

NOTES

NUTHATCH'S NEST IN A HAYSTACK.

MR. HOWARD SAUNDERS, in his *Manual*, records a nest of the Nuthatch which was placed in the side of a haystack. The nest measured 13 inches by 8, the weight of clay being 11 pounds. This nest was presented to the British Museum by the late Mr. F. Bond. I am indebted to Miss Luck, of Wadhurst, for the following particulars of a nest built in a similar position at The Olives, Wadhurst, Sussex, in 1914. This nest had a length of 13 inches; the breadth was



NUTHATCH'S NEST IN A HAYSTACK AT WADHURST, SUSSEX.

7 inches, but this was subsequently increased to $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The nest weighed $6\frac{1}{2}$ pounds. All the walls of the nest might be said to be made of clay, but in places the clay was not very solid. The cavity was lined in the usual way with scales of bark, and four eggs were laid. Two of these were taken, but the remaining two hatched out and the young birds flew in due course.

During and after the construction of the nest, Starlings were most troublesome in their efforts to obtain possession. They succeeded in making an excavation behind the thick layer of plaster. To prevent the Starlings from using this cavity,

one of the men on the estate placed a thick stick across the opening, and this the Nuthatches quickly plastered firmly in, quite closing the opening made by the Starlings. The birds were seen carrying the mud from a duck pond some distance away and also from a cow-yard and rubbish heap close by. The nest has been preserved.

R. OSWALD BLYTH.

[Mr. Bond's nest was found at East Grinstead (*cf.*, *Zool.*, 1871, p. 2850), and it is curious that this second record should be from the same county.—EDS.]

GREAT GREY SHRIKES IN SURREY AND KENT.

ON January 30th, 1915, I shot an adult female Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius e. excubitor*) in Surrey, on a bit of moorland dotted about with trees. It is of the form known as Pallas's Grey Shrike with one white bar on the wing.

G. K. BAYNES.

ON January 26th, while walking within two miles of Tunbridge Wells, I saw and watched for half-an-hour a Great Grey Shrike.

S. KENDALL BARNES.

BREEDING-HABITS OF THE MISTLE-THRUSH.

I HAVE recently come across a most excellent paper on "The Nesting of a Pair of Mistle-Thrushes," by N. M. Richardson (*Proc. Dorset Nat. Hist. and Ant. Field Club*, XXIII., pp. 67-86). As this is somewhat inaccessible to many ornithologists I give a resume of it. The nest was started on March 8th, 1901, and finished on March 11th; the eggs were laid on March 17th, 18th, and 19th, and the hen commenced to sit on March 20th. The young hatched on April 3rd (fourteen days), and the old birds swallowed the pieces of eggshell. The cock did practically all the feeding and the hen *all* the sitting; they both cleaned the nest (but usually the cock), swallowing the faeces until the last day or two, when they carried them away. The first two young flew on April 18th, and the third the next day. The hen regularly left the nest at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. for 15 or 20 minutes.

There are detailed lists of the times of feeding and the food brought; these show that the average intervals between the feedings decreased irregularly from 18½ and 19 minutes on the first two days to 7½ and 5½ minutes on the last two. The longest interval was 33 minutes, and the shortest one minute.

G. BATHURST HONY.

[Careful observations such as those given above are always valuable even where facts may be regarded as

established. In the incubation-period there is nearly always some variation. Thus Mr. S. E. Brock gives the incubation period as 13-14 days and the fledging-period as 13-14 days (*Zool.*, 1910, p. 117). An egg hatched out in an incubator on the 15th day (W. Evans). Naumann's statement that incubation lasts 16-17 days is evidently too high an estimate. He states that the male relieves the female on the nest during the mid-day hours, and further observations in this particular are desirable.—F.C.R.J.]

SURF-SCOTER IN KENT.

ON January 12th, 1914, I obtained an excellent view of a Surf-Scoter (*Oidemia perspicillata*) on a pool near the sea not far from Lydd, in Romney Marsh. During the previous days a number of Scoters of both the commoner species (*O. nigra* and *O. fusca*) had come ashore, hardly able to fly, with their feathers full of oil and tar. On every pool near the sea, and in various parts of the sand and shingle, stranded Scoters were at the mercy of the local gunners, and I saw numbers that had been shot. The Surf-Scoter was beyond the region of the shooting, and was in company with Common and Velvet. I first saw it sitting on a bank with its head tucked away under its scapulars, the white patch on the back of the neck showing at some distance. It did not move till several birds on the water shuffled away, and I got within fifty yards before it walked down into the pool and scuttled across the water. Consequently I could see all the markings near the beak very distinctly, and its red legs were remarkably conspicuous as it splashed along the water. The oval patch of white on the back of the neck gave the bird a very absurd appearance, or so it seemed to me.

H. G. ALEXANDER.

ADULT SMEW IN SURREY.

AMONGST a lot of Pochard and Tufted Ducks on Frensham Great Pond, on January 10th, 1915, I noted a beautiful male Smew (*Mergus albellus*) in adult plumage, diving incessantly.

M. V. WENNER.

ON THE METHOD OF PROGRESSION ON LAND OF A YOUNG RED-THROATED DIVER.

IN August, 1914, when at Golchika on the River Yenesei, Siberia, I was given a young Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellata*) in down. Requiring a photograph of the bird in

the water, I took it down to a marsh near the river bank, and put it into a small shallow pool. Instead of diving, as my experience of the adult bird had led me to expect that it would do, it promptly turned ashore, landed, and set off across the mud at a pace that gave me some trouble to catch it, encumbered as I was with a camera and wading-boots. The bird did not move in an upright position as a dabchick does on shore, but propelled itself along on its breast by rapid jerks with its legs, assisted in a lesser degree by the wings. Each time that it was placed in the water it crawled ashore at once, and when, to test its powers of movement, I followed without touching it, it crossed a strip of mud thirty feet wide without difficulty. Mr. A. Trevor-Battye, writing of the young of this species, says: "A bird in down was brought me by a Samoyede, who declared that it ran out on to the ground when pressed. If it had not been told me by a man whose word I had the strongest reason to trust, I should not have quoted the statement." (*Icebound on Kolguev*, p. 440.)

That the young of a species should possess activities not known in the adult is not surprising, as, for instance, the fledglings of Stints if pressed can take to the water and swim like Phalaropes; but I spent some time in watching the Red-throated Diver, which was common in the district, and was quite at a loss to see how the young, before they were able to fly, reached the river, which in some cases was a considerable distance from the pools where they were hatched. I wondered whether the activity of the chicks out of water was not due merely to accident, but was of positive use to them. Towards the end of August, a flapper only half-feathered appeared in the river. It certainly was not hatched on the bank, for I had patrolled every inch of it for two or three versts round, but I am pretty sure that it was the nest-fellow of the bird mentioned above. Both were hatched out on a marshy pool about half-a-mile from the river bank, and I visited the remaining youngster several times, until about ten days later it disappeared. The pool was completely isolated, and although the ground was marshy all the way and intersected with pools, it would have been necessary, in order to reach the river, to cross considerable stretches of sphagnum. The alternative is to suppose that the old bird carried the young—a feat of which I do not think this Diver would be capable, having regard to its structural peculiarities.

MAUD D. HAVILAND.

[Many adult birds will depart from their normal habits when pressed; thus adult Waders have frequently been seen

to swim, and we have heard of an adult Great Northern Diver progressing in much the same way as that described above. One of us has seen adult Guillemots progressing in much the same way when left by a falling tide in narrow creeks in a saltmarsh.—EDS.]

FEEDING HABIT OF RED-NECKED PHALAROPE.

SOME photographs of mine of the Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) appeared in the June issue of BRITISH BIRDS (Vol. VIII., pp. 9-12). As an appendix to the notes that accompanied them, I venture to record the following :—

Last summer I spent some time in watching some of this species, which were feeding in small parties in the shallow pools in a large marsh by the River Yenesei, Siberia. My attention was called to a curious custom of two of the birds, which, remaining stationary would suddenly begin to pivot rapidly round and round on their own axis. After half-a-dozen turns they stopped, and snapped up floating particles from the surface of the water. Twice subsequently I saw single birds behave in the same way. It occurred to me that a possible explanation might be that the bottom was just beyond the reach of the birds, and that by creating a circular eddy with their bodies, the mud might be swirled to the top of the water, in the same way that tea-leaves can be drawn to the surface of a cup by stirring it with a spoon. Of course, Ducks can often be seen turning round and round when feeding with the head submerged, but this is incidental only to their position, and is not analogous to the action of the Phalaropes, which was performed when the birds were resting on the water.

MAUD D. HAVILAND.

[The above is an interesting confirmation of a habit noted by Dr. P. H. Bahr in Scotland some years ago, and recorded in our first volume, pages 204-5.—EDS.]

GLAUCOUS GULLS INLAND IN AYRSHIRE.

ALTHOUGH the appearances of Glaucous Gulls (*Larus glaucus*) are fairly regular on our coasts, it may be of interest to note that on January 4th, 1915, I saw a white Gull together with four Herring-Gulls at the Kilmarnock waterworks. This bird, which proved to be a Glaucous Gull reaching the mature stage, was not obtained until February 4th, having remained about for a month. On February 5th another was noticed near on the ploughed land, and still remains as I write. The lochs are situated about fourteen miles from the sea. The weather during January was not unusually stormy.

E. RICHMOND PATON.

DAMAGE TO TAIL-FEATHERS OF POMATORHINE SKUA.

ON October 22nd, 1912, an adult male Pomatorhine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) was shot by the Light-keeper and forwarded to me in the flesh from Mutton Island, Galway.

The ends of the two long tail-feathers were broken off about an inch shorter than the others. This defect I attributed to the Light-keeper's anxiety to make the bird "look tidy"—for the quills had not the appearance of being shot away.

In reply to a letter the Light-keeper wrote that he had not broken them off. Mentioning the subject to a well-known taxidermist, he said that in two or three instances he had received Skuas injured in the same way, and that he had heard this injury attributed to the Great Skua, which, while chasing the Pomatorhine, nipped off the long ends of the tail-feathers.

This explanation is a remarkable one, which without corroboration I hesitate to accept.

Since writing the above I remembered another adult Pomatorhine Skua shot November 1st, 1908, on Tory Island, co. Donegal, whose two central tail-feathers were similarly broken. Can the vertical twisting weaken the shafts so much that winter gales break the ends off? Both specimens are in my collection.

RICHARD M. BARRINGTON.

[There is evidence that the Pomatorhine Skua will snip off the ends of the tail-feathers of its companions and also the tips of the tail-feathers of Buffon's Skua. Mr. A. Roberts observed several at Scarborough in October, 1879, pursuing the Buffon's Skuas and snipping off their elongated tail-feathers, as well as acting in a similar way to their own species (*B. of Yorks.*, II., p. 701). Mr. T. H. Nelson also notes that this defect was noticeable in several specimens examined by him (*loc. cit.*).—F.C.R.J.]

BLACK-HEADED BUNTING IN YORKSHIRE—*Correction.*—

In our July issue (*antea*, p. 55) we referred to a Black-headed Bunting (*Emberiza melanocephala*) which was exhibited at a meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club by Mr. A. F. Griffith, who stated that the bird had been presented to the Booth Museum at Brighton and that it was said to have been caught near Halifax, Yorkshire, in December, 1910, and subsequently kept in an aviary at Hove by Major Johnson until its death in 1912. Since the publication of the record in the Club's *Bulletin*, the editors of the *Naturalist* have been inquiring into its authenticity and

have drawn the admission from the Halifax dealer who supplied the bird that his information regarding "localities" is, at all events sometimes, made for business purposes (*cf.*, *Naturalist*, 1915, pp. 3-5 and 60). The record must therefore be cancelled, and ornithologists will be duly thankful to the editors of the *Naturalist* for disposing of a bad record. The editors' conclusion (p. 60) that having proved this one record wrong therefore other recent "new records" from other sources should be deleted can scarcely be deemed judicial, to say the least.

NOTES ON SOME PASSERINE BIRDS FOUND MIGRATING IN MOULT.—Under this title Miss L. J. Rintoul and Miss E. V. Baxter contribute an article of considerable interest to the *Scottish Naturalist* (1914, pp. 245-252). The authors have examined a large number of specimens taken at lighthouses and isolated islands on migration, and have found that a good many examples of various species show signs of moult in the body-plumage, while in rare cases some tail- or wing-feathers were partly in quill. From the details given it would seem that at all events the majority of these birds were not commencing a moult, but had not quite completed it, before they migrated.

GREAT TITS IN SHETLAND.—Mr. J. S. Tulloch notes (*Scot. Nat.*, 1914, p. 287) that two Great Tits were procured in Lerwick at the end of October, 1914. The Great Tit is only an occasional visitor to the Shetlands, and it is possible that these were of the Continental form.

BLACKBIRD AND SONG-THRUSH FEEDING ON DAISIES.—Mr. W. Evans writes (*Scot. Nat.*, 1914, p. 289) that he has watched a Blackbird on several days greedily devouring daisies, and Mr. J. K. Nash states in the same number (p. 290) that he has seen a Song-Thrush in two different seasons (1913 and 1914) feeding a fully-fledged young one with daisies. In both cases only the flower-heads were eaten, the full length of stalk being left standing in the ground.

BLACK REDSTART IN SHETLAND.—Mr. J. S. Tulloch records (*Scot. Nat.*, 1914, p. 287) that an immature male *Phœnicurus o. gibraltariensis* obtained in Bressay was given to him on October 30th, 1914.

SPOTTED CRAKE IN SHETLAND.—Mr. A. J. Nicholson reports (*Scot. Nat.*, 1914, p. 288) that an example of *Porzana porzana* (which the Editors state has only occurred on three previous occasions in Shetland) was shot at Fetlar on October 19th, 1914.