

## ON THE ORIGINAL DEPICTIONS BY JOHN FREDERICK MILLER TAKEN FROM THE TYPE SPECIMEN OF THE IVORY GULL *PAGOPHILA EBURNEA* (PHIPPS, 1774)

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In summer 1773, two armed vessels belonging to the Royal Navy, HMS Racehorse and HMS Carcass, under the command of Constantine John Phipps and admiral Skeffington Lutwidge, set out on an audacious expedition towards the North Pole (Phipps 1774). Phipps added field observations about the polar bear *Ursus maritimus*, already known to Carl Linneaus and Thomas Pennant, and provided the first description (without illustration) of *Larus Eburneus*, now known as the ivory gull *Pagophila eburnea*. No other scientific expeditions approached the North Pole between 1774-1776, and whalers operating in these waters were unlikely to have had either the inclination or means to conserve any specimens of any species, suggesting that no other ivory gull could have been collected at this time.

John Frederick Miller was an English artist and illustrator of natural history subjects. He often based his work on specimens or sketches provided by naturalists and artists attached to voyages, like Sidney Parkinson, who accompanied Captain James Cook to the Pacific. In 1776 Miller began publication of his now excessively rare *Icones Animalium et Plantarum Various Subjects of Natural History*, wherein are *Delineated Birds, Animals and many Curious Plants etc* (Miller 1776-1785). Sixty plates were 'Painted, Engrav'd, and Publish'd, according to the Act, by J.F. Miller...'. The first author examined one of only two incomplete copies known in the Natural History Museum in London (hereafter NHMUK). Volume II, plate XII, dated 1776 (see Sherborne & Iredale 1921 for the dating of Miller's *Icones*) depicts the ivory gull designated *Larus albus*. It is the first published illustration of this species. The same plate was reissued

figure 1. J.F. Miller's illustration of the ivory gull in the copy of Miller (1776) held in NHMUK (©Natural History Museum, London, UK).

Afbeelding van de ivoormeeuw zoals afgebeeld in het exemplaar van Miller (1776) in het National History Museum in Londen.





figure 2. J.F. Miller's original illustration as held in the archives of the NHMUK (© Natural History Museum, London, UK). Originele afbeelding van de ivoormeeuw door J.F. Miller.

in 1796 under the new title of *Cimelia Physica* [...], with text supplied by George Shaw. This publication is only slightly less rare than the earlier work (Shaw 1796). The fact that Miller was able to publish an illustration in 1776 strongly suggests that Phipps returned to Britain with a specimen (maybe more than one) which were made available to Miller. The illustration (figure 1) reveals a rather oddly coloured ivory gull. Phipps was a highly observant man and may well have made field notes about the birds observed, and probably collected, which he '.... found on the coast of Spitsbergen ....'. He provided a description in Latin of what must have been a freshly killed specimen, including measurements, colouration of plumage and bare parts (p. 188). His birds were 'immaculate, as white as snow. The bill leaden and feet coloured grey-lead and equipped with black nails'. The blue colour of feet and basal part of the bill are unnaturally depicted and do not align with the description by Phipps. Also, the orbital ring is coloured yellow (figures 1 and 2), while in adult birds this is dark red (Olsen & Larsson 2004). It is not known whether Miller coloured his own engravings, although he did claim on the title page to the reissue of his plates in *Cimelia Physica* that the plates were 'engraved and coloured from the subjects themselves'. If not, the task would have been left to the discretion of a professional colourist, and discrepancies between nature and art may have emerged.

Only recently, Miller's original painting made of this type specimen was identified by Jansen at the NHMUK (figure 2), having been accessioned under the UK Government Acceptance in Lieu scheme (Arts Council England 2017: 31). In the handwritten legend below the image, Miller stated 'This Bird brought from Spitzbergen in 1773. by the Honble Constantine Phipps'. The work was signed at lower left beneath

the image 'John Frederick Miller pinxt 1774.' confirming that he was responsible for creating this original painting. The leaden colouration of the legs and basal two-thirds of the bill are consistent with Phipps' description. This painting therefore differs considerably from the hand-coloured engraving published two years later (Walters 2009).

What has happened to Phipps' type specimen is not known. While many other specimens from voyages went to the private museum owned by Sir Ashton Lever, the ivory gull appears not to have been amongst them, even though Lever is known to have possessed two specimens. In 1784, Thomas Pennant, in his *Arctic Zoology*, described 'No. 457 Ivory Gull' based on specimens in that museum and acknowledged 'To Sir Ashton Lever, Knight, I am highly indebted, for the more intimate and closer examination of his treasures than was allowed to the common visitors of his most magnificent museum'. One year later, John Latham (1785: 377-378) also recorded the ivory gull in this collection. Edward Donovan, in creating the catalogue for the sale of this museum in 1806, recorded as Lot 25 'Snow gulls, Hudson's Bay' (Donovan *et al.* 1806) and these were purchased on July 13<sup>th</sup> 1806 by Johan Natterer on behalf of the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna, Austria (von Pelzeln 1873). One of these is still present in Vienna (Bauernfeind 2004, NMW 54.001), while the other was sent to Coenraad Jacob Temminck (Temminck 1807) for his own cabinet, which was to form the basis of the collection at the Leiden Museum. This specimen was, however, already absent when Hermann Schlegel, his curatorial successor, came into office (Schlegel 1863). It is possible that these two specimens were sent at an unknown date by Johan Reinhold Forster from Hudson's Bay. We must conclude, therefore, that the type specimen(s) of the ivory gull has been lost.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original-coloured drawing by J.F. Miller was discovered at the NHMUK while conducting research on historical illustrations in conjunction with and on behalf of Dr. Mark and Heather Cabouret.

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**SAMENVATTING – DE ORIGINELE AFBEELDING VAN HET TYPE VAN DE IVOORMEEUW *PAGOPHILA EBURNEA* (PHIPPS, 1774) DOOR JOHN FREDERICK MILLER**

Op een expeditie naar de Noordpool in de zomer van 1773 is de ivoormeeuw als nieuwe soort voor de wetenschap ontdekt. Mogelijk is er toen een exemplaar (of meerdere) verzameld en meegenomen naar Engeland. De vogel is afgebeeld door John Frederick Miller. De originele plaat is tot op heden niet gepubliceerd geweest. Dat is wel gebeurd met een kopie in 1776 (Miller 1776). Wij beschrijven de verschillen tussen het origineel en de kopie. Het getekende exemplaar, dat het holotype vertegenwoordigt, is niet in de voor de hand liggende collecties teruggevonden.



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[published 2 December 2022]