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DICTIONARY OF BIRDS

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PART IV. (SHEATHBILL-ZYGODACTYLI,
TOGETHER WITH INDEX AND INTRODUCTION)

LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
1896

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INSTRUCTIONS TO BINDER.

In binding the Four Parts as one Volume, the following arrangement should be observed :—

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1841, p. 5; 1842, p. 402, pl. 2)¹ as *C. minor*, is smaller in size, with plumage just as white, but having the bill and bare skin of the face black and the legs much darker. The form of the bill's "sheath" in the two species is also quite different, for in *C. alba* it is almost level throughout, while in *C. minor* it rises in front like the pommel of a saddle. Of the habits of the western and larger species not much has been recorded. It gathers its food, consisting chiefly, as Darwin and others have told us, of seaweeds and shell-fish, on rocks at low water; but it is also known to eat birds' eggs. There is some curiously conflicting evidence as to the flavour of its flesh, some asserting that it is wholly uneatable, and others that it is palatable,—a difference which may possibly be due to the previous diet of the particular example tasted, to the skill of the cook or the need of the taster. Though most abundant as a shore-bird, it is frequently met with far out at sea, as by Fleurieu (*Voy. de Marchand*, i. p. 19), in lat. 44° S., some 260 miles from the eastern coast of Patagonia. It is not uncommon on the Falkland Isles, where it is said to breed (*Ibis*, 1861, p. 154), though confirmation of the report is as yet wanting, and from thence is found at both extremities of the Strait of Magellan, and southward to Louis-Philippe Land in lat. 60° S. On the other hand, thanks to the naturalists of the British and United States expeditions to Kerguelen Land for the observation of the transit of Venus in 1874, especially Mr. Eaton (*Philos. Trans.* clxviii. pp. 103-105) and Dr. Kidder (*Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus.* 1875, No. 2, pp. 1-4), much more has been recorded of the eastern and smaller species, which had already been ascertained by Mr. Layard (*Proc. Zool. Soc.* 1871, p. 57, pl. iv. fig. 7) to breed on the Crozet Islands,² and was found to do so still more numerously on Kerguelen, while it probably frequents Prince Edward's Islands for the same purpose. The eggs, of which a considerable number have now been obtained, though of peculiar appearance, bear an unmistakable likeness to those of some Plovers, while occasionally exhibiting a resemblance—of little significance, however—to those of the Tropic-birds.

The systematic position of the Sheathbills has been the subject of much hesitation—almost useless since 1836, when De Blainville (*Ann. Sc. Nat.* ser. 2, vi. p. 97) made known certain anatomical facts proving their affinity to the OYSTER-CATCHERS, though

¹ Lesson (*loc. cit.*) cites a brief but correct indication of this species as observed by Lesquin (*Lyce Armoricain*, x. p. 36) on Crozet Island, and, not suspecting it to be distinct, was at a loss to reconcile the discrepancies of the latter's description with that given of the other species by earlier authors.

² A previous announcement of the discovery of its egg (*Ibis*, 1867, p. 458) was premature, the specimen, now in my possession, proving to be that of a Gull—a fact unknown to the American writer named above.

pointing also to a more distant relationship with the GULLS. These he afterwards described more fully (*Voy. 'Bonite' Zoolog. i. pt. 3, pp. 107-132, pl. 9*), so as to leave no doubt that *Chionis* was a form intermediate between those groups. Yet some writers continued to refer it to the *Gallinæ* and others to the *Columbæ*. The matter may now be regarded as settled for ever. In 1876 Dr. Reichenow in Germany (*Jour. f. Orn. 1876, pp. 84-89*) and in America Drs. Kidder and Coues (*Bull. U. S. Nat. Mus. No. 3, pp. 85-116*) published elaborate accounts of the anatomy of *C. minor*, the first wholly confirming the view of De Blainville, the last two¹ agreeing with him in the main, but concluding that the Sheathbills formed a distinct group "*Chionomorphæ*," in rank equal to the CECOMORPHÆ and CHARADRIOMORPHÆ of Prof. Huxley, and regarding this group as being "still nearer the common ancestral stock of both." These authors also wish to separate the two species generically; but their proposals are considered needless by Garrod (*Proc. Zool. Soc. 1877, p. 417*) and Prof. Milne-Edwards (*Ann. Sc. Nat. ser. 6, xiii. art. 4, p. 24*). The osteology of *C. minor* has further received the attention of Dr. Shufeldt (*Journ. Anat. & Physiol. 1891, pp. 508-525, pls. xi. xii.*) who has also (*Auk, 1893, pp. 158-165*) reviewed the various opinions entertained as to the systematic position of this form. The views of De Blainville and Dr. Reichenow are borne out by the observations of Mr. Eaton (*loc. cit.*), and no one knowing the habits of an Oyster-catcher can read his remarks without seeing how nearly related the two forms are. Their differences may perhaps justify the separation of each form into what is vaguely called a "Family," but the differences will be seen by the comparative anatomist to be of slight importance, and the intimate affinity of the *Gavinæ* and *Limicolæ*, already recognized by Prof. W. K. Parker as well as by some of the best taxonomers, is placed beyond dispute.²

SHELD-DRAKE, or, as commonly spelt in its contracted form, SHELDRAKE, a word whose derivation³ has been much discussed,

¹ In some details their memoir is unfortunately inaccurate.

² The little group of very curious birds, having no English name, of the genera *Thinocorys* and *Attagis* (PLOVER, p. 733), which are peculiar to certain localities in South America and its islands, are by some systematists placed in the Family *Chionididæ* and by others in a distinct Family "*Thinocoridæ*" (more correctly *Thinocorythidæ*). They are undoubtedly Limicoline, though having much the aspect of Sand-Grouse, but their precise position and rank remain at present uncertain (*cf. Garrod ut supra*, and Parker, *Trans. Zool. Soc. x. pp. 301 et seqg.*), though it is pretty clear that they are generalized and somewhat ancient forms—a fact which accords with their GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION (p. 324).

³ Ray in 1674 (*Engl. Words, p. 76*) gave it from the local "sheld" (=particoloured), which, applied to animals, as a horse or a cat, still survives in East Anglia. This opinion is not only suitable but is confirmed by the bird's