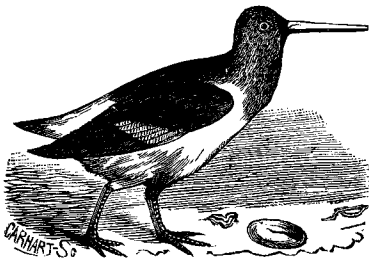


THE AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER.

Hœmatopus palliatus.

BY W. W. WORTHINGTON.

Well do I remember the first specimen of this wary bird I ever relieved of his skin. I was hunting along the South Carolina coast, and by carefully sculling my little skiff I was able to approach near



AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER.

enough to risk a long shot. At the report of my gun he tried to rise, but a chance shot had tipped one wing and his only chance of escape was by running.

Quickly grounding my skiff, I jumped out and started in hot pursuit; but I was encumbered with my heavy boots, and how he could run! He made directly for a small creek and reached the water about six feet ahead. In I plunged and was just about to grasp him, when he dove and I only captured him by plunging my arm in nearly to the shoulder; but I had him safely in my grasp at last, and as I squeezed the life out of him I admired his black head, neck, tail and wing tips, brown back, white rump and under parts and bright red bill, (which is a veritable oyster knife) and also his sharp yellow eye.

These birds are found throughout the year along the South Atlantic coast and are very shy and difficult to obtain. They nest on the outer beaches, simply scratching a hollow in the sand in which the eggs are deposited—in Georgia about the middle of April. Further north they are laid a little later. Maynard, in "Birds of Eastern N. A." says: "they lay about June 6th," which is no further from the truth than many other statements in the same volume.

Of two sets handled by myself the past week, the first, taken April 19th, was about one-fourth incubated. The other set, taken the 20th, had two of the three eggs picked. The eggs have a pale drab ground, with dark brown spots, some obscured by the ground color. Average size, 2.25x1.50.