

**REMARKS ON THE
ORNITHOLOGY OF
NORTHERN
NORWAY, PP. 189-309**

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ROBERT COLLETT

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Robert Collett.

With a Map.

Read at the Meeting of the Society on 20th Dec. 1872. (Printed in April 1873).

Each of the last three summers I have been enabled to prosecute a series of zoological researches in the northern and central portions of the Norwegian coast: in 1870, on the large islands off the Trondhjem Fjord, Hitteren, Frøyen, and others; in 1871, in the provinces of Namdalen and Nordland; in 1872, in West Finmark and the neighbourhood of Tromsø. The principal ornithological facts resulting from the first of these excursions having been already published,¹ the following pages will embrace my researches during the two last summers in the northern parts of the country.

To give a tolerably complete account of the avifauna of a region so characteristically situated and wide in extent as is the northern coast of Norway, the researches of years would hardly suffice. Therefore it is obvious, that what is here recorded, does by no means pretend to exhaust the subject. Nay, I am convinced from the observations I have made, that a rich harvest of facts may yet be gathered from further and more diligent researches in regions so attractive by their situation and general character.

My chief object in the present paper has been to compare and elucidate with regard to habits and geographical distribution the several species known as inhabiting the regions north of the Polar Circle in Norway. Observations from other localities on the North

¹ Ornithologiske Bemærkninger til Norges Fauna (Nyt Mag. f. Naturv. Vol. 18, p. 161).

Coast, in particular Nordland, will, however, be found subjoined, and I have likewise recorded such of the latest ornithological discoveries in the country as I held to be of a special interest.

As regards Finmark, the *eastern* portion of that Stift, or „Östfinmarken“ has been specially favoured, in having been made the subject of comparatively accurate researches, extending over a period of many years, — as witness the labours of Schrader,¹ Sommerfelt,² Nordvi. Bearing this in mind, I passed the whole of last summer in West Finmark and Tromsø Amt,³ provinces comparatively little known to ornithologists. The localities visited were chiefly the following: — In *Finmarken* Amt the tracts bordering on the Porsanger Fjord, the country round the North Cape, and the valley of Aiten; in *Tromsø* Amt, the island of Tromsø, and the valley of the Maalselv. Store Tamsø, an island in the Porsanger Fjord, about 1 □ mile in extent, attracted my attention in a special degree: here I found a very considerable number of the Arctic *Grallae* and *Natatores*, for instance *Tringa minuta*, and *Branta leucopsis*. As in the valley of the Maalselv and in Aiten, I observed not a few species of the central European fauna, which, owing to the influence of the Gulf Stream on the climate, are enabled to range to a latitude in Norway far exceeding their limits in the eastern interior portions of the European Continent; so also at Gjøsvær, a bird preserve and fishing locality west of the North Cape, I found several of the more easterly species beyond their extreme western range, as hitherto known.

The localities which I explored in the summer of 1871, were chiefly the tracts bordering on the Foldenfjord, and the southern portions of Helgeland.

The directors of the Bergen Museum kindly placed at my disposal the late Pastor Heltzen's MS. on the fauna and flora of Helgeland, belonging to that institution. In this voluminous work, which is brought down to the year 1842, all the species

¹ Journ. f. Ornith. 1853, p. 240.

² Öfv. Kgl. Vet. Akad. Förh. 1861, p. 67.

³ The most northern part of this „Amt“ is in latitude 70° 30'.

observed in Helgeland (Nordland) are accurately described and figured, the ornithological section being based on the earliest editions of Nilsson's fauna. In this work, which, however, is to be made use of with considerable reservation, I have found recorded as occurring in Nordland, several species that had not previously been observed in such high latitudes.

Finally will be found recorded various observations made in other parts of the country, in particular the coast region, and chiefly so far as they bear upon those relating to species occurring in the northern districts. From the researches of late years two new species, *Cygnus olor* and *Chaulelasmus strepera*, which had not previously been observed within the confines of the country, are now introduced into our fauna.¹

The total number of species *actually* belonging to the Norwegian fauna is thus at the present moment 250. Of these, 174 have been observed within the Polar Circle; of this number 160 having ranged as far north as within the limits of Tromsø Amt; and finally 150 species belong to the fauna of Finmark proper.

A. Incessores, Vig.

1. Passeres, Lin. Sundev.

Turdus viscivorus, Lin.

North of Bodø, near which town it was found breeding (Godman, Ibis 1861), it has been observed by Professor Sundevall only at Alten (70°).

Turdus iliacus, Lin.

Common in all the birch woods of West Finmark. On the island of Tromsø and in the valley of the Maalselv, the nests found between 16th and 20th June contained young in various stages of growth, from nestlings just hatched to half grown birds. In a

¹ Vide „Norges Fugle og deres geografiske Udbredelse i Landet“ in Forh. i Vid. Selsk. 1869, p. 116—122.

nest near Bosekop, in Alten, there were fresh eggs so late as 14th July 1872.

Turdus musicus, Lin.

Was tolerably abundant in the valley of the Maalselv, near Tromsø, in June 1872, its occurrence being not exclusively confined to conifer woods; rarer in Alten (70°), the most northern point at which perhaps, it occurs. As a breeding bird it is highly improbable that on the southern fells it ever passes beyond the limits of the fir region; in the summer of 1871, it was met with breeding at Maristuen, on the Fillefeld, about 2800' above the level of the sea: hence its geographical distribution in Norway coalesces with that of the *Pinus sylvestris*; it affects, however, invariably spruce woods.

Turdus pilaris, Lin.

Exceedingly numerous in the birch woods of Finmark, yet in no locality in colonies so large as on the south-western coast. On Tromsøen, the nests, which are built not infrequently on dwelling-houses, contained young 16th June 1872; in Alten, adults of the year and fresh eggs were found at one and the same time. As the autumn advances, they journey southward, few individuals passing the winter in Finmark, a fact sufficiently explained by the nature of their food (berries of *Sorbus aucuparia*).

This species would appear to count a greater number of varieties than any other Norwegian bird, and several of such specimens are preserved in the museum of the university. The last two, a speckled white example, (November 1871), and a pale yellow albino (January 1872), were both killed near Christiania.

Turdus merula, Lin.

Occurs tolerably common along the inner shores of the Trondhjemsfjord (64°); I observed it at Namsos, June 20th 1871. Godman found it breeding near Bodø, the most northern known limit of its distribution.

Turdus torquatus, Lin.

Common along the whole coastal line, as far north as Lofoten. Not very numerous in West Finmark; the species here preferring the islands, where it has been found as far north as Fuglø (70° 20').

In East Finmark, it is seldom met with and only during the brief period of migration.

The notes and nesting habits of this bird have been variously described. The 10th June 1872, I lighted on several pair breeding in immediate proximity to one another (among *T. pilaris*) at Hjerkinhø (3100'), on the Dovre. The males mounted into the air like on *Anthus*, warbling in their ascent a melodious strain, which, though mellow and varied, was not loud, and very unlike the dismal call-note heard at other times. A nest, built upon the bare ground beneath a spreading juniper bush, contained 5 eggs, almost fresh.

Cinclus aquaticus, Lin.

Not very numerous in West Finmark, where, as in East Finmark, it occurs in the inland tracts. At the approach of winter, it moves towards the coast, and at that season of the year may not infrequently be met with on the island of Tromsø.

Regulus cristatus, Koch.

As a breeding bird, scarcely known north of Salten,¹ within the Polar Circle (67°). The correctness of Professor Rathke's statement, which makes it occur at the North Cape,² has been previously questioned by Sundevall; indeed Rathke's assumption must rest solely on the presence of stray individuals, there being no vestige of spruce growth here. In East Finmark, according to Nordvi, flights of these birds were observed repeatedly at Vadsø, April 12th 1853, and the following days, and individuals were even taken alive in the hand.

On the 20th May 1872, Mr. Landmark discovered a nest in Smaalehuene, containing 11 eggs, which had been sat upon for about 48 hours. (Length $13\frac{5}{10}$ — $14\frac{1}{10}$ mm, breadth $10\frac{6}{10}$ — $10\frac{8}{10}$ mm).

The nest being attached to the pendent twigs of a pine tree, some 30 feet from the ground, it was a matter of the greatest difficulty to sight it even at the distance of half a yard. The diameter, outside, was 90mm, inside, only 35mm. Height of nest

¹ In „Norges Fugle“ etc. (Forh. Vid.-Selsk. 1868, p. 121). „Alten“ is erroneously mentioned; hitherto it has not been found there, but may possibly occur.

² At first recorded by Raach in „Nyt Mag. f. Naturv.“ B. 1, p. 270.

75mm. It was constructed principally of fine moss and lichens, closely interwrought with the strong silky threads which certain species of *Araneidae* spin round their eggs. Amongst the other materials were thin, dry pine twigs, and here and there a tuft of the down of *Cirsium*. The inside was thickly lined with the feathers of small birds, amongst which those of *Fringilla spinus* could be readily distinguished.

Ruticilla phoenicurus, Lin.

Numerous in Alten, near Bosekop, and on Tromsø in the months of June and July 1872; it is likewise of frequent occurrence in East Finmark, and has been found breeding near Rensø (70° 20'). At Salsvand, north of Namsøs, I found 23rd June 1871 a nest with 8 eggs, at a distance of less than 80 yards from a nest, then occupied, of the *Haliaeetus albicilla*.

A nest taken from the hollow trunk of a birch tree on 9th June 1872 was constructed chiefly of the hair of *Myodes lemmus*, and lined with the feathers of *Lagopus albus*.

Cyanecula succica, Lin.

Common in birch undergrowth in Finmark and on Tromsø; in West Finmark, it was most abundant along the shores of the Porsangerfjord and in Alten. From the middle of July full grown birds of the year were to be seen almost everywhere.

On the southern fells this species would seem to be steadily increasing from year to year. Both on the Dovre and Fillefeld, and their ramifications, it is very abundant in wooded and willowed marshes; at the latter end of July 1872, this species with their full grown young struck me as being the most numerous of all the small birds in the wide marshy tract round Fokstuen on the Dovrefjeld, a locality in which nearly the whole of our alpine fauna is found represented. At the same time individuals of this species were occasionally seen in the sub-alpine districts of Gudbrandsdalen; it is by no means however probable, that the bird ever breeds here; it merely repairs from the adjacent fells at the close of the breeding season. In the lowlands they are rarely observed, and only on their migratory passage,

which may, perhaps, be partly accounted for by their shy and cautious habits. But in the vicinity of Christiania, where they have been more sought after, several examples have been procured of late years; two males, for instance, were killed on the 18th May 1871.

In the breeding season the males are, as a rule, anything but shy; they perch upon the tallest willows and sing their ever changing song, variations being constantly introduced. The azure throat, invariably with a centre spot of bay (only this form is known in Norway), render it a highly conspicuous bird, easily recognised at a distance. In both sexes the alarm note is very similar to that of *Saxicola*. The 10th June 1872, I found on the Dovre several nests, some of which contained incubated eggs; all of the nests were underneath willow bushes, and were constructed exclusively of the finest grass (*Poa*).

A very peculiar coloration marked the plumage of a female, shot on the Dovre, July 13th 1871. In this specimen the chin was blue blended with whitish; the breast lightish brown, on the sides bordered with a black band, spotted with white. Below the breast there was a blue stripe margined with red. Though not a sterile female (the ovarium contained eggs the size of a pea) this individual was very like a young male. On examining the stomach it was found to contain seeds and a *Clausilia*, exclusive of insects. In the stomachs of examples (young birds and adults) procured in Finmark were found only insects (*Coleoptera*, *Tipulidæ*), and their larvæ.

The size of individuals varies in a considerable degree; I have measured old males with a total length of 148 $\frac{1}{2}$, 152, 155, and 160 mm.

Erithacus rubecula, Lin.

Namdalen in June 1871; further north it occurs here and there in Nordland, extending into the Polar Circle.

Saxicola oenanthe, Lin.

Common along the whole coast-line. In Finmark it was numerous both on the fishing-grounds, whither it resorts in search of food among the fish drying on the „Hjelder“ (a kind of pole, on which the fish is dried), and high up among the snow patches on the desolate plateaus of the fells.