



AVOCET.
Recurvirostra avocetta, (Linn.)

Genus RECURVIROSTRA, Linn.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* long, slender, feeble, depressed through its whole length; the point flexible, and turning upwards; the *upper mandible* grooved along its surface, the *under* grooved laterally. *Nostrils* on the surface of the beak, long and linear. *Tarsi* long and slender. *Toes* three before, palmated as far as the second articulation; and one behind, merely rudimentary and articulated high on the tarsus. *Wings* pointed; first *quill-feather* longest.

AVOCET.

Recurvirostra avocetta, Linn.

L'Avocette à nuque noire.

THE very interesting and well-defined genus *Recurvirostra* contains but a very limited number of species, of which the present is the only European example; not, however, that it is altogether confined to that portion of the globe, but is also found from Egypt throughout the whole of Africa, to its most southern boundary, as is proved by the identity of individuals killed on the northern coast, and at the Cape of Good Hope. It is found in India also, although rather sparingly. It would appear, however, that Holland, France and Germany may be considered its natural and most congenial habitat; preferring in each of these countries the low flat lands bordering the sea, salt marshes and swamps occasionally covered by the tide. A century ago, before our fens were drained, and while extensive marshes afforded food and concealment, the Avocet was common in England, frequenting in abundance the fens of Lincolnshire and Norfolk, to which it even now occasionally resorts for the purpose of incubation. We believe it to be strictly migratory, arriving in our latitudes only at those seasons when the marshes and lakes are unfrozen and abound in its peculiar food, which consists chiefly of minute insects, the larvæ of crustacea, &c., for the taking of which its beak is most singularly and beautifully adapted; nor is the construction of its legs less adapted to sustain it on the mud and swampy ground in which it wades; its semipalmated feet being more adapted for the purpose of supporting its weight on a soft and yielding surface, than for assisting it when swimming, to which it seldom resorts but in cases of necessity. The places it selects for the purpose of incubation, are similar to those of other marsh birds, usually a depression in the ground, making little or no nest, where it deposits its eggs, which rarely exceed two in number, and which, except in size, so nearly resemble in shape and markings those of the Lapwing as to be easily mistaken for them. They are however much larger, measuring 2 inches 1 line in length by 1 inch 7 lines in width, of an olive brown, spotted with black.

Dr. Latham informs us that the Avocet is very bold in defence of its young, and when disturbed in the breeding season, it hovers over the sportsman's head like the Lapwing, and flies with its legs and neck extended, uttering a sharp note like the word *twit twit* often repeated. The young soon resemble the adults in colouring, and old birds present no external differences, having the whole of the body white, with the exception of the top of the head, the back of the neck, the scapulars and quill-feathers, which are black; beak black; irides reddish brown; feet and legs blueish ash.

We have figured an adult bird in full plumage.



Gould, John. 1837. "Avocet. Recurvirostra Avocetta, Linn. L'Avocette à nuque noire. [Pl. 308]." *The Birds of Europe* 4, <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.317490>.

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