

POLYGAMY AMONG ROOKS.

BY

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DURING the spring of 1910 I devoted a considerable amount of time to studying the habits of the Rook (*Corvus f. frugilegus*), and much of interest was revealed. One point that appeared was that the Rook is not always monogamous.

At one Rookery a nest was built in a sycamore apart from the remainder, which were for the most part in yews; a good view could be obtained of this nest, with glasses, from above, as the trees were situated on a hillside. The nest was a small one and unfortunately could not be reached by climbing, as the branches in which the nest was built were too slender to support any weight.

Having previously noticed three Rooks about this nest, on the evening of April 15th, I examined it carefully, and found that two birds were sitting side by side in the nest hollow, evidently incubating.

Subsequently this nest was watched carefully, and, on May 1st, about five minutes after they had been disturbed by my approach, two birds returned and went on to the nest, sitting side by side.

After some time, one of them moved aside and allowed the other to come off past it; the former then resumed incubation whilst the one that had left the nest preened its plumage on an adjacent branch. Later the other came off and also commenced preening. Shortly after the cock bird returned with food, both the birds that had been incubating shook their wings and cawed when they saw him approaching. The nest contained small young, and the cock fed both the hens and the young. He went off again as soon as he had disposed of the food. The two hens then went on to the nest, coming off once or twice to preen their plumage later. They were on the nest at the end of half-an-hour when the male returned, but both immediately left it and greeted him with much cawing and wing-shaking. The cock again left and returned after another absence of almost exactly half-an-hour.

The hens were on the best of terms and showed no sign of jealousy. On May 4th the nest was again kept under observation. The male was absent forty-three minutes between two visits. One of the hens went off for a fly and when she returned the other came off the nest and preened her plumage, the former immediately taking her place.

When the cock returned both birds almost mobbed him, so eager were they for food.

The following day, at another Rookery, a Rook was seen to feed a hen on a nest and then go to a nest near by and feed another incubating bird. Here, in more than one case, Rooks were seen feeding young which had reached a fair size : in these instances the hen Rooks sat by, not receiving any food ; no doubt when the young grow larger, the hens leave them at times, in order to forage for themselves. Later both parents feed the young.

At this Rookery, two days later, two nests, built side by side, which I had previously noticed were apparently cared for by one cock, were kept under observation. One of them evidently contained small young. The cock came and fed the hen and the young in this nest and then departed. Returning after an absence of forty minutes he fed both hens but not the young.

On each occasion both hens quivered their wings at his approach.

The following year I watched closely at both Rookeries, but could detect no case of a cock having more than one hen.

The first of the foregoing instances is somewhat remarkable, for in that case two hens shared the same nest, sat side by side in the same nest hollow, and were obviously on the best of terms with each other.