

NOTES

BLUE-HEADED WAGTAIL IN HERTFORDSHIRE.

IN a pasture bordering one of the reservoirs at Tring, on April 29th, 1917, my sister-in-law detected a Wagtail differing in colour from the Ray's Wagtails with which it was consorting. As we looked down from the top of the reservoir embankment on the birds running to and fro in the short grass, it was an easy matter to distinguish the stranger by its blue-grey crown and nape, the conspicuous whitish buff superciliary streak, the less distinct streak of the same colour through the ear-coverts, and the buff wing-bars. The upper-parts and ear-coverts were greyish-brown, the breast and belly pale yellowish-buff passing into bright sulphur-yellow on the under tail-coverts. I cannot say positively to which subspecies of *Motacilla flava* the bird, a hen, belonged, but the blue-grey crown and the pale ear-coverts point to *M. f. flava*, the subspecies, apart from *M. f. rayi*, most likely to occur.

CHAS. OLDHAM.

PRESENT STATUS OF NUTHATCH IN CARNARVONSHIRE AND ANGLESEY.

ON May 5th, 1917, Mr. F. H. Mills of Bangor sent me a specimen of the Nuthatch (*Sitta e. britannica*), which had been found dead at the foot of a tree in Vaynol Park. The species appears to be establishing itself along the Menai Straits for it has been recorded on the Anglesey side by myself in 1910, and Mr. R. W. Jones in 1914; while on the Carnarvonshire side it was noted in Penrhyn Park by Mr. C. Oldham in 1912, and at Llandwrog by Mr. S. G. Cummings in 1914. Prior to this the only record was a bird seen at Bodwyn, Carnarvon, in 1902. As a whole the evidence seems to indicate that the species has extended its range thus far westwards only within quite recent years. Around Llandudno it has become firmly established during the last ten years.

H. E. FORREST.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE IN WILTSHIRE.

MY friend, Miss Margaret Butterworth, saw a Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) on April 18th, 1917, about a mile and a half from Lechlade, on the road to Highworth on the borders of Wiltshire and Berkshire. She knows all our common birds well, including the Red-backed Shrike.

J. E. KELSALL.

UNUSUAL NESTING-SITE OF WILLOW-WARBLER.

THE extraordinary wet weather conditions of the later spring of 1916 were adverse to ground-breeding birds. On July 15th I watched a pair of Willow-Warblers (*Phylloscopus t. trochilus*) feeding young. The nest was well concealed in a climbing rose, where also ivy helped to make more cover, on the north side of a house (in Northumberland) some six feet from a path below which, again, was a drop of nearly four feet. The young birds, therefore, looked out on the world from a height of nearly ten feet, an unusual position for them.

The nest showed wisdom in choice of position, for brooding was then possible when the ground all around was a "waste of waters."

CATHARINE HODGKIN.

[*Cf. Zool.* 1868, p. 1294; 1872, p. 3228; 1899, p. 556. etc.—F.C.R.J.]

EARLY LAYING OF REED-WARBLER AND CUCKOO.

WITH reference to the notes which have appeared on this subject (*antea*, Vol. IX., p. 48; X., pp. 20 and 41), it may be worth while recording that in 1909 I have a special note of a nest of a Reed-Warbler on June 3rd with young a few days old in Berkshire, and the same day noted two pairs building on a private island previously undisturbed. As regards the Cuckoo, my experience is that between June 4th and 14th is the most favourable time for finding their eggs in the nests of the Reed-Warbler. Earlier dates noted are June 8th, 1916, when I found a Reed-Warbler's nest containing five eggs and a Cuckoo's egg, all just chipping, and on May 28th and 30th, two nests each containing a Cuckoo's egg, in the latter case the egg being fairly incubated. On several occasions I have found the nest quite high up, two in 1916 in elder trees could not have been less than 16 and 20 feet up respectively.

GWYNNE WITHERINGTON.

MORTALITY AMONG BARN-OWLS IN IRELAND.

THIS year (1917) some disease has attacked Barn-Owls (*Tyto a. alba*) over a great part of Ireland. During March and the first week in April I examined no less than one hundred and sixty examples all in the same condition. They were greatly emaciated, the body being so thin and wasted that little more than feathers, skin and bones, were left, the stomachs were entirely empty, but the plumage was in excellent condition. At first I thought that this condition might have been caused by the birds picking up poisoned vermin, but if this was the cause the Long-eared Owl would suffer similarly, and I have

only examined one Long-eared Owl in this emaciated condition. They are all common Barn-Owls, none as far as I can judge are of the continental form. I have heard from several correspondents through the country that they have found dead Barn-Owls about their farm buildings. The Barn-Owl is the commonest species in Ireland, but is scarce in the northern and western counties compared to the midland and southern parts of the country. W. J. WILLIAMS.

MARKED GANNET IN NORTHERN NORWAY IN WINTER.

MR. E. PETERSEN of Christianssund and Mr. T. Hegerdah have both very kindly written to inform me that a Gannet (*Sula bassana*) marked with a *British Birds* ring No. 100,034 was caught by a fisherman near Christianssund on January 28th, 1917. We are informed that the boat passed by "great masses" of Gannets which were "lying quietly at sea." This particular bird was apparently weak and was caught with a gaff. The bird was ringed as a nestling on July 30th, 1913, on the Bass Rock by the late J. M. Campbell, the light-keeper. That there should have been a number of Gannets so far to the north as Christianssund in the middle of winter would seem well worthy of record, and the fact that at least one of them was bred four to five hundred miles to the south should be noted. H. F. WITHERBY.

HERRING-GULLS DROPPING MOLLUSCS.

ON the beach at Blackpool on September 19th, 1916, I watched about a dozen Herring-Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) drop mussels on to the sand in order to break them. One bird dropped the same mussel from a height of ten to thirty feet no less than thirty-two times in quick succession. The fact that birds do drop shell-fish in this way is of course well known, but I thought the perseverance of this bird exceptional and worthy of record. J. FEW.

MOOR-HENS AND MALLARDS EATING FRUIT.

CONCERNING Moor-Hens eating fruit (*cf. antea*, Vol. X., pp. 251, 275 and 295), I might state that I have often watched them eating the berries of elder trees bordering the canal near Lancaster.

A friend of mine when wild-fowling on the Cheshire Dee a few years ago in early October, noticed a black juice oozing out of the beak of some Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) which he had just shot, and on opening their beaks found that they had been feeding extensively upon blackberries.

H. W. ROBINSON.

SPREAD OF THE IRISH JAY.—Mr. G. C. May states (*Irish Nat.*, 1917 (March), p. 53) that about thirty *Garrulus g. hibernicus* appeared in the southern part of co. Dublin “within the last few months.” Mr. W. J. Williams (*t. c.*, p. 88) states that in January, 1917, several were observed near Malahide and that the bird had appeared at Bray. Mr. Williams adds that it had also been seen recently at Mountbellew, co. Galway, and in this connection I may mention that I was told in 1914 that Jays were breeding not far from this place.

H. F. W.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE IN AYRSHIRE.—Mr. J. Ritchie, Jun., describes (*Glasgow Nat.*, 1916, pp. 42-45) a female *Lanius e. excubitor* (an irregular visitor to the west coast), which was caught on a limed twig by a Mr. Kennedy near Roughwood, Beith, in December, 1915. The bird, which was accompanied by another, was evidently attracted by a Redpoll decoy. Mr. Ritchie adds an account of three specimens of a trematode (*Leucochloridium macrostomum*) new to Britain, which he found in the intestine of the Shrike.

WAXWING IN IRELAND.—Mr. N. H. Foster records (*Irish Nat.*, 1917, p. 54) that an example of *Bombycilla garrulus* was shot at Hillsborough, co. Down, on February 1st, 1917. The species is an irregular visitor to Ireland.

SIBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF IN KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE.—Mr. W. Begg records (*Scot. Nat.*, 1917, p. 33) that he obtained a *Phylloscopus c. tristis* at the Little Ross Lighthouse on December 3rd, 1916. This is the first record of the bird for south-west Scotland.

HYBRID SONG-THRUSH AND BLACKBIRD.—Mr. C. Crabb recently kindly showed me a male example of a hybrid between these two species bred in captivity. The upper-parts were darker than those in a Song-Thrush, but browner than in a male Blackbird while the under-parts were much like those of a Song-Thrush, but the spots on the breast were smaller and not so rounded, and the belly was cream-coloured rather than white and the under tail-coverts and axillaries darker and richer than in the Song-Thrush. The median wing-coverts had no golden-buff tips as in the Song-Thrush. The length of the wing was equal to that of the Blackbird measuring 123 mm., as against 111-121 in males of Song-Thrush and 120-132 in males of Blackbird. The tail measured 92 mm., which is longer than a Thrush's and short for a Blackbird. The sixth primary, was not emarginated as it is in the Blackbird and thus resembled the Song-Thrush. The

wing-formula, however, was more like that of the Blackbird, this being especially noticeable in the sixth primary which was 7 mm. shorter than the longest primary, whereas in the Song-Thrush it is 12-18 mm. shorter. H F. WITHERBY.

LITTLE GULL NEAR GLASGOW.—Mr. D. Macdonald gives an account (*Glasgow Nat.*, 1916, pp. 36-7) of an example of *Larus minutus* (a rare visitor to west Scotland), which he saw on several occasions between May 16th and 21st, 1916, hawking for insects over a marsh between Bardowie and Summerston.

MEMORIAL TO THE LATE CAPTAIN F. C. SELOUS, D.S.O.—A strong Committee has been formed under the Chairmanship of the Rt. Hon. E. S. Montagu, M.P., to establish a national memorial to the late Captain F. C. Selous, D.S.O. The Committee has decided, with the permission of the Trustees of the British Museum, to erect a bas-relief, with suitable inscription, in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, where many of the trophies of the great hunter's skill are exhibited. It believes, however, that there is a very general desire among Captain Selous's friends and admirers that some additional and less local form of memorial should also be established. Several forms have been suggested, of which the one that appears to find most general approval is the foundation of a Selous Scholarship at his old school, Rugby, on the basis that preference will be given at each election to the sons of officers who have fallen in the war.

There will be many readers of *British Birds* who will be glad to be associated with this movement to perpetuate the memory of Captain Selous, and subscriptions should be sent to the Honorary Treasurer, C. E. Fagan, Esq., Selous Memorial, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, S.W. 7.

EFFECTS OF THE RECENT ABNORMAL WEATHER ON BIRDS.—The arrival of migrants has evidently been erratic this spring, and we should be glad of information concerning abnormally late or early dates with a view to compiling a note on the subject.

Similarly we should be glad if our readers would send details concerning any diminution in the numbers of resident birds, which they have noticed. Such details should be as precise as possible and give an idea of the percentage of diminution. It should also be stated if no diminution is apparent in one district of a species, which is known to have suffered in another district.—THE EDITORS.