

RECENT RECORDS FROM STAFFORDSHIRE,
WARWICKSHIRE AND WORCESTER.

BY

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THE study of Staffordshire ornithology presents especial difficulties, as the only recent works on the birds of the county are somewhat inaccessible. Dr. Macaldowie's treatise was published in the *Report and Transactions of the North Staffordshire Field Club* for 1893, but only a few copies were separately printed; while Mr. J. R. B. Masefield's paper on the birds of the county in the *Victoria County History*, though published in 1908, was written some years previously, with only a brief appendix, in which some of the more important later records were inserted; this work is also practically unobtainable separately, and must be read in conjunction with the *Reports of the N.S.F.C.* from 1905 onwards. Unfortunately, these zoological reports do not deal with the species referred to in any scientific order, so that records of each species must be searched for throughout the whole series of reports. A re-arrangement of the notes in scientific order would render these reports much more accessible for reference and increase their value enormously.*

The *Annual Report and Transactions of the N.S.F.C.* for 1909-10 (Vol. XLIV.), which has lately been sent to us, contains, in addition to Mr. Masefield's "Annual Report" (Aves, pp. 67-71), and Mr. W. Wells Bladen's "Bird Notes from Stone" (pp. 74-83), a long illustrated paper by Mr. F. Coburn (pp. 85-128) "On the Rarer Birds of Staffordshire and their Migration across the County, with Notes from adjoining Counties" (*i.e.*, Worcester and Warwick). Most of these records are from Norton Pool, Chasetown,

* For Warwickshire the latest authority is the late R. F. Tomes' article in the *Vict. Hist. of Warwickshire*, Vol. I. (1904), and for Worcester the same writer's list in the *Vict. Hist. of Worcester* (1901).

Staffordshire, a fruitful, but previously unworked, locality, except through the exertions of Mr. G. H. Clarke, to whom most of these records are primarily due. Brief notes on some of these occurrences appeared in Mr. Masefield's report for 1908-09, but these may be treated together, as they were, we believe, derived from Mr. Coburn, to whom we must be thankful for rescuing some of these records from probable oblivion.

Although we cannot agree with many of Mr. Coburn's conclusions with regard to migration, the facts he narrates, taken in conjunction with other records, such as those of Mr. Ward at Gailey Pools, show in a remarkable way that there is a far larger and more regular stream of migrants between the Trent and the Severn than was previously supposed, and open a most interesting field of observation to local ornithologists, of which we trust they will take advantage.

Before dealing with the records *seriatim*, we should like to call attention to a "very extraordinary migration" which took place in the middle of May, 1891, during a heavy snowfall followed by hard frost. Mr. Coburn says that on May 17th "the whole district was teeming" with Stonechats. They differed from others seen earlier in the season, being "paler in colour, more slender in build and their actions different." No specimens were shot, and next day all had disappeared. From later investigations he is "quite satisfied that these were Siberian Stonechats, *Pratincola maura*"! We quote this as an instance of very remarkable optimism before proceeding to deal with the more important records in detail.

All localities referred to are in Staffordshire unless otherwise stated, and the order of Saunders' *Manual* has been followed.

[BEARDED TIT (*Panurus biarmicus*).—Two said to have been shot at Chasetown in the winter of 1896 by Mr. G. H. Clarke. Previous evidence of its occurrence in Staffordshire is far from satisfactory. The nest in a gorse-bush, referred to in the *Vict. Hist. of Stafford* (Vol. I., p. 144), was more probably that of a Long-tailed Tit!]

GOLDEN ORIOLE (*Oriolus galbula*).—One shot near Great Barr in April, 1908, in the possession of Mr. R. W. Chase. The third occurrence in the county.

ROSE-COLOURED STARLING (*Pastor roseus*).—One immature female shot on November 10th, 1890, at the Streetly end of Sutton Park on the border of Warwick and Stafford. Only one previous record for Stafford and two for Warwick.

ROLLER (*Coracias garrulus*).—One shot by a keeper in June, 1908, at Patshull (Hon. G. Legge). The first authentic record, though an example is said to have been seen at Berkeley.

CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).—A frequent visitor to Norton Pool, and also recorded from Warwickshire.

SHAG (*P. graculus*).—One captured on August 28th, 1908, at Saltley, Warwickshire.

GANNET (*Sula bassana*).—Two caught in Worcestershire (no dates given).

[FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*).—One shot during a fog on December 22nd, 1909, at the Smethwick end of Warley, close to the Worcestershire boundary. Mr. Coburn devotes a couple of pages to trying to prove that this bird was a genuine migrant. One of his arguments is, that the Duchess of Bedford informed him that in her opinion, if the bird had escaped from Woburn (whence none had been lost for some months), its fate would have been sealed much nearer home than Staffordshire. With this Mr. Coburn agrees, and thinks that the birds from the London Zoological Gardens (which *had* escaped recently) would also have been shot. He proceeds to argue that the escaped birds, whose death has not been reported, must have got safely out of the country, and that if they can find their way out, they can also find their way in! Mr. Seth-Smith writes to us: "I have no doubt that the Flamingo shot on December 22nd, 1909, in Staffordshire was one of those which escaped from here [London Zoological Gardens] about that time. They were in first-rate plumage and condition, and I doubt if anyone could have told for certain that they were not wild birds." We quite agree with Mr. Coburn that such birds kept in captivity should be marked; we suggest with rings. While on this subject we should like to remark that we are of opinion that the previous Staffordshire record of a bird captured alive in September, 1881, although accepted by the late Howard Saunders, is open to similar objection.]

GREY LAG-GOOSE (*Anser cinereus*).—One at Patshull, January 26th, 1904 (Hon. G. Legge).

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*A. albifrons*).—One shot by

Mr. P. Baker at Earlswood, Warwickshire, and others reported. No dates given. Mr. R. F. Tomes in the *Vict. Hist. of Warwick*, I., p. 201, described this bird as "formerly an occasional visitor, but now unknown."

[LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*A. erythropus*).—One shot near Chasetown, October 11th, 1906, and cooked, but identified by Mr. Coburn from one foot and a number of feathers subsequently recovered. This species is not on the Staffordshire list.]

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE (*A. brachyrhynchus*).—An immature bird shot by Mr. G. H. Clarke on Norton Pool, now in the collection of Mr. Wilson, of Norton Canes. No date given.

BRENT GOOSE (*Bernicla brenta*).—A bird believed to be of this species seen on Norton Pool in January, 1908, by the Rev. C. R. Brain; five seen by Mr. G. H. Clarke at the same place on February 4th, 1910. Two previous records only.

BLACK BRENT GOOSE (*Bernicla brenta nigricans*).—Mr. J. H. Gurney has already recorded the occurrence of this bird on Mr. Coburn's authority in Norfolk (*cf. antea*, p. 27), and Mr. Coburn here gives further details. He says that since he has studied this bird in America, he has been able to identify one in the collection of Mr. W. L. Ward, shot on Gailey Pool on November 23rd, 1895, and the following in his own collection:—One shot at Earlswood (Warwickshire) on November 5th, 1897, one at King's Lynn (Norfolk) on February 14th, 1902, another on January 15th, 1907, and those already referred to on page 27.

Mr. Coburn says that he has collected very full material in America, and on this he bases the distinctions already pointed out (*antea*, p. 27). He does not agree with Mr. Alphéraky that the white on the neck *always* meets in front, while he adds that it very rarely meets at the back, of the neck. Mr. Coburn states that the white-bellied form (*B. b. glaucogaster*) is only the female of *B. b. brenta*; but this cannot be so unless a number of birds have been wrongly sexed. Measurements are given of a number of *B. b. nigricans*, showing that six adult males measured—Wing, 330–337 mm.; average, 330 (= 13 inches). Tarsus, 52–58 mm.; average, 55–56 (= 2·2 inches). Culmen, 35–39 mm.; average, 36 (= 1·4 inch). From which it would appear that there is not much difference in size between this and the typical form.

COMMON SHELD-DUCK (*Tadorna cornuta*).—A regular visitor to Norton Pool; twenty-five occurrences in the season of 1908–09 (F. Coburn).

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*).—One at Patshull, September 7th, 1905; another from October to December, 1908 (Hon. G. Legge). Only one previous record.

SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*).—In addition to the localities already given for the breeding of this species in Staffordshire (cf. Vol. II., p. 95; III., p. 58), Mr. Coburn states that it bred near Green Pit and at Plant Swag, Chasetown, in 1909; while the Hon. G. Legge records it as nesting regularly at Patshull.

PINTAIL (*Dafila acuta*).—Additional records are given by Messrs. Coburn and Wells Bladen.

POCHARD (*Fuligula ferina*).—Common winter visitor to Norton Pool (F. Coburn); also recorded from Patshull (Hon. G. Legge) and Birmingham district (Warwickshire).

TUFTED DUCK (*F. cristata*).—Breeds regularly at Patshull (Hon. G. Legge), Hilton Park (W. Wells Bladen), and probably Gailey Pool "this season" (F. Coburn).

SCAUP-DUCK (*F. marila*).—One at Patshull, October 26th, 1906 (Hon. G. Legge); fairly frequent visitor to Norton Pool (F. Coburn). Two records from Warwickshire (F. Coburn).

GOLDENEYE (*Clangula glaucion*).—Recorded from Patshull (Hon. G. Legge); frequent visitor to Norton Pool, etc. (F. Coburn).

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Harelda glacialis*).—An immature female shot by G. H. Clarke on Norton Pool, November 18th, 1907. Another shot, but not preserved. Only one previous record.

COMMON SCOTER (*Edemia nigra*).—Frequent visitor to Norton Pool (F. Coburn); recorded from Patshull, October 15th, 1905, and November, 1906 (Hon. G. Legge).

VELVET-SCOTER (*Æ. fusca*).—One seen on Norton Pool on April 10th, 1910, by Mr. Wilson; one shot on Rotton Park Reservoir (Warwick), apparently the only record; and one near Craven Arms (Salop) on December 12th, 1890 (F. Coburn).

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*).—Two shot on Norton Pool, March 2nd, 1904, by G. H. Clarke and two in Mr. Wilson's collection at Norton Canes, besides another shot and several seen; also noted at Patshull. Only one previous definite record for Staffordshire. One seen and another shot in Warwickshire, where it is very scarce (F. Coburn).

SMEW (*M. albellus*).—Four additional records from Gailey and Norton Pools (F. Coburn).

[PALLAS'S SAND-GROUSE (*Syrrhaptes paradoxus*).—One believed to have been seen by the Rev. J. O. Coussmaker at Hamstall Ridware on December 18th, 1908.]

SPOTTED CRAKE (*Porzana maruetta*).—One shot on Cannock

Chase about five years ago (G. H. Clarke). Also said to have occurred in Warwick and Worcester.

RINGED PLOVER (*Ægialitis hiaticola*).—Regular and common visitor to Cannock Chase; also to the Birmingham district and Earlswood (Warwick) and Barnt Green, Worcestershire (F. Coburn).

GREY PLOVER (*Squatarola helvetica*).—Regular and fairly common visitor to the Cannock Chase district, and definitely recorded in 1908 and 1909 (G. H. Clarke). No previous authentic record.

TURNSTONE (*Streptilas interpres*).—Frequent autumn visitor to Norton Pool; many obtained by G. H. Clarke in August, 1904, August, 1907, and August 17th, 1908, etc. Only one previous indefinite record.

OYSTER-CATCHER (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*).—Common visitor to Norton Pool in August and September (F. Coburn); also recorded from Patshull (Hon. G. Legge).

DUNLIN (*Tringa alpina*).—Regular and sometimes abundant visitor to the Cannock Chase and Birmingham districts (Warwick) and Barnt Green, Worcestershire (F. Coburn).

LITTLE STINT (*T. minuta*).—"Almost a regular visitor, sometimes in considerable flocks, on the autumn and spring migrations, to Norton Pool." Many specimens secured by G. H. Clarke; one shot at Norton Pool, August 10th, 1904. Although a note appeared in the "Zoological Report" of the *North Staffordshire Field Club Report* for 1904-05 (p. 64) that three Little Stints were shot near Stafford, we are now informed that this was an error, and that the birds in question proved to be Dunlins (J. R. B. Masefield *in litt.*). This is therefore the first Staffordshire record; while the occurrence of one at Earlswood Lake seen by Mr. Coburn, appears to be the earliest notice from Warwickshire.

TEMMINCK'S STINT (*T. temmincki*).—One shot by G. H. Clarke several years ago and lost sight of, but re-discovered in a farmhouse at Wyrley: presumably shot at Norton Pool. This is the first Staffordshire record.

SANDERLING (*Calidris arenaria*).—Regular and fairly common visitor to Norton Pool in small flocks in autumn and spring. Three specimens in Mr. Coburn's possession, and several seen, mostly in May, of which details are given. Only three previously recorded.

RUFF (*Machetes pugnax*).—One at Norton Pool, July 10th, 1897 (G. H. Clarke). A Reeve also shot about forty years ago at Streetly. Only two previously recorded.

[GREATER YELLOWSHANK (*Totanus melanoleucus*).—On November 22nd, 1907, the keeper at Sutton Park (Warwick-

shire) noticed three strange birds which were very noisy and not particularly shy. One of these he shot and forwarded to the office of the *Birmingham Daily Mail* for Mr. Coburn to name. Subsequently the bird was purchased by Mr. Coburn who was much surprised to find that "such an extraordinary rarity had been shot within about ten miles of the city of Birmingham." Mr. Coburn further states that he purposely delayed publishing his notes on the bird until a sufficient time had elapsed for the survivors to get safely out of the country! A doubtfully humane and certainly not scientific reason. Mr. Coburn thinks that the birds made a sort of grand tour, coming to England *via* Greenland and Iceland, looking in at Birmingham *en route*, and then, after making their way to the Land's End, taking passage across the Atlantic home again! Mr. Coburn points out also that he had in 1904 studied this species in central British Columbia, where he procured many specimens. Here we may perhaps be allowed to protest against this method of recording the presence of rare birds. Surely it would have been possible for Mr. Coburn to have submitted the specimen in the flesh to some qualified and disinterested ornithologist, who would be able to confirm his identification, even if he were unwilling to exhibit the specimen at one of the B.O.C. meetings, a usual procedure in the case of the capture of a rare species.]

GREEN SANDPIPER (*T. ochropus*).—A frequent visitor to Norton Pool (G. H. Clarke) and other parts of the district (F. Coburn).

[SPOTTED REDSHANK (*T. fuscus*).—Seen once in Warwickshire and once in Worcestershire, but no dates given (F. Coburn). This species is not recorded by R. F. Tomes.]

GREENSHANK (*T. canescens*).—A very frequent visitor, especially to Norton Pool; also recorded from Bloxwich and Stafford. Only once seen at Earlswood (Warwick).

CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*).—Common and regular visitor to Norton Pool; also to Barnt Green (Worcester), and less so to Earlswood (Warwick).

WHIMBREL (*N. phæopus*).—Common on migration at Norton Pool (G. H. Clarke); also frequent at Barnt Green (Worcester) and Earlswood (Warwick). Not recorded by R. F. Tomes for Warwick.

BLACK TERN (*Hydrochelidon nigra*).—One of the commonest of the Terns at Norton Pool, sometimes in great numbers; and also common at Earlswood (Warwick) and Barnt Green (Worcester). Most of the spring visitors are adult, while the

bulk of the autumn birds are immature. Also three seen at Stretton on May 6th (F. A. Monckton).

SANDWICH TERN (*Sterna cantiaca*).—[Three are said to have been seen in September, 1909, by Mr. G. H. Clarke on Norton Pool, but we do not consider the identification satisfactory.] Mr. Coburn states that he has seen it several times at Earlswood (Warwick) and that one was shot there (no date).

COMMON and ARCTIC TERNS (*S. fluviatilis* and *S. macrura*). Described as common and regular visitors to the pools and reservoirs in the district, including all three counties.

LESSER TERN (*S. minuta*).—Less common than the preceding species, but still frequent at Norton Pool.

COMMON GULL (*Larus canus*), HERRING-GULL (*L. argentatus*), LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*L. fuscus*), GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*L. marinus*) and KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) are all regarded as more or less frequent visitors to Norton Pool and other sheets of water in the district.

GREAT SKUA (*Megalestris catarrhactes*).—One shot by Messrs. Powell and Clarke on Norton Pool in September or October, 1896. The specimen was lost sight of, but recovered in a much-damaged condition. A most interesting piece of confirmatory evidence is furnished by Mr. L. Ward, who contributed some notes from a diary on the birds of Gailey Pool to the *Report of the N.S.F.C.* for 1905-06, p. 51. On September 7th, 1896, he noted a "large brown Gull," in all probability this same bird, at Gailey Pool. This species is new to the Staffordshire list. Another specimen was killed at Fillongley, near Coventry, Warwick, and brought to Mr. Coburn on September 7th, 1909. This species is not included in Mr. Tomes' list.

RICHARDSON'S SKUA (*Stercorarius crepidatus*). — One captured at Aldridge on September 2nd or 3rd, 1909, and another picked up at Ladywood, Birmingham, on October, 1891. The third Staffordshire and second Warwickshire records.

BUFFON'S SKUA (*S. parasiticus*).—One shot in Shenley Fields, Northfield, Worcester, on October 17th, 1886. Not mentioned in Mr. Tomes' list.

RAZORBILL (*Alca torda*).—One found dead at Harborne, July 25th, 1890. This locality is strictly in Warwickshire, where the bird has already been recorded, so that it cannot be regarded as an addition to the Staffordshire list.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER (*Colymbus glacialis*).—Fairly common winter visitor to Norton Pool and the Birmingham district.

BLACK-THROATED DIVER (*C. arcticus*).—One shot on Norton Pool, December 7th, 1902, by Mr. G. H. Clarke; the second record for the county. Also one on March 5th, 1881, at Breedon Cross, and one shot on Lifford Reservoir (no date), both in Worcestershire. Not recorded for the latter county by Mr. Tomes.

SLAVONIAN GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*).—Two shot "about eight years ago" on Norton Pool by Mr. G. H. Clarke. Said to be a regular visitor on migration to Earlswood and Barnt Green (Warwick and Worcester); only one recent record for Staffordshire.

BLACK-NECKED GREBE (*P. nigricollis*).—An immature bird shot on September 20th, 1907, by Mr. G. H. Clarke at Norton Pool; two seen and one shot, September 28th, 1908; the latter was striped with white on the upper parts. Another shot at the same place on September 30th, 1909, and a fifth seen on October 21st, 1909. This species is new to the Staffordshire list. Mr. Coburn also states that he saw two birds at Earlswood (Warwick) on September 26th, 1908, evidently the same as those recorded above.

MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus anglorum*) and FORK-TAILED PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) are said to occur frequently at Norton Pool and also in Warwickshire, and the STORM-PETREL (*Procellaria pelagica*) has often been obtained near Birmingham (Warwick).

In conclusion, we note that Mr. Masefield regards ten species as new to the Staffordshire ornithology; but the evidence with regard to the Lesser White-fronted Goose and the Sandwich Tern we should regard as necessitating square brackets. The Spotted Redshank was *seen* by Mr. Coburn in Worcester and Warwick, but not in Staffordshire at all, and the locality given for the Razorbill is also in Warwickshire. The natural boundaries of our faunal areas are, of course, water-partings, and the limits of our counties are purely artificial, but to prevent duplication of records it is desirable that these limits should be respected, and if records from outside are admitted to a county-fauna the fact that the bird has been observed or obtained beyond the border cannot be too clearly pointed out. The only exception is perhaps in the case of a river-boundary, where the record can be claimed with equal right by both counties.