

ON "WAIT AND SEE" PHOTOGRAPHY.

PART III.

BY

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PERHAPS the most interesting birds which came within range of my camera by the Holy Island mere were two Jack Snipe. We had flushed them several times from a certain spot, so on April 1st I put up a tent there.

The next day one came running past almost as soon as I entered the tent. It was intent upon feeding, rapidly thrusting its bill into the ooze in search of succulent morsels. As Jack Snipe are so small, it was some time before I could catch this one in a fairly open spot free from interfering grasses. It seemed rather greedy. At any rate it ate too fast, for by and by it sat in front of me and had a violent attack of hiccoughs. While this fit of indigestion lasted, the bird crouched in a hollow and seemed very unhappy. Having recovered from its temporary indisposition, the Snipe began to run about again in search of more food. It made little short dashes to and fro, frequently heaving its body up and down like a Sandpiper. This movement was not continuous, but intermittent.

While following the one bird round with my reflex camera, I suddenly saw a second Jack Snipe sound asleep on a stone about four feet away. The absence of the median line, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Jack Snipe, is plainly seen in the sleeping bird.

Everyone knows that it is not easy to disturb a Jack Snipe. The rattle of my focal-plane shutter even failed to rouse the sleeper, nor did it alarm the first bird or interrupt his pursuits. Eventually the sleeping bird awoke, roused by a scarcely audible remark of his companion. After shaking himself, he stepped down from the stone and began to feed unconcernedly. Finally, both pattered out of sight, leaving the soft mud honeycombed by the innumerable probings of their sensitive bills.

The next day four of us crept up to the wall close to which the Jack Snipe had been sleeping. He was in the old spot, and again fast asleep. This was about eleven o'clock. I disturbed him in climbing the loose stone wall, and he did not return. After that, both birds kept to the east end of the mere. I last saw them on April 15th.



Fig. 1. JACK SNIPE: "ONE CAME RUNNING PAST."
(*Photographed by Miss E. L. Turner.*)

They fed regularly every day from about 11.30 till 3 p.m.

All the birds frequenting the mere had their regular feeding hours. Roughly speaking, for most species (exclusive of duck) these were from soon after dawn till about 8 a.m. (during April and May) and from 11.30 till 3 p.m., and again for an hour before sunset. Every day, at 11.45, one Heron (and sometimes two) alighted at the east end of the mere and gradually worked westwards towards my tent. Sometimes the Lapwing mobbed them and drove them to the opposite side. Black-

headed Gulls also joined in this chase. But the feeding was not so good there and the Heron quickly returned.

In some lights, especially in strong diffused light, the grey Heron is almost indistinguishable from the grey water, for this reason, it is difficult to follow their movements for any length of time. They are exceptionally long-sighted and possess an extraordinary keen sense



Fig. 2, JACK SNIPE: RECOVERING FROM ITS TEMPORARY
INDISPOSITION.

(*Photographed by Miss E. L. Turner.*)

of hearing. Herons are alive to the faintest sounds, and can detect slight movements which would escape the notice of many species of birds. The young bird in fig. 4 remained almost in the position in which he is photographed fully half an hour after I had dropped the shutter. He scarcely seemed to breathe, but stood still facing the tent as long as he thought fit.

It would sometimes take the Herons on the mere one and a half hours or even longer to walk within range of



Fig. 3. JACK SNIFE; ASLEEP AND AWAKE.
(*Photographed by Miss E. L. Turner.*)

my camera. The Heron displays no vulgar haste over his meals. He is an aristocrat amongst birds and the incarnation of leisured ease. Yet when he strikes, it is with the rapidity of a swift rapier thrust. So, although the distance between the spot where the Herons alighted and my tent was short of two hundred yards, it took time to traverse this. I always kept one eye on the



Fig. 4. YOUNG HERONS STUDYING THE PHOTOGRAPHER.
(*Photographed by Miss E. L. Turner.*)

lordly bird, and the other on less dignified feeders. If I happened to photograph anything passing my tent when the Heron was half-way along, he would pause for a moment, then slowly retrace his steps. When at a safe distance he would stand motionless, erect, and vigilant, and by and by advance again. With luck, and by refraining from photographing anything else, I could secure one photograph of the Heron a day.

When taking wing, Herons are a long time getting under way: long enough to enable the photographer



Fig. 5 HERON: THE "KICK-OFF."
(Photographed by Miss E. L. Turner).

to change his plate and get another shot, for several seconds elapse before the bird's legs, which are tense after the kick off, can be gathered up and thrust out behind. (Figs. 5, 6 and 7).



Fig. 6. HERON : SLOWLY RISING.
(*Photographed by Miss E. L. Turner.*)

Many Jackdaws came down to bathe in the mere, but I did not succeed in getting good photographs of them. They generally chose a spot where cattle came to drink. I put up a tent there, but each time it was knocked down by a mildly inquisitive young bull.

One day a Jackdaw alighted on the tent when I was inside and investigated every inch of it outside. He clung to the sides and tried hard to get his head through my peep holes. Then he rained heavy blows with his



Fig. 7. HERON: GETTING UNDER WAY WHILE BEING MOBBED BY A BLACK-HEADED GULL.

(*Photographed by Miss E. L. Turner.*)

beak all over the top, and I had to crouch down in order to avoid them. Meanwhile, he kept up a running conversation with himself and seemed extremely indignant about something. Curiously enough, the Jackdaw was mobbed and finally driven away by a pair of Terns.