, feathers, and oil of the young are applied, contribute essentially to the comfort of the inhabitants. They lay but one egg each, white, and of a large size, with a shell of very brittle texture. The young are hatched about the middle of June, and are fed with *oil* thrown up by the parents (the produce of the food upon which they subsist), and, as soon as fledged, are eagerly sought for by the natives, although often at the risk of life, in scaling the tremendous and overhanging cliffs in which they nestle. Like most of the group, these birds have the power of ejecting oil with much force through their tubular nostrils, which is used as the principal mode of defence; it becomes an essential point, therefore, that they should be taken and killed by surprise, in order to prevent the loss of a liquid so requisite for the comfort of the inhabitants, by supplying them with the necessary fuel for their lamps. The Fulmar is of voracious appetite, feeding upon all sorts of animal substance, particularly of an oily nature, such as the blubber of whales, seals, &c.; and for this purpose it follows in great numbers the track of the whale vessels, and is so greedy of its favourite food, as to be often seen alighting upon the wounded animal, when not quite dead, and immediately proceeding to break the skin with its strong hooked bill, and gorging itself with the blubber to repletion."

The Rev. Mr. SCORESBY, in his "*Arctic Regions*," vol. i. p. 528, gives the following account of its habits as observed by him in the polar seas.

"The Fulmar is the constant companion of the whale-fisher. It joins his ship immediately on passing the Shetland Islands, and accompanies it through the trackless ocean to the highest accessible latitudes. It keeps an eager watch for any thing thrown overboard; the smallest particle of fatty substance can scarcely escape it. As such, a hook baited with a piece of fat meat or blubber, and towed by a long twine over the ship's stern, is a means

employed by the sailor boys for taking them. In the spring of the year, before they have glutted themselves too frequently with the fat of the whale, they may be eaten; and when cleared of the skin, and of every particle of yellow fatty substance lying beneath it, and well soaked in water, they are pretty good, particularly in 'sea pies.' They are remarkably easy and swift on the wing. They can fly to windward in the highest storms, and rest on the water with great composure in the most tremendous seas. But it is observed that, in heavy gales, they fly extremely low, generally skimming along the surface of the water. The Fulmar walks awkwardly, and with the legs so bent that the feet almost touch the belly. When on ice it rests with its body on the surface, and presents its breast to the wind. Like the Duck, it sometimes turns its head backward, and conceals its bill beneath its wing.

"Fulmars are extremely greedy of the fat of the whale. Though few should be seen when a whale is about being captured, yet, as soon as the flensing process commences, they rush in from all quarters, and frequently accumulate to many thousands in number. They then occupy the greasy track of the ship; and, being audaciously greedy, fearlessly advance within a few yards of the men employed in cutting up the whale. If, indeed, the fragments of fat do not float sufficiently away, they approach so near the scene of operations, that they are knocked down with boat hooks in great numbers, and sometimes taken up by the hand. The sea immediately about the ship's stern is sometimes so completely covered with them, that a stone can scarcely be thrown overboard without striking one of them. When any thing is thus cast among them, those nearest the spot where it falls take the alarm, and these exciting some fear in others more remote, sometimes put a thousand of them in motion; but as, in rising into the air, they assist their wings, for the first few yards, by striking the water with their feet, there is produced by such a number of them, a loud and most singular splashing. It is highly amusing to observe the voracity with which they seize the pieces of fat that fall in their way; the size and quantity of the pieces they take at a meal; the curious chuckling noise which in their anxiety for dispatch they always make; and the jealousy with which they view, and the boldness with which they attack, any of this species that are engaged in devouring the finest morsels. They frequently glut themselves so completely, that they are unable to fly; in which case, when they are not relieved by a quantity being disgorged, they endeavour to get on the nearest piece of ice, where they rest until the advancement of digestion restores their wonted powers. Then, if opportunity admit, they return with the same gust to the banquet as before; and though numbers of the species may

be killed, and allowed to float about among them, they appear unconscious of danger to themselves.

"The Fulmar never dives, but when incited to it by the appearance of a morsel of fat under water. When in close view of any men, it keeps a continual watch both on the men and its prey; having its feet continually in motion, and yet perhaps not moving at all through the water. Its boldness increases with the numbers of its species that surround it. It is a very hardy bird. Its feathers being thick it is not easily killed with a blow. Its bite, from the crookedness, strength, and sharpness of its bill, is very severe.

"When carrion is scarce, the Fulmars follow the living whale; and sometimes, by their peculiar motions, when hovering at the surface of the water, point out to the fisher the position of the animal of which he is in pursuit. They cannot make much impression on the dead whale, until some more powerful animal tears away the skin; the epidermis and rete mucosum they entirely remove, but the true skin is too tough for them to make way through it."

PROCELLARIA GLACIALIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 369.

FULMAR PETREL, Nutt. Man., vol. ii. p. 330.

FULMAR PETREL, *Procellaria glacialis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. iii. p. 446.

Male, 8, 18.

Not uncommon off the coast, from New York to Nova Scotia. Abundant on the banks of Newfoundland. Breeds in high latitudes.

Adult Male in summer.

Bill shorter than the head, robust, straight, slightly compressed, the tip curved. Upper mandible with the nostrils on the ridge, separated only by a thin partition, covered by an elevated horny case, and opening directly forwards, the sides convex, and separated by a groove from the nasal plate, as well as from the unguis, which is remarkably strong, curved and acute, the edges sharp, inflected, and slightly curved. Lower mandible with the angle long, rather wide, acute, the sides erect but convex, the edges sharp and inflected, the very short dorsal line ascending and slightly concave, the edges decurved at the end.

Head rather large, ovate. Neck rather short. Body full. Feet of moderate length, stout; tibia bare for a short space below; tarsus a little compressed, rather sharp before, covered all round with reticular scales, of which those on the anterior and posterior ridges are much smaller. Hind toe a slight prominence, with a conical obtuse claw; the fore toes long, slender, scutellate above, connected by striated entire webs, the fourth a little longer than the third, the second not much shorter. Claws rather small, arched, compressed, rather acute, that of third toe with an inner thin edge.

Plumage free, close, elastic, blended; on the back and wings the feathers rather distinct. Wings long; primary quills rather broad, tapering, acuminate, the first longest, the rest graduated; secondary broad and rounded. Tail rather short, slightly rounded, of twelve broad, rounded feathers.

Bill, iris, and feet yellow, the latter tinged with green. The head, neck and lower parts, are pure white; the back and wings light greyish-blue, the rump paler, the tail bluish-white; the primary quills and their coverts blackish-brown.

Length to end of tail $16\frac{1}{2}$ inches, to end of wings $17\frac{3}{4}$, to end of claws $11\frac{1}{4}$; extent of wings 30; wing from flexure 13; tail $4\frac{1}{4}$; bill along the back $1\frac{1}{2}$, along the edge of lower mandible $2\frac{2}{12}$; tarsus 2; outer toe $1\frac{8}{12}$, its claw $\frac{4}{12}$. Weight 1 lb. 4 oz.

The Female is similar to the male.

PACIFIC FULMAR.

+*PROCELLARIA PACIFICA*, Aud.

(NOT FIGURED.)

Three skins transmitted to me by Mr. TOWNSEND appear to belong to two species of the Fulmar genus, distinct from that of the Atlantic seas. The first of these species I have named as above. An adult individual resembles the common *Procellaria glacialis* in form, proportions, and colour, but differs in having the bill much smaller, more compressed, with the angle of the lower mandible narrower, and the tips of both very much inferior in strength. It is about the same size as the species just mentioned, and shews no remarkable difference in the wings or tail. Besides being more compressed, its bill presents a character, which, if universal, is perfectly distinctive; the upper outline of the united nasal tubes is concave in the Atlantic Fulmar, and its ridge flattened; whereas the outline of these tubes is straight in the Pacific species, and its ridge distinctly carinate.



W. 8. 11.

Swan, Male.

Adult Male Summer Plumage.

Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon, F.R.S. &c.

Engraved & Colored by J. T. Bowen, Philad.



Audubon, John James. 1844. "The Common Fulmar, *Procellaria glacialis*, Linn. [Pl. 455]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 7, 204–208. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319570>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/124981>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319570>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/319570>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: NOT_IN_COPYRIGHT

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.