

LETTER.

ON INCUBATION.

To the Editors of BRITISH BIRDS.

SIRS,—In the article on Incubation, by Mr. Eric B. Dunlop (*antea*, p. 109), the writer says: "Another bird which rears few young compared to the number of eggs it lays is the Great-crested Grebe. Four or five eggs are very frequently deposited, but it is not usual for more than two young to be brought to maturity. Mr. Edward Tristram suggests . . . that when the first one or two chicks are hatched the parents at once leave the nest with them, regardless of the remaining eggs which have not hatched out."

During the past five years there is no bird which I have watched and photographed more than the Great-crested Grebe, and during this time I have had not less than fifty nests under observation, and my experience is that in the great majority of cases four young are reared where five eggs are laid, and three when the nest contains only three eggs. It is commonly thought that this Grebe only rears two young, and this idea has no doubt been brought about through the habits of the birds. When the first two young leave the shells the male bird almost invariably takes care of them, and they are led away from the nest, but the hen remains sitting on the other eggs until the one egg hatches, if there should be only one left, or if there are three, she will sit until two more eggs hatch. Then she will desert the fifth egg, and take her two young out on to the lake, but she does not interfere with the male bird. Each parent bird will look after its two young until they are about a month or six weeks old; after that time they will be seen together, but if alarmed in any way the young will quickly swim towards their respective parents, and if not too large, hide under their wings, when the birds dive and carry the young to a place of safety.

On the lakes where I have observed these Grebes, I have been surprised to find that there are so many pairs which do not nest. During the past summer there were over forty pairs, but although the whole of the suitable nesting-parts were most carefully searched, I found that only fifteen of these pairs were nesting, and it is interesting to know that in one corner of the largest lake there was quite a colony of nests: seven containing eggs were found on a piece of reed-covered water about ten yards square. This is a thing I have never seen before, for usually they resent other birds of their own species coming to their particular portion of the lake.

Those pairs which did not nest were, as late as the middle of July, still going through their curious courting exercises, that is, facing each other, with necks extended, frills open, and crests raised, and at short intervals almost touching beaks and giving the head a peculiar shake. If another Grebe came near them, the male immediately placed himself in fighting attitude.

OLIVER G. PIKE.

WINCHMORE HILL, MIDDLESEX, September 5th, 1913.

[The Great-crested Grebe breeds in large colonies on some of the bigger sheets of water on the Continent, and small colonies have been met with occasionally in the British Isles, as for example in the West of Ireland, where Mr. J. Henderson found several pairs breeding close together; *cf.* also Yarrell, 4th ed., IV., p. 118. Seeböhm (*History of British Birds*, III., p. 456) describes the large colonies on the Lantow See and Garda See in Pomerania, and numerous other instances are quoted in the *Neuer Naumann*, XII., p. 73.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]