

# NOTES

## HABITS OF BROODING-BIRDS AND NESTLINGS AT NIGHT.

REGARDING my note on the behaviour of nestling birds at night (*antea*, Vol. VIII., p. 144), the following additional particulars may be worth recording. In 1915 I visited the following nests regularly after dark:—Two Blackbirds, three Song-Thrushes, three Robins, one Nightingale, one Hedge-Sparrow, one Yellowhammer, and one Chaffinch.

I found that in the case of both Blackbirds, two Song-Thrushes, the Nightingale and the Hedge-Sparrow, the parent bird roosted on the nest up to the time that the young flew.

In the case of one Song-Thrush, all three Robins, the Yellowhammer and the Chaffinch, after the young were half-fledged the old birds never roosted on the nest, nor near it, as well as I could see.

Regarding the curious spasmodic action of the young Robins described in my previous note, in 1915 I saw a similar action performed in all three nests under observation, though in one case it was not very marked. I also noticed it very strongly in the case of the Nightingale, and in a much less degree with the Chaffinch. In all the other nests the behaviour of the young birds was the same as by day.

MAUD D. HAVILAND.

## TREE-SPARROW NESTING IN CO. ANTRIM.

IN July, 1915, when with the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club, I found a colony of Tree-Sparrows (*Passer montanus*) breeding in holes in the face of a cliff on the North Antrim coast, and on visiting the place again in August some of these birds were still there. With them were several House-Sparrows, but the majority of this colony was composed of Tree-Sparrows. The distribution of the Tree-Sparrow in Ireland is, so far as known, very much restricted. For many years it has been known to nest in co. Dublin, and in 1905 Mr. Warren recorded a colony in co. Mayo where, however, it is not stated that it bred. In 1906 it was found nesting in co. Londonderry, and in the following year in co. Donegal. The discovery of its breeding in co. Antrim proves an interesting addition to its range in Ireland.

NEVIN H. FOSTER.

## HIGH MORTALITY IN YOUNG YELLOW BUNTINGS.

DURING July and August 1915 I have had under observation about a dozen nests of the Yellow Bunting (*Emberiza c. citrinella*), all built within three-quarters of a mile along a high road, about two miles outside Shrewsbury.

Although four or five eggs were laid in each nest, and in the majority of cases four young birds were hatched, yet in no instance did four birds reach a fully fledged condition. Most of the nests after a week from the time of hatching contained two birds, and in some cases only one. As a great number of motor cars pass along the road it occurred to me that the small number of birds reaching a fully fledged state is due to the action of the dust raised by these vehicles.

Perhaps it may be that the birds hatched in August are more weakly than those which come from earlier broods; but considering that in the same month I have found, in hedges removed from the road-side, several nests containing the normal number of young, I am inclined to think that the suffocating action of dust is responsible for such a small number of birds reaching a fully fledged state. A. MAYALL.

## UNUSUAL NESTING-SITE OF CIRL BUNTING IN DORSETSHIRE.

HAVING heard during the last few weeks a Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*) trilling out its song from the higher branches of a roadside elm, and having made several unsuccessful attempts at finding the nest, which I felt sure was not far off, I again visited the spot on August 18th, and after watching for about half an hour caught sight of a small bird flying to an isolated thorn-bush standing in a meadow adjoining the road-side. On reaching the bush and looking up I saw the nest, off which the female Cirl slipped away. The nest, which contained one young one and two addled eggs, was situated quite eight feet from the ground, a very unusual position, I should imagine, for a Cirl. The date may appear rather late to those unacquainted with the nesting-habits of this bird, but according to my own observations, nesting in August is quite customary: in fact, during the last few years I have found several nests containing fresh eggs during the first half of that month.

W. J. ASHFORD.

WESTERN LARGE-BILLED REED-BUNTING  
IN SUSSEX.

A MALE Large-billed Reed-Bunting (*Emberiza palustris*) was shot at Filsham, Sussex, on January 6th, 1915. I

examined it in the flesh the next day, but am not able to say to which of the three subspecies it belongs, as I have no skins for comparison. H. W. FORD-LINDSAY.

[Mr. J. B. Nichols, in whose collection this bird now is, has kindly permitted me to examine it and I find that it is of the western form, *E. palustris palustris*.—H.F.W.]

#### LARGE INCREASE OF NESTING PIED FLYCATCHERS IN WESTMORLAND.

I AM glad to record that during the past five years the Pied Flycatcher (*Muscicapa h. hypoleuca*) has largely increased as a nesting species in Westmorland. During the past summer of 1915 upwards of twenty nesting pairs were to be seen in one district, and in another district about a dozen, whilst in one garden belonging to a gamekeeper, five pairs nested within a stone's thrown of one another. H. W. ROBINSON.

#### EARLY NESTING OF REED-WARBLER IN CHESHIRE.

IN connexion with the records of early nesting of the Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus s. streperus*), given on page 48 of this volume, possibly the following may be of interest. On May 4th, 1913, I found an almost completed Reed-Warbler's nest built in the old reeds on the margin of Rostherne Mere, Cheshire; at that time the new reeds were not grown. On May 19th this nest contained four eggs. A. W. BOYD.

#### WESTERN BLACK-EARED WHEATEAR IN SUSSEX.

ON May 6th, 1915, I was shown an example of the Black-throated Wheatear in the flesh that had been shot the previous day at Hollington, Sussex. Upon examination it proved to be a male. H. W. FORD-LINDSAY.

[By the kindness of Mr. J. B. Nichols, in whose collection this bird now is, I have been able to examine and compare it and find it to be an example of the western form (*Enanthe h. hispanica*).—H.F.W.]

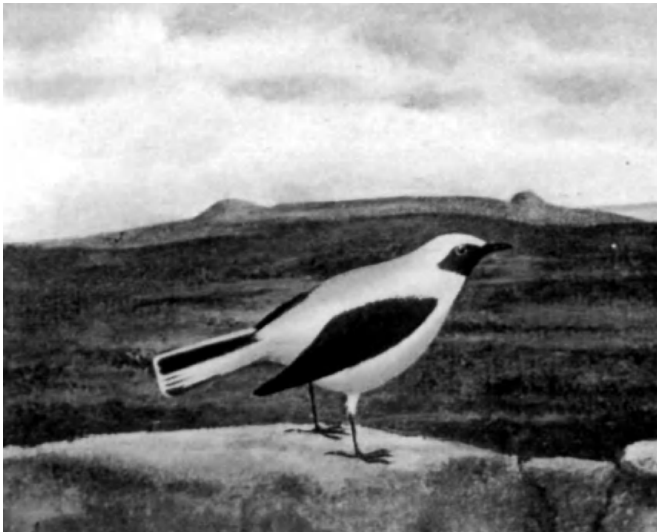
#### EASTERN BLACK-EARED WHEATEARS IN SUSSEX.

ON April 22nd, 1914, I saw in the flesh a female Wheatear, which was shot at Westfield, near St. Leonards, Sussex, on April 21st, 1914. I was not sure to which form it belonged, but Mr. Witherby has kindly examined it and decided it to be the Eastern Black-eared Wheatear (*Enanthe h. xanthomelæna*).

A male (with a white throat) of the same subspecies was shot at Pevensey, Sussex, on April 30th, 1914. It was examined by Mr. M. J. Nicoll. J. B. NICHOLS.

EASTERN BLACK-EARED WHEATEAR SEEN  
IN YORKSHIRE.

ON June 6th, 1915, I met with a male Wheatear on the moor-edge of the Cleveland Hills, Yorks., about ten miles from the sea. I had the bird under observation for three hours



WHEATEAR SEEN JUNE 6TH, 1915, ON THE CLEVELAND HILLS,  
YORKSHIRE.

(From a water-colour sketch by W. S. Medicott, made just after seeing the bird, and from notes made on the spot.)

(from 1 to 4 p.m.), and for most of the time he was on a stone wall, occasionally flying to the ground when he spotted an insect.

In colour there was nothing on this bird but *pure* white and sooty black, with the slightest suspicion of brown in it. The bird was pure white all over with the following exceptions :—

*Wings*.—Black. *Throat*.—From just above the eyes and base of beak to about  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. below base of beak, and from behind each eye, black. *Tail*.—Some central feathers black :

outer tail-feathers some black on lower portions, other portions white (it was not possible to see exactly the markings on each tail-feather). *Legs and beak*.—Black.

He was without doubt a more active and restless bird than our Common Wheatear and more of a percher: he was never on the ground for more than a second or two and did not run on the ground like our bird. He twice rested for a minute or more on a large stone on the wall top, crouching on his breast, not using his legs. I have never seen our bird do this. Once or twice he sang a shorter, sweeter, more guttural song than our bird. I had strong Ross binoculars and could see his markings very clearly, though he would not allow a closer approach than 15 yards or so. In reply to an alarm note a second Wheatear appeared for a short time on two occasions, the description of which is as follows:—

*Crown, back of neck, back*, very light stone-grey; *rump* white; *wings* brown, broad brown line *over ears and through and below eye to base of beak*. *Throat and breast* very light fawn. *Under-parts* white. *Tail*, brown and white, lower portion and centre brown, rest white. *Legs and beak* nearly black.

This second Wheatear was possibly a rather light-coloured male of the ordinary Wheatear. Although I visited the place twice within a week, I never saw the birds again. After examining the skins in the Natural History Museum, I am convinced that the bird first seen was a male of the Eastern race of the Black-throated Wheatear (*Ænanthe hispanica xanthomelæna*). Most of the skins showed some fawn colour, but there are one or two exactly like the bird seen by me.

W. S. MEDLICOTT.

#### RECOVERY OF MARKED HOUSE-MARTIN.

ON June 29th, 1912, I marked an adult House-Martin (*Hirundo u. urbica*) at Waterside Farm, Ashton-with-Stodday, near Lancaster, with Ring No. 21454. The nest from which I then took it contained three adults with neither young nor eggs. On September 2nd, 1915, I again caught this bird in a nest at Tarnwater Farm, Ashton-with-Stodday, about one third of a mile as the bird flies from where I marked it in June, 1912. This nest contained four adults and one half-grown young, the other three adults escaping. Towards the end of the summer the parents of late broods of House-Martins are assisted in the feeding of their young by numbers of other adults (I have seen over a dozen assisting thus with

one brood), and judging by four being found in this nest they are evidently "housed" in return for their voluntary help. I replaced the ring with one numbered G676.

H. W. ROBINSON.

#### SOME HABITS OF THE GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER.

As it is stated in the *British Bird Book* (Vol. II., p. 333) that the Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dryobates m. anglicus*) is rarely seen on the ground, it may be of interest to record that on May 9th, 1915, I saw a male clinging to the side of the bank of a pool in Alderley Park, Cheshire. The roots of a poplar were embedded in the bank, but the bird clung both to the bank and to the root, hopping from side to side, and afterwards climbed to the level grass at the top of the bank and stood and hopped on that. On investigation I could see the holes in the bank made by the bird's beak, but the only foodstuff I could find was a small fly, whose species I am not entomologist enough to determine.

The same work also states (Vol. II., p. 321) that it is uncertain whether both sexes take part in excavating the nesting-hole, and (on p. 325) that of the courtship display we know practically nothing. I watched a pair at the nesting-hole in May, 1912, and distinctly saw both male and female excavating. During courtship the male chased the female continually round the trees near the nesting-site, and once I noticed him quivering his wings when near the female. Coition took place twice on the stump above the nesting-hole; during the act the male spread his tail out. Immediately after the second occasion, the male stood on the stump a little behind the female, and turned his beak towards her; she craned her head round until her beak touched his. Both male and female uttered a low, chiding note, like a Starling's, but harsher and louder; sometimes a noisier cry, like an angry Mistle-Thrush's.

It is also disputed whether the drumming note may be heard at all times of the year. On December 1st, 1912, a cold morning with snow on the ground, I heard and saw a female Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming at Alderley, Cheshire. I carefully noted that there was no red patch on the back of the bird's head.

E. W. HENDY.

#### BREEDING-HABITS OF THE LONG-EARED OWL IN SCOTLAND.

IN Mr. J. H. Gurney's interesting paper on the Long-eared Owl (*Asio o. otus*), he remarks (*antea*, p. 58) that this bird

“generally builds in a fir-tree—a spruce fir for choice.” In the district with which I am best acquainted, viz., south-west and central Scotland, all the nests I have examined were in pine trees, in deserted nests of Magpies or Carrion-Crows. Wide, rolling country with strips of pines, where one might expect to find a Kestrel, is the typical home of this species. The nest usually contains eggs by the third week in March, and is generally scantily lined with dead pine needles. On two occasions I have found quantities of green pine needles, evidently freshly plucked, and dead fronds of “hard” fern. As incubation advances, a few feathers and some dirty-looking bluish-grey down are invariably to be met with. According to my notes, incubation lasts from twenty-five to twenty-seven days, and the young fly twenty-four days after hatching. The “cheeping” notes of the young Long-eared Owls differ from those of the Tawny Owl progeny, so that the experienced bird’s-nester can distinguish the species after merely tapping the tree. The young of each species of Tit also have quite distinguishable “cheerings,” a very useful help to identification in the case of a nest when the occupants are out of sight.

The Long-eared Owl is generally much attached to a wood, and returns yearly to nest, but seldom utilizes the same nest twice successively, though it may do so after some years. On April 8th, 1914, I put an Owl off a nest in a little pine wood which contained four highly-incubated eggs. On April 8th, 1915, I revisited the wood and found the Owl brooding on five eggs, again much incubated, in a nest on the tree next to that previously occupied. Occasionally, however, favourite woods are deserted for no apparent reason, and two or three years later the Owls return again to their old haunts. On one occasion I found a nest which was only a ruin of bleached sticks encircling a fork, the eggs being laid on the bare wood of the tree. JAMES CAIRNS.

#### BLACK-NECKED GREBE BREEDING IN IRELAND.

ON two occasions correspondents have told me that they have seen Grebes larger than the Dabchick, and smaller than the Great Crested Grebe, on some of the Irish lakes during the summer months, viz. Lough Erne and Killarney. As people are so easily mistaken, I made no further enquiry; however, on August 25th, 1915, I received from one of the western lakes a young Black-necked Grebe (*Colymbus n. nigricollis*), shot the previous day, with the wings so little developed that the

bird was incapable of flight, which leaves no doubt that it was hatched on that particular lake. I showed the specimen to the late Mr. R. M. Barrington, who agreed with me that this occurrence is strong evidence that this Grebe has bred in Ireland. I hope to make further investigation next season. I am aware that this species has been reported to have bred in Oxfordshire (*B. Birds*, Vol. II., p. 368), also in Norfolk and Perthshire.

W. J. WILLIAMS.

[There is some evidence, but no proof, that the bird has bred in the counties above mentioned. On the page quoted by Mr. Williams it will be seen that a small number of pairs were found breeding in 1904 in a certain locality, which is now generally known to be in Wales, and we are glad to say that they still breed there. We may here remark that we have also had reports during the last few years of a Grebe, intermediate in size between the Great Crested and Little Grebes, breeding on a lough in western Ireland. Mr. Williams's announcement is of great interest.—Eds.]

#### INCREASE OF TURTLE-DOVES BREEDING IN LANCASHIRE.

As a breeding species, the Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia t. turtur*) is extending its range northwards. A gamekeeper, who has resided in the Southport district of Lancashire twenty years, informs me that he first observed the bird eleven years ago (1904). It nested that year and has since been steadily increasing in numbers. This summer its characteristic notes have been heard in many of the woods of the district. In one small covert I saw six birds.

J. FEW.

#### YOUNG COMMON SANDPIPERS SWIMMING AND DIVING.

ON July 11th, 1915, I ringed three young Common Sandpipers (*Tringa hypoleuca*) on the East Cheshire Hills. They were nearly full fledged and could almost fly. The first one, when pursued, swam up stream; at first it used its feet only, but when the strong current tired the bird it employed its wings as well, flapping them on the surface of the water, and later, becoming exhausted, made use of them to climb upon a stone in mid stream. Once during my pursuit it dived and swam several feet under water. I am able to confirm Mr. J. G. Gordon's and Mr. Ticehurst's statements in *British Birds*, Vol. VII., pp. 23-4, that in swimming under water both legs and feet are used. The water was



clear, and I could see that small bubbles adhered to the bird's feathers while it was beneath the water, giving it a whitish appearance. I captured two other young, one in a rabbit hole at the bottom of a gorse bush, and the other in the middle of a stone wall. Both swam with the feet only when I put them in the water, but neither attempted to dive.

E. W. HENDY.

#### GREAT SKUA IN CARNARVONSHIRE.

WHILST watching seabirds from a rock at the foot of the Great Orme's Head on September 14th, 1915, my attention was attracted by their harsh cries to a party of Terns, which I soon discovered were being harried by a Great Skua (*Stercorarius s. skua*) a little way out. After having worried them some minutes, the Skua settled on the water, and the Terns disappeared. After resting for a few seconds the Skua rose and flew landward, towards the spot where I was concealed amongst the rocks. A few yards to my left a dozen or so Herring and Black-headed Gulls were, in their usual noisy manner, trying to catch some of the whitebait or other fry which every now and again leaped in little shoals above the surface of the water. The Skua, when only some ten or fifteen yards from the cliff, dashed after a Black-headed Gull which had succeeded in catching a fish. Up and down, now seaward, now landward, they both dashed, until at last the pursued yielded up its prize to the pursuer, after which it flew out to sea. I made a point of looking for the white bases of the wing-feathers. These were not only easily discernible as the Skua followed the Terns, but were seen to great advantage, both on the upper and under sides of each wing, when it chased the Gull. This is the second definite instance of the occurrence of the Great Skua in Carnarvonshire (*cf. B.B.*, Vol. VI., p. 163).

RICHARD W. JONES.

DEATH OF MR. R. M. BARRINGTON.—We greatly regret to hear of the sudden death of Mr. R. M. Barrington, of Fassaroe, Bray, the well-known Irish ornithologist, which occurred while he was driving his car between Dublin and his home. We hope to give some details of Mr. Barrington's life and work in our next number.