

NOTES

MUD-DAUBED EGGS OF JACKDAW.

IN *British Birds*, Vol. VIII., p. 14, there is a note by me on a Jackdaw which was in the habit of daubing its eggs with mud. In 1915 I had to leave Oswestry before the bird had finished laying in the particular nest referred to. A friend visited the nest two or three days later and found that it had been robbed in the meantime. This year (1916) I visited the nest on April 23rd, and found it nearly complete and lined as usual with wool, hair and a little moss and grass. I revisited it on May 2nd and found that it contained four eggs so thickly daubed with mud that only very small portions of the shell were visible. The eggs were dry but the nest was very different from when I first saw it, for now the lining was thickly covered with mud which had caked and resembled the mud bottom of a Magpie's nest. I removed the eggs, which were incubated in slightly different stages, and replaced them by four clean fresh eggs from another nest. On May 3rd I revisited the nest and found the mud lining damp and the eggs slightly coated with mud. Previous to this year only the eggs had been daubed, but this time it would be difficult to say, of the bird's own eggs, whether the nest was mud-lined and the eggs got it from the lining, or whether in the process of daubing the eggs the lining of the nest became coated with mud. The latter is perhaps the right view. The clean eggs which I put into the nest were probably muddied accidentally from the lining: this may have been damped by the bird as she returned to the nest, as there had been rain in the morning and after I left the previous day.

The difference in the stages of incubation of the mud-daubed eggs led me to examine a set out of a nest which had only one egg on April 23rd and on May 3rd held six. These were all in different stages of incubation, from clearly defined young to practically fresh. Other complete sets gave more or less similar results, but some sets were all fresh. This shows that the Jackdaw has no fixed rule when incubation shall commence.

J. H. OWEN.

PIED FLYCATCHER IN HERTFORDSHIRE.

ON April 30th, 1916, Dr. A. H. Foster and I saw a male Pied Flycatcher (*Muscicapa h. hypoleuca*) near Knebworth.

Hertfordshire. It is an exceedingly rare species in Hertfordshire. The bird was in an oak wood and was busily engaged in catching insects.

W. PERCIVAL WESTELL.

EARLY LAYING OF REED-WARBLER AND CUCKOO.

WITH reference to the note on this subject (*supra*, p. 20) the Reed-Warbler in the Henley-on-Thames district would seem to have two distinct dates of arrival. The first nests are often found early in May, but the larger number are not seen until June. The bird is still exceedingly common in our reed-beds, though not nearly as numerous as thirty years ago. I am sorry I have not kept more notes of early nests, but I see on May 31st I found two hatching, the clutch in each case being four. If we allow twelve days for incubation, the first eggs would have been laid by May 16th.

A Cuckoo's egg was found in a Pied Wagtail's nest near Henley on May 6th, 1916.

HEATLEY NOBLE.

[For previous records of early laying of the Cuckoo see Vol. VI., pp. 18, 88, 90 and 122.—Eds.]

BLACKBIRD'S NEST MADE OF STRING.

It may be worth recording that early in April, 1916, a pair of Blackbirds (*Turdus m. merula*) built in a wood-pile on a farm in Bedfordshire a nest constructed entirely of binder string. The nest was partially demolished by a great storm and the birds built another nest of the same material, about a foot away in the same wood-pile.

W. ROWAN.

BLUETHROAT OFF NORFOLK IN MAY.

A BLUETHROAT flew on board my ship at 4 p.m. on May 11th, 1916, while we were patrolling ten miles north-west of Cromer. As it came into the captain's cabin and stunned itself flying against the glass of the window, I picked it up and was able to examine it closely. The breast was a brilliant metallic blue, and I did not observe the red spot, but was not looking for it, as I did not then know the bird. The rest of the plumage, of which I wrote a description the same day, agrees accurately with that of *Luscinia svecica*, a specimen of which I saw in Booth's Museum, Brighton, when on leave a week later. Dr. Langton, of Brighton, also verified it for me. I gave the bird some crumbs and water: it remained about the decks half an hour or more and then flew away.

R. WINCKWORTH.

[The Bluethroat is seldom observed on the spring migration.—Eds.]

ROBINS BUILDING NESTS IN SPRUCES.

ON April 14th, 1916, I found near Oswestry, Shropshire, a nest of a Robin (*Erithacus r. melophilus*) placed, exactly like a Blackbird's or Thrush's nest, in a young spruce. The bulk of the nest attracted my notice and the fact that it was built outwardly of dead leaves. It seemed rather incompletely lined at the time, and as it had not progressed any



ROBIN ON ITS NEST IN A SPRUCE TREE.

(Photographed by J. H. Owen).

further on April 18th I thought it was deserted. On April 22nd I was taking a friend to see it and while passing through the wood discovered another Robin's nest in a similar situation and containing four highly-incubated eggs. This nest was much smaller than the other and also incompletely lined. I was rather surprised on reaching the first nest to find that it contained three fresh eggs. This number was afterwards increased to five. Later on some bird sucked them, while in the other nest the young hatched but were taken by vermin. Some of the measurements of the nests may interest other ornithologists, so I give a table of them. Both nests were

entirely new and constructed by the Robins in my opinion and the opinions of those to whom I showed the nests.

	1ST NEST.	2ND NEST.
Height of top of nest above ground ..	3 ft. 9 in.	3 ft. 3 in.
Diameter of brim from outer edges (widest and narrowest measurements)	15 in. × 11 in.	6 in. × 5 in.
Diameter of cup ..	2.75 in.	2.5 in.
Depth of cup ..	2 in.	2.25 in.
Depth of nest ..	7.5 in.	6.3 in.
Materials	Outside a thick mass of beech leaves; then moss, leaves and grass combined: lined with fine grasses and a few very fine roots: just two or three hairs.	Materials as usual but very few leaves; the outside was moss, one or two leaves and grass: the lining was of fine grass and very fine roots, hardly any hairs. This nest was nearly half-domed.

J. H. OWEN.

DIPPER IN HERTFORDSHIRE.

ON April 5th, 1916, I saw in a partially flooded field, near Hatfield, a Dipper, apparently of the British form *Cinclus c. britannicus*. I had a very clear view of the bird and was able to make a sketch of it. Even as a wanderer I believe the Dipper has rarely been observed in Hertfordshire.

W. ROWAN.

LITTLE OWL IN SHROPSHIRE.

FURTHER evidence of the spread of the Little Owl (*Athene n. noctua*) in the district (*cf.* Vol. VIII., p. 18) is afforded by the capture on May 6th, 1916, of one at Millichope Park, near Church Stretton. Possibly it was the same bird that was heard calling repeatedly in the grounds of the Longmynd Hotel, Church Stretton, in November and December 1915. It was caught in a "tunnel" trap: a long square wooden tube with an ordinary iron rat-trap in the middle. It is rarely that any bird gets taken in this form of trap.

H. E. FORREST.

MARSH-HARRIER IN LEICESTERSHIRE.

ON June 17th, 1916, I received for identification from Mr. W. W. Cobb, of Atherstone, a bird obtained two days

previously at Upton, Leicestershire, four miles from Atherstone, Warwickshire. It proved to be an adult male Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), and is the only example from any of the Midland counties that I have seen or heard of in recent years. The date of occurrence—mid June—is worthy of note.

H. E. FORREST.

GLOSSY IBIS IN OXFORDSHIRE.

A FEMALE Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis f. falcinellus*) was obtained on May 11th, 1916, on the Oxfordshire side of the Thames and within two miles of Reading. It had been observed in the locality for about a fortnight previous to the date of its capture. Examination of the bird gives no suggestion of its being an escape from captivity, and the light feathers of the neck make it appear probable that it is in its first year plumage. The specimen is being set up and will be given to the Reading Museum.

W. NORMAN MAY.

ON THE STATUS OF THE COMMON CURLEW AND THE BLACK GROUSE IN WILTSHIRE.

I. THE COMMON CURLEW.

NEARLY every recent book on British birds mentions Wiltshire as one of the counties in which the Common Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) breeds, but I am of opinion that this is one of those errors which get copied from one work to another. I know no part of the county which is really suited to the requirements of the bird, and very much doubt if it ever breeds here, and I believe that all records are based on Stone-Curlews (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) which are fairly common. This view is shared by Dr. Penrose.

The mistake probably arose as follows. In 1870 Mr. (now Sir Everard) im Thurn gave an instance (*Birds of Marlborough*) of a nest on the Aldbourne Downs, but this record was at once discredited by his reviewer in the *Zoologist* (1870, p. 2178). In 1876 Mr. im Thurn, in his *Appendix to the Birds of Marlborough (Report of Marlb. Coll. Nat. Hist. Soc.)*, gave a little additional, but still quite insufficient evidence with regard to this nest, which was again discredited (*Zoologist*, 1877, p. 637). The Rev. A. P. Morres thereupon wrote very positively (*Zoologist* 1877, p. 106) that the bird bred regularly within seven miles of Salisbury. Probably relying on this record, Howard Saunders (4th edition *Yarrell*, Vol. III., p. 501) wrote: "a few pairs may be scattered through Wilts in the breeding-season."

The Rev. A. C. Smith (*Birds of Wiltshire*, p. 412) said that various people "assure me that they used to breed regularly in certain districts on the Downs. Possibly they may do so still." He then quotes the three writers mentioned above, and adds, "I have no positive proof to bring forward, but see no reason to doubt it."

In the meantime (1883) Morres, in spite of his previous assertion, wrote (*Wilts. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Mag.*, Vol. XXI., p. 223): "I had often been told that these birds bred on the Downs, and was promised some eggs, but when they were sent, they turned out to be Stone-Curlews, *as I had all along suspected would be the case*" (my italics).

Now Morres's original statement appeared in the *Zoologist*, and was therefore widely read, but as his recantation was only published in a local journal, it was almost unnoticed—though it was just quoted by Mr. Harting in the course of his review of Smith's book (*Zoologist* 1888, p. 118). At all events, this recantation must have escaped the notice of Howard Saunders, for he repeated his statement in the *Manual*, 2nd edition (p. 127) and has been copied by all subsequent writers. Mr. Eagle Clarke has kindly looked up Saunders's notes for me and finds that the passage stands just as it is in the *Manual*, and therefore I think we may conclude that he got his information from the sources mentioned. Needless to say, I shall be very glad if I am shown to be wrong and the Curlew is proved to nest in the county.

II. THE BLACK GROUSE.

The Black Grouse (*Lyrurus t. britannicus*) is another bird which is popularly supposed to be a resident in Wiltshire. This error can also be traced to Howard Saunders, but I have been unable to discover on what evidence his statement was based.

In 1884 Howard Saunders wrote (4th edition *Yarrell*, III., p. 62): "They are found, although sparingly, in Wiltshire." Writing in 1887 the Rev. A. C. Smith (*Birds of Wiltshire*, p. 327) quoted this statement and added: "I am afraid, however, that we can only lay claim to the visit of a very rare and accidental straggler, seen from time to time after an interval of many years." He recorded a male and female, obtained in 1818 and 1819 respectively, which were supposed at the time to be the last native birds of this species in the county, and remarked that all later records (of which he only gave three—in 1866 and 1880) had straggled over from the New Forest.

In spite of this flat contradiction by the Rev. A. C. Smith, Howard Saunders wrote (*Manual*, 1st edition, p. 479): "still maintain themselves in Wiltshire," and repeated this statement in the second edition of the *Manual* (p. 493). Subsequent writers have followed Saunders; thus the *Hand-List* (p. 215) says "some Wilts," while the new *B.O.U. List* (p. 317) assures us that "in Wiltshire it has become very scarce."

It seems impossible to think that Howard Saunders would have made such definite statements unless he had some reliable information; but where this came from I cannot tell, and Mr. Eagle Clarke can give me no help from Saunders's notes. At all events, absolutely the last Wiltshire specimen of the bird was a Greyhen which was killed against wire near Warminster on April 8th, 1906, as recorded in the *Field* of the following week. G. BATHURST HONY.

[Mr. J. E. Harting in the 2nd Edition of his *Handbook of British Birds* (p. 133, 1901) gives the following list of Wiltshire localities for this species:—"Winterslow Woods and Ellesbourne formerly; Redholm, Vale of Pewsey and Compton Bassett; occasional stragglers from Hants and Somerset." As Mr. Harting in the 1st Edition of the *Handbook* (p. 38, 1872) does not mention Wiltshire, the above statement is probably founded on notes contributed to the *Field* in the interim. Possibly this was the source of Howard Saunders's information.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]

LAND-RAILS IN SOMERSET.

IN connexion with the recent enquiry into the status of the Land-Rail (*Crex crex*) in the British Isles (Vol. VIII., pp. 83-92), it may be worth recording that we have had more Corn-Crakes this spring (1916) in this district than we have had for many years. For a fortnight, or more, two or three birds were calling incessantly in the meadows round my house, in the parish of Weare, and I heard others in the neighbourhood. I am afraid most of these birds have passed on, as I have only heard one of them lately. H. W. MAPLETON.

BRITISH TREE-CREEPER IN LEWIS, OUTER HEBRIDES.—Mr. W. E. Clarke records (*Scot. Nat.*, 1916, p. 76) that an example of *Certhia f. britannica* was accidentally killed in a stack of hay at Galson, Lewis, on October 13th, 1915, during a terrific gale, by which it had no doubt been blown to the island.

LATE STAY OF GREAT GREY SHRIKE IN ESSEX.—Mr. W. Howlett states (*Field* 3.6.'16, p. 881) that he saw a *Lanius excubitor* at Chingford, Essex, on May 24th, 1916—a very late date.

LESSER WHITETHROAT IN WEST INVERNESS-SHIRE.—Mr. W. E. Clarke and Mr. Knight Horsfield watched a male *Sylvia curruca* on June 13th, 1915, near Loch Trieg. The bird was singing, but no female was seen (*Scot. Nat.*, 1916, p. 78).

EARLY ARRIVAL OF SWIFTS.—Mr. J. Steele Elliott writes that one was observed at Bewdley, Shropshire, on April 21st, 1916, and Mr. W. E. Glegg tells us that he saw four on the same date at Staines Reservoir, Middlesex. We are informed that Swifts were also observed on the north Norfolk coast, near Cley, on April 20th. (*Vide supra*, p. 21.)

HOOPOE IN YORKSHIRE.—Mr. W. H. Parkin reported at a meeting of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union that an example of *Upupa e. epops* had been obtained near Thirsk on October 15th, 1915 (*Nat.* 1916, p. 141).

DARK-BREADED BARN-OWL IN SHETLAND.—Mr. W. E. Clarke records (*Scot. Nat.*, 1916, p. 76) that a specimen of *Tyto a. guttata* was obtained on Unst on November 5th, 1915. This appears to be the first authentic record of the occurrence of this race in Scotland.

BARTRAM'S SANDPIPER IN CO. LEITRIM.—Mr. J. M. McWilliam records (*Zool.*, 1916, p. 194) that an example of *Bartramia longicauda* was shot by his cousin, the late J. S. Ellis, at Bunduff, co. Leitrim. Mr. McWilliam states that Mr. Ellis showed him the field, quite close to the sea, in which he shot the bird; he was quite certain of the month being November, but the exact year was not quite certain, though it was probably 1901. Mr. McWilliam proceeds: "In the case of so rare a bird it is unfortunate that it should not have been recognised and recorded at once. However, I not only had from Mr. Ellis himself a description of the circumstances in which it was taken, but afterwards it passed direct from his possession into mine." The specimen has been examined by Mr. W. E. Clarke. Bartram's Sandpiper has been recorded about ten times in England and twice previously in Ireland.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT IN HADDINGTON.—Mr. W. Evans records (*Scot. Nat.* 1916, p. 70) that he saw a single *Limosa limosa* in Aberlady Bay on August 7th, 1915.

IVORY-GULLS IN SCOTLAND.—Mr. W. Berry records (*Scot. Nat.*, 1916, p. 95) that an adult male *Pagophila eburnea* was obtained on Beauy Firth (Inverness-shire) on February 5th, 1916, and another seen on the 7th, while Mr. L. Barnard states (*l.c.*) that he obtained an adult male also on February 5th at Mallaig (south-west Inverness-shire).