

NOTES ON MIGRATION AT DUNGENESS, KENT,
AUTUMN 1914.

BY

H. G. ALEXANDER.

I WAS at Dungeness from October 15th to November 5th, 1914. Apart from a few observations on birds whose occurrence was sufficiently unusual to deserve special record, it may be interesting to give a short account of the chief migratory movements seen during the three weeks. I was usually observing for an hour or less before 8 a.m., from about 10.0 to 12.0, and again from 3.0 to 4.0, or for a short time before sunset. I was not often more than a mile from Dungeness Point. It is important to bear in mind that the coast runs a trifle *north* of west from Dungeness towards Rye, and a trifle *west* of north towards Littlestone.

In general, the immigration of birds took place soon after dawn and in the late afternoon; but a few immigrants were liable to appear at any time of day. *Skylarks* and *Starlings* came across the sea in numbers, and I saw a good many *Chaffinches* in the first week and a few *Swallows*, *Greenfinches*, *Linnets*, *Meadow-Pipits* and *Pied Wagtails* from time to time. All were flying east or north of east, some almost due north. They arrived on various parts of the coast, but I think mostly quite near the point. The large flocks seen in the early morning and less frequently in the late afternoon showed no signs of fatigue, but I saw single Finches at various times of day that dropped on to the shingle the moment they arrived.

The emigration, chiefly of Finches, was far more striking. Day after day flocks of small birds—*Linnets*, *Greenfinches*, *Goldfinches*, *Redpolls*, *Wagtails*, *Pipits*, *Swallows* and less frequently *Skylarks*, *House-* and *Tree-Sparrows*, *Bramblings*, *Siskins* and *Martins*—came flying over the shingle in the first few hours of daylight. The strength of the wind seemed to affect their numbers, but although the wind was often disagreeably strong, I only once or twice observed no early morning departure.

The direction of the wind affected the direction of the flight to a remarkable extent. For several days after my arrival there was a moderate north-east wind blowing, and every day migrants came over the shingle from the west or north-west, the majority flying parallel to the coast and within one or two hundred yards of it until they reached the point. Then a few, even when it was windy (chiefly *Greenfinches*), continued across the sea, to east and to south-east, whilst many *Linnets* and others flew round and round in the air, finally departing from a fair altitude; others rested in the bushes, and quite a large proportion turned the point and continued to fly parallel to the coast, northwards. In some cases these flocks, that had been flying east, merged with flocks that had arrived from the sea flying west, and the two flew north together!

Later, when the wind changed and for several days blew from points between south and west, the majority of departing birds came from the north along the coast from Littlestone, and a smaller number from between north and north-west, over the shingle. On windy days some of these, similarly, turned the point and continued their flight along the coast westward, so that the flight of the previous few days was exactly reversed, although the same species were involved. Those that departed from the point, however, flew nearly south-east, but more to the south of south-east than to the east of it.

Apart from the day movements it was evident that some migration occurred at night. The numbers of the various *Thrushes* seen among the bushes fluctuated daily, and I frequently heard them at night. On October 17th there were at least twenty-five *Ring-Ouzels*, which seems to be a rather remarkable number for that species.

Small numbers of *Great Tits*, *Robins*, *Hedge-Sparrows*, *Firecrests* and *Black Redstarts* occurred, and larger numbers of *Wrens*, *Goldcrests* and *Stonechats*. It was not easy to tell where these birds came from: twice

I saw *Goldcrests* arrive as if from the east in the early morning; once I saw a *Great Tit* fly about half-a-mile due west at a single flight, and I noticed that the bushes nearest the east coast most often contained *Wrens* and *Goldcrests*, particularly in the morning. The *Black Redstarts* and *Firecrests* must have come from the east; so I think all or most of these small bush-haunting birds may have come from that direction. Every day there were some *Wrens*, but the number was getting smaller by early November; hardly any *Goldcrests* or *Stonechats* were passing after the end of October; early in the month I have seen both species in abundance at Dungeness.

It may be worth while to give exact particulars of the occurrence of *Firecrests*. On October 15th I saw one near Lydd, in the company of a *Chiffchaff*; the rest were near Dungeness Point:—October 18th, one; 23rd, one; 25th, one (possibly the same, but I think not); 28th, one; 29th, one (possibly the same, but at a different part); November 1st, four (two together, one with a *Goldcrest* and one with four *Goldcrests*); 3rd, one (probably one of the two); 4th, one (the same). Only the two mentioned were with *Goldcrests*, and several were on days when I saw no *Goldcrest*.

On October 28th the wind dropped completely, and late the same day a period of strong easterly winds, chiefly south-east, set in. In the few hours of absolute calm I had the good fortune to hear a *Dartford Warbler's* harsh note from some distance; on any other day I should have missed it. For some time I could not get near the bird, but eventually I had excellent views of it; apparently it was a female. It moved west at each flight while I watched it; this was not necessary, as it was some way from the sea, and it might have moved various other ways to avoid me. This is the only evidence with regard to its point of arrival. No *Dartford Warbler* has been recorded from Kent since 1891, according to Dr. N. F. Ticehurst.

The south-east winds were coincident with the appearance of several birds which I suspected had come from the east, in addition to the *Firecrests* of November 1st. On October 29th a *Great Grey Shrike* appeared, and stayed till the 31st. On the 30th I saw a *Chiffchaff*, the first since the 15th, and on November 1st another (or the same); if it was the same it had moved a mile west-north-west. Neither of these was *Ph. c. tristis*. November 2nd was a fearfully stormy day, huge seas being hurled on to the point by the south-east gale, and in the afternoon a crowd of *Gannets* was sitting just off the point, occasionally plunging for fish. In a very bad light I put a small Warbler out of a bush, and after wearily following it backwards and forwards and several times almost losing it I saw it really well. To all appearances it was a *Reed-Warbler*, but of course there is a chance that it was *Blyth's Reed-Warbler*.

I have said nothing of the sea-birds, whose movements off Dungeness are always interesting to watch, but rather puzzling. In watching them one realises the absurdity of trying to make a hard and fast division between migration and other bird-movements. I doubt if most sea-birds know when they are migrating and when they are not doing so, although they cover such a vast area from season to season. *Velvet-Scoters* were far more plentiful than I have known them near Dungeness in other winters. On October 18th and 19th I saw a *Great Northern Diver* among the Red-throats (some of which were still in summer dress); on the 29th a *Little Gull* flew past the point early in the morning; on November 1st and 3rd I saw what must, I think, have been an immature *Eider*. On the 1st it flew past the point with some Scoters, and looked a good deal larger than they. On the 3rd it came over me, flying along the coast, and just at the last moment I noticed the shape of its beak. On October 24th a bird that I took to be a *Lapland Bunting* flew past, going due south, during the early morning departure of migrants.