



# REVIEWS



*The Birds of Dumfriesshire. A Contribution to the Fauna of the Solway Area.* By Hugh S. Gladstone. Illustrated. Witherby & Co. 25s. net.

A WORK on the birds of a Scottish county is a novelty, though there are papers of varied length on the birds of most of the counties of the Scottish south-west, *e.g.*, Kirkcudbrightshire, Ayrshire and Wigtownshire, and East Renfrew. None looking at the map of Dumfriesshire with which the volume under notice is furnished, can fail to see that this county makes a good geographical division. With its general slope to the south, its three parallel valleys, coursed respectively by the Nith, the Annan and the Esk, its "northern battlements" of hills which extend down the east and west to shut it off from neighbouring counties on these sides, and its sea-front to the south, it forms a tolerably satisfactory unit. The variety of the physical features within its limits, and the industry of Sir William Jardine formerly, and Mr. Robert Service and Mr. Gladstone recently, no doubt in part account for the satisfactory total of two hundred and eighteen species of which its avifauna consists.

Mr. Gladstone has carried out his labour of love faithfully and well, and is to be congratulated heartily on the completion of a work which makes ornithologists generally, and Scottish ornithologists particularly, his debtors.

Changes in the method of agriculture, the area under cultivation, the subjects cultivated, the increase of planting, the action of man as a destroyer all the time and a more or less intelligent protector recently, and gradual climatic changes over long periods (though this last is hypothetical) have all in some degree contributed to the alteration in the status of many birds. The causes of some changes remain obscure, none of the reasons above mentioned appearing satisfactory as explanations, but from whatever causes arising the changes are many, and must strike anyone who carefully peruses Mr. Gladstone's work.

Some of the changes which are hardly open to doubt may be mentioned: The Swallow is decreasing, and a "lamentable" decrease of the House-Martin is recorded; the Hawfinch "would seem to be" extending its breeding-range; the Goldfinch, formerly abundant and latterly a scarce resident, has nested recently, though not regularly, "in nearly every

parish"; and the increase in the Starling population is notorious. The Jay seems to be re-established in many places as a breeding-species; the Magpie is picking up; and the Jackdaw has undoubtedly increased "in the last fifteen years"; while of the Rook a substantial increase is reported. The Great Spotted Woodpecker is re-established as a breeding-species. Of the Barn-Owl it is sad to read that few are left, and it is hardly a compensation to be told that the Long-eared Owl is "on the increase," particularly when the next sentence contains a quotation from Sir W. Jardine to the effect that that species "is certainly the most common next to the White Owl," and that was in 1839! The Hen-Harrier, formerly a common resident, is now but a very rare visitor; the Sparrow-Hawk is decreasing; the Peregrine Falcon has had its breeding-quarters woefully curtailed in the interests of game-preservation while the Kestrel is increasing. Grey Lag-Geese now take the place of Bean and Pink-footed, which formerly predominated; Barnacle have decreased since 1899, and the Whooper is declining—Bewick's Swan predominating in recent years. Sheld-Duck are increasing annually, and the Tufted Duck has extended greatly as a breeding-species since 1890. The Stock-Dove in now a well recognised nesting-species. The Pheasant has gone up in numbers enormously, and Mr. Gladstone connects the decrease in the numbers of Black Grouse since 1870 with this phenomenon, as he also does the starving out of the Partridge, though the diminution of cropping in the upper districts has been an influence in the latter case. Ptarmigan, common till the beginning of last century, have been long extinct, but have been re-introduced recently. The Moor-hen has increased considerably, but the Coot is believed to be decreasing locally. It is only of late years that the Woodcock has become so plentiful as a breeding-species in Dumfriesshire. Ringed Plovers and Oyster-catchers are becoming more common as nesting-species on rivers inland. The Redshank since 1880 has become common in the nesting-season inland. The Black-headed Gull has undoubtedly increased. The Great Crested Grebe has become a nesting-species, and the Little Grebe is quite common in summer now, though formerly chiefly, if not exclusively, a winter-visitor. Such are some of the changes recorded, and they form a remarkable catalogue.

One turns with curiosity to the accounts of certain species regarding the occurrence and distribution of which, in Scotland, there seems to be some uncertainty. Here Mr. Gladstone, from lack of full personal knowledge, is not in-

frequently unconvincing. About twenty years since, proof of the nesting of the Lesser Whitethroat in Scotland began to be called for, as suspicions were then excited regarding assertions long current about its occurrence in many places. The interval has only shown it to be a casual on passage. Under the very peculiar circumstances of this bird as a nesting-species in Scotland, one egg out of five sent for verification, leaves something to be desired as a reason for acceptance. The Blackcap and Garden-Warblers present a bit of a tangle. Thus, the former is said to be more abundant than the latter although according to Jardine, in 1832, the latter was abundant and the former had only appeared "within these few years," and at the present day Mr. Laidlaw says, about the south of Eskdale, that the Garden-Warbler is "very plentiful," while the Blackcap is "very rare." Mr. Service, however, says that in most years the Blackcap "is decidedly more abundant than the Garden-Warbler." If there be doubt from season to season as to the relative numbers of these two species in Solway, or if the Blackcap be the more abundant (which is possible), then in either case Solway is in an interesting position of isolation, as there is no doubt whatever about the Garden-Warbler being abundant in "Clyde," "Forth" and Perthshire, and outnumbering its congener in all of them. The statement in Saunders's *Manual* that the Garden-Warbler "has been recorded as nesting in Perthshire," conveys as exact an impression as if one read in the same work of the Nightingale that "it has been recorded as nesting in Surrey." The Chiffchaff is local in Dumfriesshire, but, according to Mr. Service, is more frequent in Kirkcudbrightshire, and it is notable that in May, 1897, several Glasgow ornithologists found it to be quite common at Castle Kennedy, in Wigtownshire. Within the Clyde area it is, in any numbers, a southwestern species, and in Solway appears to be a western species. Mr. Gladstone seems conscious of the difficulty of working up the Marsh-Tit's distribution. It is set down as "very scarce and local." The account of the White Wagtail is disappointing. No theory, however ingenious, about a change of flight-line explains the absence of old records. Mr. Service, who formerly opposed the idea of its being overlooked, has published a recantation. The view that it has been overlooked is the only one with any potentiality of growth in it, and it appears to the present writer that the author might safely assume that it passed through Solway in the time of the Romans (and earlier), and that it will continue to do so till the time of the Germans (and after)!

Regarding the Yellow Wagtail, one would like very partic-

ularly to know if the colony, which existed on the banks of the Annan in 1832, is not still to be found there. It is such a constant species where known in colonies, and respects its boundaries so strictly, that a narrative which does not clear up such an important point is incomplete. The inclusion of the Red-backed Shrike does not seem justified on the evidence. The Lochmaben chronicler may have been better informed than the Langholm one, but it is easy to account for the latter's mistake—he had heard of *the* Butcher-bird being seen, he stumbled on the information that *Lanius collurio* is a Butcher-bird, and that is how the history we have painfully to unravel is made. A reader not knowing anything of Mr. John Corrie's qualifications would like to be assured that his Red-backed Shrike was not a Redstart!

Mudie should surely have been left in obscurity. The quotation from him that the Spotted Flycatcher was rare in Scotland in 1841, "if indeed it at all reaches that country," may be put beside the following from the Rev. Wm. Patrick's account of Hamilton parish, Lanarkshire, written in 1835:— "This bird, as far as can be ascertained, is in this district confined to the vale of the Clyde at Hamilton and Bothwell. It builds in out-houses and in wall-trees, in the most frequented places. It is a tame and silent bird, and disappears in September."

One would not expect the Brambling to leave "in January and February." In recent years there have been many Scottish records (east and west) of flocks throughout March and April, and even till May 1st. Saunders's statement that by "the middle of March almost all have returned to their northern breeding-grounds" surely requires a more or less decided qualification. The Lesser Redpoll being very local in the nesting-season is a disappointment to the author, which will be shared by Scottish readers, who are more prepared to hear of the great scarcity of the Twite in summer. In the south-west, inland, it makes a poor show at that season. It is notable that the author quotes Theobald's emphatic condemnation of the Bullfinch from Kent, instead of following the more patriotic course of quoting Colonel Drummond Hay's emphatic commendation (*Scottish Naturalist*, V., p. 247). Perhaps the author's sympathies are with the former. The Crossbills have been most creditably disentangled.

The resuscitation of the Starling "had begun in 1865," according to Mr. Gladstone, but if he came over the hills into "Clyde," he would need to carry his narrative back several decades. One of the things rescued from the obscurity of the files of the *Dumfries Courier* by Mr. Robert Service, was the

narrative of the death of a boy, who was after a Starling's nest, at the castle on the island in Loch Doon in 1813.

The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker's inclusion, it is fair to the author to say, rests on Mr. Service's assurances, but as there is no conclusive fresh evidence, the misgivings which have hitherto obtained will not be removed.

The Red-breasted Merganser does not only breed "in Ireland and north-west Scotland," but is a common nesting-species in "Clyde." The nest is found on the shores of the sea-lochs in "Clyde," on its islands and many rocky islets, so that the statement about it being found "seldom at any great distance from fresh water" is quite erroneous, and is the more conspicuous from the rarity of such lapses.

The status of the Ruff in "Clyde," at any rate in the Glasgow district where observation is keen, is very much what it was stated by Sir Wm. Jardine to be in Solway, in the first half of last century. That being so, one would infer that the conclusion that it now only occurs "at fairly long intervals" is not justified. It is not a conspicuous species, and its occurrence is sometimes only revealed by its being shot with Golden Plover. The case of the Spotted Redshank is, perhaps, somewhat parallel. As Macpherson met with it on the English side of Solway "nearly every autumn," and it has occurred in the last two autumns, and in two consecutive autumns ten years ago in East Renfrew, it is probably an occasional, if not regular, visitor to the Solway, overlooked because it is unknown.

The occurrence of the Kittiwake twelve miles inland should hardly be described as "remarkable." I have seen it several times east of Glasgow, in winter and at the spring-passage.

The appearance of three Guillemots inland need not be attributed in all cases to "stormy weather." In the present autumn, in an unprecedented spell of halcyon weather, three have occurred inland in Renfrewshire, where they are quite unknown, and one was observed at the same season in Glasgow Harbour.

JOHN PATERSON.

*The Home-Life of the Spoonbill, the Stork and some Herons.*

By Bentley Beetham, F.Z.S. Pp. 47, and 32 mounted plates. Witherby & Co. 5s. net.

THE present artistically-produced volume forms a companion to *The Home-Life of a Golden Eagle*, which we had the pleasure of reviewing some months ago, and these two, we venture to hope, are only the first ones of a series which will deal in turn with the most interesting of our British birds.

The present volume deals with the Spoonbill, White Stork,

the Common and the Purple Heron. The letterpress is a simply-written narrative of the author's experiences undergone while procuring the photographs from which the plates are reproduced. Such experiences are always of great interest to that growing community of bird-photographers, and cannot fail also to interest those who have had no experience of this fascinating, but often disappointing, pursuit. The habits of the several species are fairly fully dealt with, and there are one or two observations which strike us as novel and are not without importance; we would particularly refer to the habit, which seems to be a very usual one, of the young Storks standing and even progressing about the nest, supported only upon their tibio-metatarsal joints, the tarsi and feet being held up off the nest with the toes dangling. The attitude of rest amongst the Storks, on the whole length of the tarsi, is, of course, well known, but the above observation appears to be new. The method by which the young Spoonbills are fed, viz., by taking regurgitated food from the base of the parent's bill is fully described, and the contrast with the method pursued by the Storks and Purple Heron, which scatter the disgorged food about the nest and leave the young to pick it up, is well brought out. The supplying of food is apparently also undertaken solely by one bird (? the male) in the case of the Spoonbill, whereas both sexes feed the young in the case of the Stork, while both share in the duties of incubation in the case of the Common Heron. Reference must also be made to the interesting description of the climbing powers of the Purple Heron.

The plates, which are exceedingly well reproduced, do the author great credit both for his patience and perseverance under trying circumstances and his technical skill as a photographer. Personally we would have preferred them mounted on a rather darker and warmer shade of brown, but this is perhaps *only* a personal opinion. The photographs of the Spoonbills and Purple Herons are undoubtedly the best of the series, and while those of the Storks are good, they no doubt lose a little as bird-portraits from (the necessary) distance at which the exposures were made; incidentally all of these exhibit very clearly the superior results that are obtainable when each picture can be focused separately by working at close quarters in a "hide" in contrast with those of the Common Heron, which perforce had to be taken with a fixed focus and the exposure made from a distance.

N.F.T.