

detail has been given. Especial attention has been paid to the solvent glands. The general part, and most of the numerous illustrations, will chiefly interest the histologist, but the systematist will hardly derive much help or hints from this part of avine anatomy.

XXXVI.—*Letters, Proceedings of the British Ornithologists' Union, Extracts, Obituary, &c.*

WE have received the following letters addressed to "The Editors of 'The Ibis'":—

SIRs,—On the 16th January last, through the kindness of Mr. Arthur W. Elford, British Vice-Consul at Catania, Sicily, I came into possession of a fine specimen of *Porphyrio alleni* Thompson, which had been obtained on the 4th of December, 1902, at the Pantano di Catania, an extensive tract of marshy land near the town of that name. The bird in question was shot by a local sportsman, Signor Vincenzo Auteri, who, fortunately recognising its rarity, took it to a taxidermist and had the skin prepared by him. The specimen was not sexed, but, judging from its wing-length (6.10 inches), I presume it to be a male. The average wing-length in a series of specimens of this species in my collection is 6 inches in the case of males, and 5.60 inches in that of females.

This makes the sixth recorded instance of the occurrence of this tropical species in Europe, four of the previous captures having been effected in Italy and one in Spain. Of the four examples obtained in Italy, no less than three come from the neighbourhood of Lucca in Tuscany, while the fourth is from the vicinity of Pachino in Sicily (Giglioli, 'Avifauna Italica,' p. 353).

According to Signor Auteri, another of these birds was seen by him about the middle of January this year not far from the Lake of Lentini, also near Catania, but was not secured.

I may also here mention having lately heard from the naturalist Blanc of Tunis that a specimen of *Porphyrio alleni* was obtained in December last near Bizerta in North Tunisia, and was prepared by him for a customer.

As Prof. Giglioli observes (*Avifanna Italica*, p. 354), it is a singular fact, and one worthy of notice, as being contrary to the generally accepted ideas regarding the laws governing the migration of birds, that the cases recorded of the occurrence in Europe of this tropical Ethiopian species should all have occurred during the autumn or winter months.

The species has no doubt rightly been separated generically from *Porphyrio* under the name of *Porphyryula* Blyth, or *Porphyriola*, as perhaps it should be spelled.

While on the subject of *rare aves*, for this part of the world at least, I may mention having this winter obtained a fine adult specimen of the Gannet (*Sula bassana*). This was taken alive in a fishing-net off the coast near Palermo and brought to me by some fishermen. The bird lived in my garden for more than two months, but died about the end of March, on the approach of warm weather.

This northern species, although apparently common in winter about the Straits of Gibraltar, is more or less rare so far east in the Mediterranean as Sicily, particularly in its adult dress; and the present capture is, I believe, but the third recorded for Italy in that state of plumage. The Florence Museum possesses one; another, obtained off the small island of Levanzo in the month of May, is in the Trapani Lyceum collection, and that now recorded appears to be the third. Young Gannets in their dark dress are more often met with in this part of the Mediterranean, and I myself last year obtained one of them here, and another near Tunis. The species, although no doubt more or less uncommon on the Italian coasts, is probably less rare than is generally supposed. Colonel Irby, who was in Palermo during the past winter, informed me that he and his son, when out walking one day, saw an adult Gannet flying not far from the shore below Monte Pellegrino. From Tunis also I have heard of an adult Gannet having been obtained during the past winter on the Lake of Bizerta.

Palermo,
May 30th, 1903.

Yours &c.,
JOSEPH I. S. WHITAKER.