

cavates its own burrow, but always uses that of the Viscacha, or Biscacha; and Mr. Darwin considers that where that animal is present, Azara's statement is doubtless correct, but that on the sandy plains of Bahia Blanca, where the Biscacha is not found, this cavy, as the Spaniards maintain, is its own workman. The same thing, he adds, occurs with the little owls of the pampas (*Noctua cunicularia*), which have been described by travellers as standing like sentinels at the mouths of almost every burrow; for in Banda Oriental, owing to the absence of the Biscacha, these birds are obliged to hollow out their own habitations. Azara, moreover, states that, except when pressed by danger, this cavy does not have recourse to its burrow for safety, but crouches on the plains, or trusts to its speed; adding, however, that it is soon run down.

On the contrary, Mr. Darwin asserts that at Bahia Blanca he repeatedly saw two or three animals sitting on their haunches by the mouths of their holes, which they quietly entered as he passed by at a distance. He remarks, however, that, different from most burrowing animals, they wander, commonly two or three together, to miles or even leagues from their home, and he was not able to

ascertain whether or not they returned at night.

This species is diurnal in its habits, roaming about by day. It is very shy and watchful, seldom squats after the manner of a hare, and cannot run fast, so that indifferent dogs easily overtake it. The female breeds in her burrow, generally producing two young ones at a birth. The flesh of this animal is white, but dry and insipid. The skin with the fur on is in esteem, being used for rugs, and is beautiful from the character of the hair, which is full and soft, and from the tasteful arrangement of the marking. The colour of the back is brown, grizzled with white, verging into yellow on the sides of the body and on the limbs, but becoming black as it approaches the haunch; this dark hue is there abruptly interrupted by a white band passing transversely above the root of the tail, and spreading on the back and sides of the thighs. The appearance of this white mark is very striking. The chest, inside of the limbs, and under-part of the body, are also white. The ears are three inches and a-half in length, erect and pointed. Full-grown individuals weigh between twenty and twenty-six pounds. The young, it is said, may be easily domesticated.

HAUNTS OF THE DOTTEREL.



BARELY in the morning, after having breakfasted off a delicious salmon, which Donald had caught that morning at daybreak, in the burn near the shieling, we started for the haunts of the dotterel. As we were sure to have a long and toilsome day, the good wife had amply provided each of us with a large parcel of newly-baked scones and huge slices of salmon. Donald led the way

up the steep hillside with the elastic step of a born mountaineer. I toiled after him for the first mile or two speechless and breathless, caring for nothing but to keep up with him, and listening to the throb of my overtaxed heart. The path we at first pursued had been famous in time gone by as that by which the smugglers of the district had travelled to dispose of their whisky.

When we reached the top of the first hill, we sat down to enable me to regain my breath. What a glorious stretch of

wooded plain and lofty mountain lay spread out before us, shining in the early morning sun! In the foreground the steep hillside, clothed in brown heather and the greenest of bracken, with here and there huge boulders of granite covered with bright-coloured mosses. At our feet lay the little lake, one half of which showed like liquid silver, as the sunbeams danced and played on the tiny rippling wavelets. The other end looked dark and dismal from the reflection of the black rocks as they rose in precipices from its margin. In the middle distance stretched the well-wooded plain in which Braemar stands. An amber-coloured stream, fringed with hazel trees and oak copse, wound through it, while on either side were bright corn-fields, with a red-roofed farmhouse at intervals. In the distance rose the mountains, ridge beyond ridge, like huge waves, the lowest covered to their summits by silver-stemmed birches and green larch trees; those higher, with dark pines climbing their sides, and towering above all, the huge, snow-crowned, serrated peaks of Ben Muic Dhui and Cairn Toul.

As we walked on the weather changed. A thick mist came rolling down, accompanied by a bitter cold wind, and blotted out everything. Hour after hour we tramped on. I was wondering how Donald kept the right direction, and coming at this moment to what I thought a mere patch of snow, several of which we had crossed, I carelessly stepped on to it, and was about to make another step, when suddenly my arm was grasped, and I was dragged back so violently as to fall. Looking up at Donald I saw he was pale, and trembling violently. In a few seconds, when he had regained his power of articulation, he said, "That was a near shave, sir; another step and you were over the Canlochan Crags."

He had gone off the right track, and the patch in front was the narrow rim of snow which clings to the top of the crags for many weeks after most of the snow

round about has disappeared. These Canlochan crags are huge precipices which form a semicircle of about two miles in extent, and are still much frequented by eagles.

In a few minutes a glimpse of sunshine shone through the mist, and in a short time it was broken up, and sent rolling in eddying masses, reflecting the most brilliant rainbow colours, as it passed away lit up by the bright sun, and disclosing the whole line of cliffs. Skirting the edge of the cliffs for about a mile, we struck off, and began to ascend the rough stony summit of the Glasha, which lay immediately in front of us.

As it was now well on in the afternoon, and we had been toiling all day, I asked Donald if we were still far from the dotterel ground, and was relieved by being told we had only one more mile to walk. After we had descended the other side of the Glasha, I saw at a glance that here at last was ground suitable for the dotterel. Who could paint the desolation of the scene? A thin driving mist obscured the sky and the more distant objects. In front of us ran a long ridge which rose gradually into the broad rounded summit of the Glas Maol. This ridge was not covered with stones, but with a thick layer of grey woolly moss and stunted sedge. Here and there a large, damp, black patch of peat bog. On the right hand lay a steep stony corrie, and on the left the ridge sloped gradually down to the edge of a line of precipices. All was still and silent as the grave, but for the mournful sigh of the north-east wind as it swept gloomily over the cold, dank, dismal waste. Here we separated in order to beat the ground, Donald keeping along the centre of the ridge, while I, every sense keenly awake, held on about fifty paces to his right.

After we had proceeded in this way for some time, I was attracted by the tinkling note of a small bird coming from the edge of the corrie. Surprised

at the sound, and thinking it might be the long-looked-for snow-bunting, also a lover of the desolate, I turned to the right and walked in the direction of the sound. Before I had advanced many paces, I saw a brown bird rise from the middle of a patch of stones, near the edge of the corrie, and go shuffling off, trailing its wings on the ground as if wounded. At my signal Donald came running up and saw the bird just as it disappeared over the edge. He at once pronounced it to be the dotterel. After a little search I found the eggs, lying in a slight hollow, between two stones. They were rather smaller than the eggs of the lapwing, and marked with large distinct patches of dark brown on a greyish yellow ground. The nest, if nest it could be called, was a mere hollow among the stones, lined with a few pieces of the broken stalks of *carex*. I shall not attempt to describe our enthusiasm at this moment. While I sat among the stones, Donald forgetting his Highland sobriety of demeanour, went capering about like a mad goat, alternately congratulating me in English and himself in Gaelic.

Being desirous of again seeing the bird, we ensconced ourselves near the top of a slight eminence, which overlooked the patch of stones, about fifty paces distant. After lying exactly half an hour the dotterel suddenly appeared at some little distance on the other side of the nest. Fixing the telescope on her, I followed her various manœuvres with ease. These consisted of little runs of two or three yards with lowered head and crouching body. Then a pause for a few seconds, now and then picking up a beetle or grub. In this way she pro-

ceeded, keeping at the same distance from the nest, till she had almost completed half a circle. Then in the same manner she went towards the nest, till within a few feet, when throwing aside all cunning she raised her head and ran up to it. She seemed to give a sigh of relief as she settled herself down cosily on the yet untouched eggs, and then remained motionless.

Then we held a council of war as to whether the bird should be shot or not. I was strongly opposed to it, knowing its extreme rarity. Donald, on the other hand, would have the bird. What was the good of it, he asked, rare or not rare, if no one ever saw it?

"If you don't shoot the bird, I shall," and he picked up his breech-loader.

"In that case I had better do it with the stick-gun," I said, "as it won't mark the bird so much." So with many a qualm of conscience, I crept noiselessly towards the bird. When within a few yards of her I rose—the dotterel rose also—a loud report and the beautiful little creature lay dead among the grey stones. It was melancholy to think as I picked up the dead thing, that this was the outcome of my constant inveighing against the reprehensible habit of shooting our rare indigenous birds.

As we shortly afterwards quitted the spot, its loneliness seemed increased two-fold. Several hours' hard walking brought us shortly after nightfall to Donald's hut. After partaking of the good wife's hospitality, I started for my inn at Braemar. It was a wild and stormy night, the hurrying moon showing at intervals through ragged rifts in the clouds; but little recked I, for had not the dotterel's nest been taken?

