

PREFACE.

The present work is intended to meet the wants of a large number of persons, especially sportsmen, who are interested in birds and would like to know their names, but often find it no easy task to identify them by the "bird books." To all such I offer this Key, in which the species are arranged in groups according to size, and believe it will enable any one unfamiliar with birds to identify with comparative ease any species of our North American Shore Birds.

Birds vary so much in size that the *length* of any one specimen cannot be accepted as a standard for others of the same species. The length measure is, nevertheless, of value to enable us to form an approximate idea of the size of the bird. The length of the *wing* is, however, much less variable, and is an important aid to the identification of many species. In fact, the variation is so small and constant that, allowing for possible extremes, they may be arranged in groups according to length of wing. The identification of any species then becomes a very simple matter, as usually the birds contained in each group are so few in number that characteristic differences in each species are easily indicated.

Let us assume, for example, we have before us a bird which we wish to identify. We first measure the wing (see directions for measurements, illustrated, page 7). We find the wing measures nine inches long. We now turn to the "Index to Key" (page 12), and find that Group 6 contains birds having the wing measuring from nine to twelve inches long, and is divided into three sections; Sections 1 and 2 comprising birds having four toes, and Section 3, birds with three toes. Our bird has four toes, so we look for it under Section 1 or 2. We find that birds under Section 1 have the bill curved downward, and birds under Section 2 have the bill curved upward, or nearly straight. Our bird has the bill curved downward. We therefore look for it under Section 1. We find but two birds included under Section 1; one with axillars reddish brown, marked with black, and the other having the axillars banded with slaty