

**FAUNA ORCADENSIS; OR, THE
NATURAL HISTORY OF THE
QUADRUPEDS, BIRDS, REPTILES
AND FISHES OF ORKNEY AND
SHETLAND**

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Fauna Orcadensis; or, The natural history of the quadrupeds, birds, reptiles and fishes of Orkney and Shetland by George Low

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GEORGE LOW

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FAUNA ORCADENSIS:

OR,

THE NATURAL HISTORY

OF THE

QUADRUPEDS, BIRDS, REPTILES, AND FISHES,

OF

ORKNEY AND SHETLAND.

BY

THE REV. GEORGE LOW,

MINISTER OF BIRSA AND HARAV.

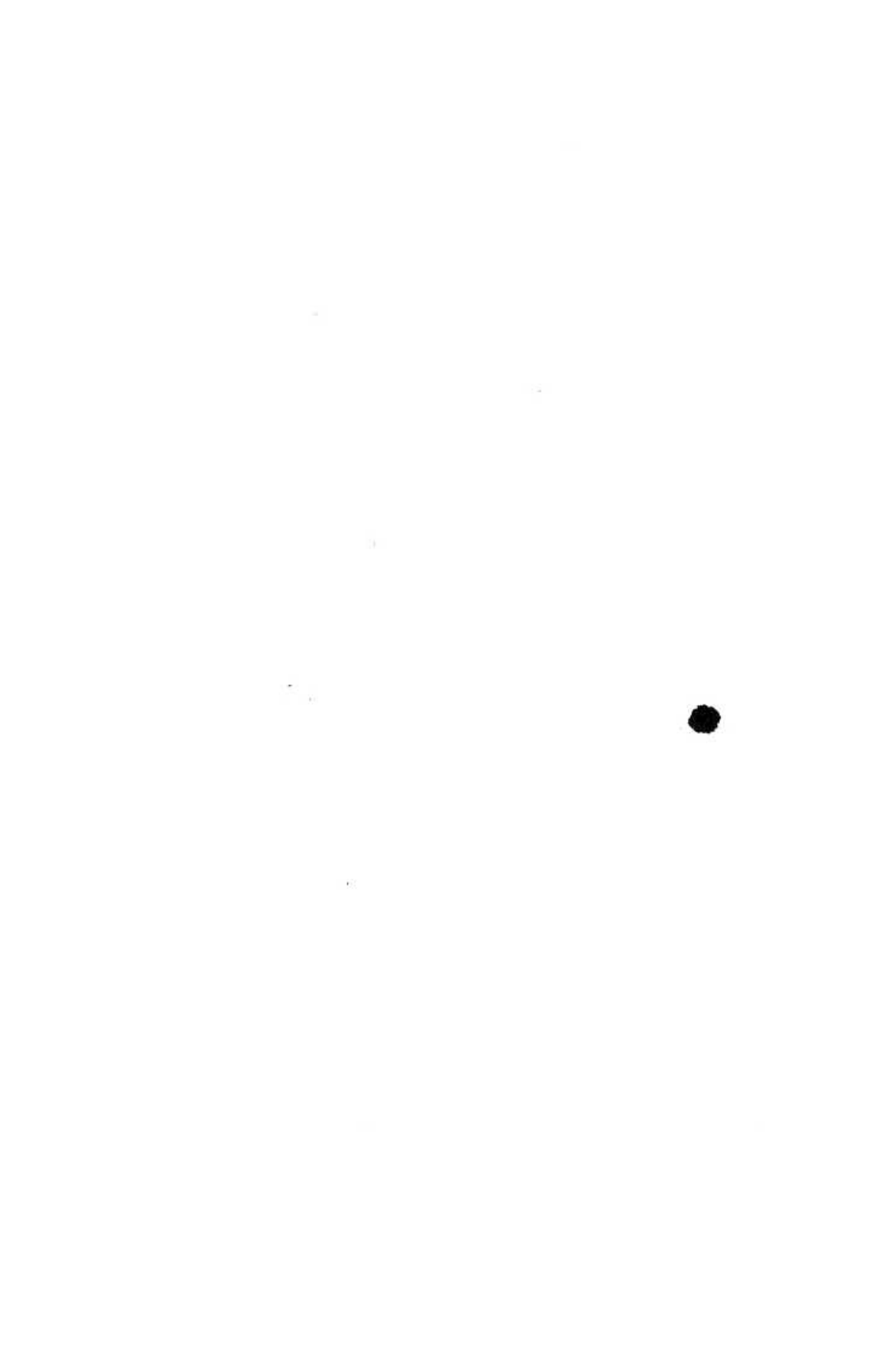
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LONDON.

1813.



TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

SIR JOSEPH BANKS, K. B. &c. &c.

WHOSE GENEROUS PATRONAGE OF SCIENCE

HAS EXTENDED

EVEN TO THE OBSCURE LABOURS OF THE AUTHOR,

THIS BOOK,

AS AN HUMBLE TRIBUTE OF ADMIRATION,

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY HIS OBEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE EDITOR.

ADVERTISEMENT.

MR LOW's merits, as a laborious and accurate observer of Nature, were, it is believed, scarcely known beyond the narrow circle of his particular friends; and it is to be regretted, that a recent historian* has not scrupled to avail himself of the advantages which this obscurity offered to a plagiarist. It having been the Editor's fortune to procure the MS. *Fauna Orcadensis* of Mr LOW, he now begs leave to lay it before the public, in the form in which it was left by its Reverend Author. It appears to have been revised by the late Mr PENNANT, as it contains a few corrections in that gentleman's handwriting. The Editor trusts that it will be found to afford an interesting and valuable addition to the Natural History of the British Islands, and prove far more useful than the closet compilations of some modern zoologists.

IT may not be uninteresting to relate the few facts which the Editor has been enabled to collect†, respecting the author of the following pages. MR LOW was born, in 1746, in the parish of Edzel, in Forfarshire. After prosecuting his studies at the Colleges of Aberdeen and St Andrew's, he became tutor in the family of a gentleman of the name of GRAHAM, at Stromness, in Orkney. While he remained at this place, Sir JOSEPH (then Mr) BANKS and Dr SOLANDER touched at the islands, on their return from the last and ill-fated voyage of discovery, in which Captain Cooke fell. MR LOW having early acquired a taste for Natural History, was much noticed by these distinguished philosophers, and was requested to accompany them in their excursions through the Orkneys, and also to the Shetland Islands, which he did.

ON the 14th of December 1774, MR LOW was ordained minister of Birsay and Haray, a parish in Pomona, or the Mainland of Orkney. The duties of this charge he continued to fulfil throughout the remainder of his life.

* The Rev. George Barry, D. D. in his *History of Orkney*, 4to. 1805.

† For these particulars the Editor is indebted to Patrick Neill, Esq. author of a *Tour in Orkney and Shetland*, whose ardour in the pursuits of science is too well known to require any praise in this place, and to Mr Hugh Moore at Birsay, an intimate friend of Mr LOW's.

IN 1775, he married Miss HELEN TYRIE, only daughter of the Rev. JAMES TYRIE, minister of Stromness and Sandwick. The death of this Lady (which happened in child-bed, the year after the marriage) deeply affected Mr Low, and it is believed he found consolation chiefly in that devotion to the pursuits of Natural History for which he was remarkable. During the last nineteen years of his life he continued to labour in the study of Nature, and his success was certainly creditable, considering the many disadvantageous circumstances against which, in his remote situation, he had to strive.

SIR JOSEPH BANKS, with his wonted discrimination and zeal for the promotion of science, took an opportunity of introducing Mr Low to the acquaintance of the celebrated Mr PENNANT. By Mr PENNANT's encouragement, chiefly, Mr Low engaged to draw up both a Fauna Orcadensis and a Flora Orcadensis. The former is now presented to the public: the latter has entirely disappeared. He likewise prepared for the press "A Tour through the Islands of Orkney and Shetland, containing Hints relating to their Ancient, Modern, and Natural History." He likewise undertook and executed a translation of Torfaus's History of Orkney. Mr Low died in 1795.

THE principal part of his MSS. including the Fauna, the Tour, and Translation of Torfaus, together with his Zoological Collections, (in which was a specimen of *ASTERIAS Caput Medusa*, taken in the Orkney Seas, and now in the Editor's possession), fell into the hands of the late eminent antiquary, Mr GEORGE PATON of Edinburgh, at whose sale, after his death, they were purchased by different individuals.

The Editor cannot conclude this advertisement without acknowledging the liberality of the Booksellers, in readily undertaking to publish this *Orkney Fauna*, in a form and style calculated to do credit to the unfortunate Author.

WILLIAM ELFORD LEACH.

Edinburgh, May 14, 1812.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE utility of provincial histories of all kinds is now generally acknowledged to be great, as these are certainly the materials from which a general structure, either of civil, military, or natural history, is to be raised. In no branch of history is this more apparent than in that of Nature. She must be sought and described on the spot, and her various productions investigated in their proper climates, soils, and beds. Hearsay descriptions of natural subjects are seldom to be depended on, unless taken from the most attentive observers, and even these, to be convincing, must be made on the spot, as change of climate or soil sometimes makes such alterations in the appearance of natural objects, as may deceive even adepts in the science.

The following sketch of the Natural History of the Orkney Islands was at first designed as an information of what might be remarkable here to a gentleman*, whose writings on the same subject do him honour, and are well known to the public. But by degrees swelling to some bulk, by his advice it was thrown into a systematic arrangement, and now appears as a separate work.

* THOMAS PENNANT, Esq.