

ADDITIONAL NOTES TO—NOTICE OF THE REMAINS OF THE GREAT AUK (*ALCA IMPENNIS*, LINN.), FOUND IN CAITHNESS; WITH NOTES OF ITS OCCURRENCE, &c., IN SCOTLAND, AND OF ITS EARLY HISTORY. BY JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, M.D., SECRETARY S.A. SCOT.

In my previous paper on the Great Auk (Proceedings, vol. i. pp. 82, 83, New Series, 1879) I quoted from the "Account of Hirta and Rona," in Pinkerton's "General Collection of Voyages and Travels," and also referred to as included in the Sibbald MSS. It is stated to have been that given to Sir Robert Sibbald by Sir George M'Kenzie of Tarbat.

The Rev. Walter Macleod, who is so well able to explain and decipher old MSS., has been good enough to compare the writings of Sir George M'Kenzie with this MSS., so as to enable him to judge whether they were original MSS. or simply copies by Sir Robert Sibbald. M'Kenzie's account was probably sent to Sir Robert before the publication of his "Scotia Illustrata," 1684, as in it he refers to the very great size of the egg of the Garefowl, which Sir George M'Kenzie specially mentions.

Mr Macleod writes to me as follows:—

"I have again examined the MSS. in the Advocates' Library on the Western Islands.

"MS. 33. 2. 3 is entirely in the handwriting of Sir James Balfour of Denmylne, Lyon King of Arms, and has his name inscribed under date 1642. It is professedly a transcript of the 'Descriptione of the Westerne Iles of Scotland, by Mr Donald Monro, who travelled through many of them in Anno 1549.' This is the MS. published by Auld in 1774, and in the 'Miscellanea Scotica' already referred to, where, by a printer's error, the date is given as "1594" instead of "1549," as correctly printed by Auld.

"MS. 31. 2. 6 (old number, Jac. V. 4. 24.) is another copy of the Dean's 'Description of the Occidental (*i.e.*, Westerne) Iles of Scotland. By Mr Donald Munro, who travelled through many of them in Anno 1549.' The handwriting of this copy, which is not an exact transcript of the former, I am not able to identify; but it seems to belong to the period between the Restoration and the Revolution, 1660–1690. The notes on the margin of it are stated in the Catalogue to be in the handwriting of Sir Robert Sibbald, and from com-

parison I think it is so; the copy may therefore have been made under his supervision. In the same MS. volume there is added a copy of another old MS., entitled 'Description of the Iles of Scotland,' the author of which is not known.

"MS. 33. 3. 20 (old number, A. 4. 14.) with the general title of 'A Description of the Islands belonging to the Crowne of Scotland taken from several manuscripts; and the relations of those that lived in them or frequented them, &c., &c.,' and a sub-title, 'A Description of the Isles belonging to the Crowne of Scotlande. By Sir Robert Sibbald.' This is not a mere copy of Dean Munro's 'Description,' but it is incorporated apparently with such other matters concerning the Western Isles as Sir Robert was able to collect. This MS. is not in the handwriting of Sir R. Sibbald.

"I have compared these MSS. with some autograph MSS. of Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, and also with some writings of Sir George M'Kenzie of Tarbat, afterwards Earl of Cromartie, but do not consider that either of these persons was the writer of any part of them.

"I may state that the writings of the two Mackenzies referred to are in the collection of MSS. which belonged to the late Mr David Laing, LL.D., and are now in the University Library."

Dean Munro (MS. 31. 2. 6.), in his description of Hirta and its adjoining islets, only refers generally to the sea-fowl.—"In thir rock Iles are infinite fair scheippis, with ane falcon nest and wild foullis biggand." To this copy of Dean Munro's MS. there is also added a copy of another old MS., entitled "The Description of the Iles of Scotland."¹ It also includes a notice of "Irt." I quote only the references to the sea-fowl:—"It is maist fertile of scheip and foullis;" describing the natives he says—"but thair daylie exercitation is maist in delving and labouring the ground, taking of foullis and gaddering their eggis, quharon they leif for the maist pairt of their fude."

¹ Copies of these MSS.—MS. 31. 2. 6, and along with it "The Description of the Iles of Scotland," also the MS. 33. 3. 20—have been recently copied for the Society, under the careful supervision of the Rev. W. MacLeod, and are now preserved in our Library, and "The Description of the Iles of Scotland" has just been printed at full length in the Appendix to Mr W. F. Skene's recently published "Celtic Scotland," vol. iv., Edinburgh, 1880. Mr Skene considers this MS. from internal evidence to have been written between 1577 and 1595.

Sir Robert Sibbald in the last MS. referred to (No. 33. 3. 20) seems to incorporate in a continuous narrative or description the various accounts given of these islands, some of them having been sent to him apparently in answer to queries; as one part of the MS. is entitled:—"Ane answer to the Generall Queries for the Isle of Mull." He includes in this MS. Sir George M'Kenzie's "Account" (part of which I have printed in my paper, p. 82), but without any special mention of its authorship. He transposes it to suit his own arrangement, quotes the large size of the eggs of the Great Auk "almost as big as those of the ostrich" already referred to, and the very great abundance of the sea-fowl, &c. In this MS. (from which I also quoted in my former paper, p. 83, but the number of which should have been 33. 3. 20), he adds various details of the sea-fowl and their habits, &c., from other authorities, whose names he does not give. Under the title of "Addenda" to this MS. he also gives a much more detailed description of Hirta, principally from Martin's Account of his Voyage—only instead of saying like Martin that the egg of the Garefowl "is twice as big as that of the Solan Goose," Sir Robert now says it is as big as, if not bigger, than that of tame geese. I may perhaps quote the whole passage:—

"The Garefowle, is the largest and stateliest of all the Sea Fowles here. He is bigger than a Solan Goose, of a black colour, red about the eyes, with a large white spot under each eye, a long broad bill; standeth straight on his feet holding his body upright. His wings are short. He heth no flight. He cometh ther the first of May and goeth away the middle of June. He layeth his eggs upon the bare rock. If it be taken away he layeth no more till the next year. He heth the hatching spot upon his breast, *i.e.*, a bare spot without downes. This may be seen in all fowles which hatch. The egg of the Garefowle is as big, if not larger than that of tame geese, and is variously spotted."

This is apparently Martin's account, but slightly altered in its style and arrangement. I have already quoted Martin's account of the Garefowl in my former paper (p. 86).

It is interesting therefore to notice, as I have now attempted to point out, that Sir Robert Sibbald, from his first short account of the Garefowl

in his "Scotia Illustrata" (quoted at p. 85 of my former paper), apparently on the authority of Sir George M'Kenzie's statement that "it hath eggs as big almost as those of the ostrich"—which Sibbald however simply describes as "ovo maximo," and tells us that the Garefowl was one of the birds on which he desired more accurate information—goes on next to note Martin's description of the bird, and its egg as being "twice as big as that of a Solan Goose." Martin gives this natural-enough comparison, made, doubtless, by some St Kilda man familiar only with the eggs of sea-fowl. Sir Robert then concludes with this, his last notice of it, in the MS. just quoted, where he says:—"The egg of the Garefowle is as big, if not larger, than that of tame geese," a comparison of its size familiar to and easily understood by every one; except perhaps by the natives of St Kilda who had no domestic poultry.

This whole history, then, of the Garefowl and its egg, becoming thus gradually more explicit, is also, it appears to me, an additional proof of the continued presence of this bird on the island of St Kilda—it may have been in gradually failing numbers—both in Martin's time as well as subsequent to it; which, however, some of our writers on ornithology seem strongly inclined to doubt.

I may mention that Dean Munro's "Description" as well as Sir George M'Kenzie's "Account" were published in 1774, in a small volume, now very scarce, with the following title:—

DESCRIPTION OF THE WESTERN ISLES OF SCOTLAND, CALLED HYBRIDES.

By Mr DONALD MUNRO, High Dean of the ISLES, who travelled through most of them in the year 1549.

With his

GENEALOGIES of the chief CLANS of the ISLES.

Now first published from the MANUSCRIPT.

To which is added—

I. AN ACCOUNT of HIRTA and RONA, by the Lord Register SIR GEORGE M'KENZIE of Tarbat, never before published.

II. A DESCRIPTION of SAINT KILDA, by Mr ALEXANDER BUCHAN, late Minister there.

III. A VOYAGE to SAINT KILDA in 1697, by M. MARTIN, Gentleman.

EDINBURGH: Printed by WILLIAM AULD. MDCCCLXXIV.

The sub-title to Sir George M'Kenzie's account is as follows :—

“An Account of Hirta and Rona, Given to Sir Robert Sibbald, by The Lord Register, Sir George M'Kenzie of Tarbat. As he had it from intelligent Persons dwelling in the same.”

In Gough's “British Topography,” vol. ii. p. 273, 4to, London, 1780, he refers to this and others works on the Western Islands, and says that the copy of the Dean's MS. published by William Auld, Edinburgh, 1774, was corrected from the MS. in the Advocate's Library here, “the best and correctest copy.”

I also referred to the Great Auk noticed by Professor Fleming, D.D., in his “Gleanings of Natural History during a Voyage along the Coast of Scotland in 1821,” published in the “Edinburgh Philosophical Journal,” vol. x., 1824. The Rev. John Fleming, D.D., minister of Flisk, afterwards Professor Fleming of the New College, Edinburgh, in the course of his voyage round Scotland with Mr Stevenson, in the “Regent” yacht, says :—“We left Lochbroom on the morning of the 17th [August] on our return to [the island of] Scalpa [or Glass, on the east coast of Harris, on which there is a lighthouse], which we reached on the morning of the 18th. When on the eve of our departure from the island, we got on board a live example of the Great Auk (*Alca impennis*), which Mr Maclellan, the tacksman of Glass, had captured some time before off St Kilda. It was emaciated, and had the appearance of being sickly; but in the course of a few days it became sprightly, having been plentifully supplied with fresh fish, and permitted occasionally to sport in the water, with a cord fastened to one of its legs to prevent escape. Even in this state of restraint it performed the motions of diving and swimming under water with a rapidity that set all pursuit from a boat at

defiance. A few white feathers were at this time making their appearance on the sides of its neck and throat, which increased considerably during the following week, and left no room to doubt, that, like its congeners, the blackness of the throat feathers of summer is exchanged for white during the winter season. I may add that the black colour of the throat of the Razorbill (*Alca torda*) was at this time undergoing a similar change. In the young of this species the neck was black, but the throat was freckled with white. The bill was black, with the rudiments of a single ridge, and the white line reaching to the eye was obvious" (vol. i. p. 97).

The date of this visit was in the month of August, and the Doctor goes on to say:—"After leaving the Isle of Glass, and taking shelter on the 19th of August in Loch Maddy, we sailed across to Skye on the 20th, and entered Loch Scavig, where we landed," &c.

Professor Fleming afterwards published his "History of British Animals" in 1828, and, curiously enough, in describing this bird he gives the year 1822 (probably a misprint) as the time when he examined it. It was a voyage by the Board of Commissioners of the Northern Lights for the inspection of the different lighthouses, with which Dr Fleming was associated as a guest, and as it is of some little interest to give the exact date when this, the last specimen, of this apparently now extinct bird was captured in Scotland, I subsequently applied to Thomas Stevenson, Esq., F.S.A. Scot., the well-known engineer to the Board, and to the Secretary, and I received the annexed letters, which completely settle the question:—

NORTHERN LIGHTHOUSE BOARD,
84 GEORGE STREET,
EDINBURGH, 16th March 1880.

DEAR SIR,—Referring to your call yesterday, and your inquiry whether it was in the year 1821 or 1822 that Professor Fleming accompanied the Commissioners on their inspection voyage, I beg to say that the Engineers have ascertained from an inspection of the journals of these voyages that the name of the Rev. Dr Fleming of Flisk occurs in the report of the voyage for 1821, but not in that for 1822.

It is, therefore, certain that Professor Fleming accompanied the Commissioners in 1821, and highly improbable that he did so in 1822.—I am, dear Sir,
yours faithfully,

J. M. DUNCAN, *Secy.*

JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, Esq., M.D.,
10 Palmerston Place.

NORTHERN LIGHTHOUSE BOARD,
84 GEORGE STREET,
EDINBURGH, 16th March 1880.

MY DEAR SIR,—I find Mr Duncan was asking about the Auk. It is given in my Father's Annual Report for 1821.

I will try to lay my hands on his Journal, but it does not seem to be in its place.—Yours very truly,

THOMAS STEVENSON.

Dr SMITH.

&c. &c.

NORTHERN LIGHTHOUSE BOARD,
84 GEORGE STREET,
EDINBURGH, 17th March 1880.

MY DEAR SIR,—I have not as yet been able to get my Father's private Journal for 1821. I find, however, that he went from Leith and went round the coast, arriving at Greenock on the 7th September, so that I believe the Great Auk escaped in or near the Firth of Clyde. I begin to fear the Journal for 1821 may not be recovered.—Yours very truly,

T. STEVENSON.

Dr SMITH.

&c. &c.

In a letter which I received from Professor Alfred Newton of Cambridge University, who has paid much attention to all matters connected with this bird, he refers to my remarks on the statements taken from Fox's "Synopsis of the Newcastle Museum" about the great auk burrowing like a rabbit (p. 94). He agrees with me in thinking the reference must be to the Puffin, and says: "There is not the slightest evidence that the Garefowl ever did such a thing, and a great deal of evidence that it did not."

Professor Newton also kindly corrects a mistake I fell into owing to a typographical error in the list of works cited by Fabricius in his "Fauna Groenlandica," which was the only authority I was then able to refer to on

the subject (p. 101 of my paper). The title of Eggert Olafsen's and Bjarne Povelsen's book is, "Reise igiennem Island," *i.e.*, Travels in (or throughout) Iceland. It was published at Sörøe, a rather important place in Denmark. It was Iceland, therefore, that was referred to as a nesting-place of the Garefowl, and not the island of Sorøe in Norway, which, indeed, is out of the former range of the great auk (*Alca impennis*).

After referring to the history of the great auk, or northern penguin, and its being at the first confounded with the penguins of the southern seas, I stated (p. 100) that they were by naturalists afterwards included in the great Family ALCIDÆ, but that the great auk belonged to the Sub-Family *Alcinæ*, and the true penguins to the Sub-Family *Spheniscinæ*. Changes of classification have gone on, and more modern ornithologists have since placed them still more apart; and I am again indebted to Professor Newton for giving me the latest information on this interesting subject:—

"Bonaparte in 1831 recognized the penguins of the southern seas as forming a distinct family, SPHENISCIDÆ, which is now adopted by nearly all authorities, though some of them term it APTEODYTIDÆ. In 1867 Professor Huxley pointed out that, whereas the ALCIDÆ were manifestly closely allied to the gulls, petrels, and divers, forming a group to which he applied the name of CECOMORPHÆ, the penguins differed in many remarkable characters, and formed a group of equal rank, which he called SPHENISCOMORPHÆ (Proceedings of Zoological Society, 1867, pp. 457, 458). This conclusion of Professor Huxley has been accepted in principle by the majority of leading ornithologists, one of whom, Professor Alphonse Milne-Edwards, in a most exhaustive treatise on the family now in course of publication in the "Annales des Sciences Naturelles" (series 6, vol. ix.),¹ does not hesitate to call the penguins of the southern seas the most singular, if not the most abnormal, group of the class *Aves*. Systematists at present differ considerably as to the number of genera into which the group should be divided,—six or eight having been more or less definitely proposed,—while the number of species is still uncertain.

¹ Art. 9, "Recherches sur la faune des régions australes."

Except one, which is found in the Galapagos Islands, all inhabit the ocean to the southward of the Tropic of the Capricorn, resorting to its shores and islands for the purpose of breeding. The treatise above named, when completed, will doubtless form by far the best account of these birds that has been written, while the portion that has already appeared gives a very complete bibliography of the subject."

In conclusion I may notice that since my paper on the great auk was published two eggs of this bird have been accidentally discovered in a private collection in Edinburgh. They were each labelled "Penguin," and were sold by auction in Mr Dowell's rooms here in a varied collection of eggs, &c., the property of W. C. Murray, Esq., W.S. The collection had been purchased some twenty-five years before, by his late father, John Murray, Esq., S.S.C. (neither of whom apparently were aware that it included the eggs of the great auk), from the late John Lister, Esq., advocate, by whose deceased brother, Andrew, this natural history collection had been made, and in whose possession they were believed to have been for a considerable time. Another brother was a surgeon in the army, and it was supposed that possibly he might have brought these eggs to his naturalist brother. The collection was purchased for a small sum by Mr Small, bird-stuffer, who ascertained that these eggs were really those of the northern penguin or great auk. The eggs were afterwards sold in London at Stevens's Auction Rooms in July 1880, where they were purchased by the Right Honourable Lord Lilford, the one for £100 and the other at 102 guineas, the highest price yet realised for the eggs of the Great Auk, now believed to be extinct.

Mr Robert Gray exhibited these eggs to the Royal Society here (June 1880), and gave some notes of the history of the bird in relation especially to Newfoundland (Proc. Roy. Soc. Edin., vol. x.).