

## WHITE-BILLED NORTHERN DIVER ON SHETLAND

BY

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(Plate II, fig. 2).

ON January 21st, 1946, a dead White-billed Northern Diver (*Colymbus adamsii*) was found by the Venables washed up at the head of Whiteness Voe, Shetland. It was not possible to preserve the bird, but it was examined and measured on the spot and the skull was cleaned and sent to Tucker, who identified it. It is now deposited in the Oxford University Museum.

Only two definitely reliable records of this species for the British Isles are recorded in *The Handbook of British Birds* (Vol. iv, p. 118). (cf. also Witherby, *Brit. Birds*, Vol. xvi, pp. 9-12). The bird had been dead for several days and, though the cold weather had kept it fairly fresh, the colours of the soft parts may have changed. It was not sexed.

The mantle and scapulars showed a few big white spots, and there were rows of small white spots on the lesser, median and greater wing-coverts. The tail-feathers were tipped with various shades of smoke-grey and light grey-brown, instead of with white as in the adult. The combination of immature tail-feathers with some feathers of the breeding plumage on the upper-parts evidently indicates a bird in its second winter, since the adult breeding plumage is not assumed till the second year. Witherby states in *The Handbook* that in the Great Northern Diver (*Colymbus immer*), with which the species agrees closely in most respects, "the juvenile plumage is only partially moulted in December and January, many juvenile body feathers being retained, also all primaries and secondaries and most wing-coverts . . . sometimes whole tail, but often only part." The present bird, however, would appear to have retained the juvenile tail-feathers into January of the second winter, unless the new tail-feathers after the first post-juvenile moult are occasionally more or less like the juvenile ones and not invariably "as adult winter" (i.e. tipped white), as stated in *The Handbook*. An examination of a larger series than has been available to us (B.W.T.) would be necessary to throw light on this point.

The bill (see Plate II, fig. 2) shows well the characteristics of *C. adamsii*, the almost straight outline of the upper mandible, the more pronounced gonys, and the flatter, less rounded sides of the upper mandible as compared with *C. immer*. The horny sheath was noted in the flesh as white, slightly tinged yellow, pale horn at upper base and slightly blue-tinged at lower base. At a distance it looked quite white: more so than does that in the photograph of the immature *Colymbus i. immer* in Coward, Vol. iii, p. 238.

The tarsi were dusky outside, and white, slightly tinged yellow, inside.

The following measurements were taken in the flesh :

Beak : front end of nostril (i.e. the hole, not the bevel) to tip of beak, 77 mm. The range given in *The Handbook* is 60-80 mm., as against 53-70 in *C. immer*. End of feathering to tip of beak, 96 mm.

Tarsus : 103 mm. [Probably this measurement was not taken strictly by *The Handbook* method, as the maximum *Handbook* figure is 96 mm., or 98 for *C. immer* (B.W.T.)]. Tarsus plus the longest toe stretched out flat : 213 mm.

Wing : 385 mm. *cf. Handbook*, 360-395 mm. 385 is the maximum measurement quoted for *immer*, except for one case (male) of 408 mm.

Wing tip to body : 63 cm.

Total span : 152.5 cm.

Tip of beak to tip of tail : 81.5 cm.

Tip of beak to tip of longest toe : 100.5 cm.

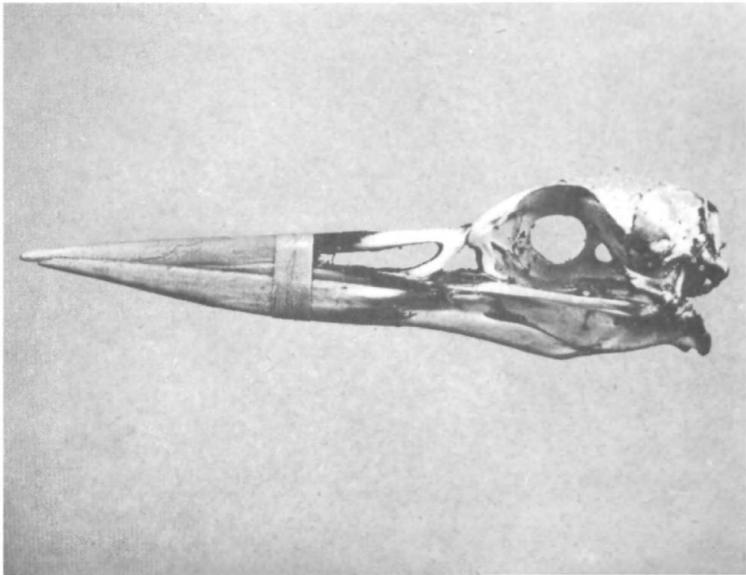
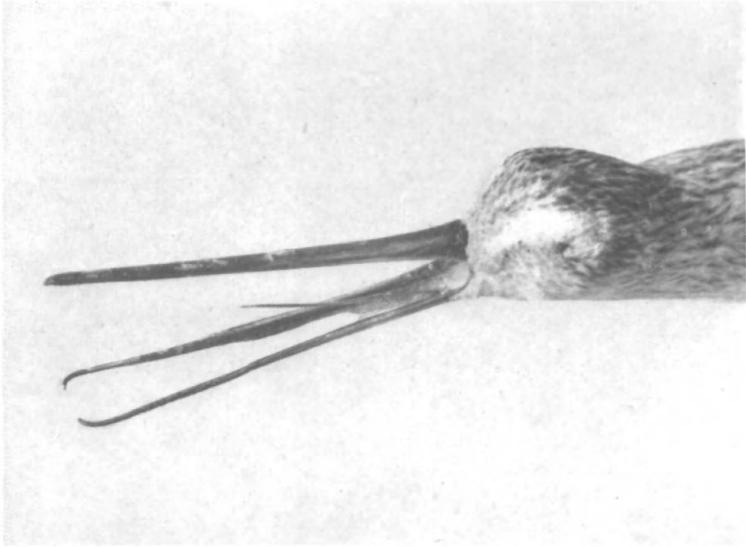


FIG. 1.—BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa l. lapponica*) WITH ABNORMAL BILL.  
(see p. 120).

FIG. 2.—SKULL OF WHITE-BILLED NORTHERN DIVER (*Colymbus adamsii*)  
FROM SHETLAND, JANUARY 21ST, 1946. (see p. 112).