

# NOTES

## STARLING NESTING IN A LAUREL BUSH.

It is perhaps worth being put on record that a Starling (*Sturnus v. vulgaris*) is nesting in a laurel bush here at Wadhurst, Sussex. The nest is a bulky open one with a deep cup. It is built of the usual materials near the top of the bush about nine feet from the ground, and until the eggs were laid was taken to be an unfinished House-Sparrow's nest. The eggs are normal. A large flock of Starlings, which was presumably checked on its way north by the wintry weather, seems to have disbanded here during the last week of April and competition for nesting-places has been most keen. There are several semi-open nests in ivy (fairly closely clipped) on the walls of the house.

T. M. SAVAGE ENGLISH.

[Mr. H. S. Gladstone (*Birds of Dumfriesshire*, p. 107) refers to a similar case at Corrie Common, near Lockerbie, where half-a-dozen nests built of straw and rough litter, like a House-Sparrow's, may be seen in one clump of Portugal laurels. Semi-open nests in ivy are of fairly frequent occurrence. Mr. S. Lewis (*Zool.* 1899, p. 370) also records colonies of Starlings breeding on branches of fir trees in Burnt Wood, Emborough, near Wells.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN.]

## NESTING OF THE MARSH-WARBLER IN DORSET.

I KNOW of no published record of the nesting of the Marsh-Warbler (*Acrocephalus palustris*) in Dorset, so the following facts are of interest:—Mr. A. W. Champernowne, of Sidbury, found three pairs of birds breeding in the River Yeo Valley, between Sherborne and Bradford Abbas, in 1897, and discovered two nests. This is probably the first record for Dorset. I have lately seen a nest and eggs of this species taken about the year 1908 in the south-west of Dorset. My informant found the species nesting in the same locality again the following year. This year, 1917, I went to this locality on June 8th and found the birds in two withy beds, the males singing their unmistakable song, and anxious and demonstrative when their haunts were invaded. The bed in each case contained a tangled mass of undergrowth, and I did not succeed in finding the nests which were almost certainly there.

F. L. BLATHWAYT.

## RARE BIRDS IN SUSSEX.

I WISH to record the occurrence of the following birds in Sussex in 1916 :—

RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa p. parva*).—A female was shot by J. Saunders at Rye Harbour, Sussex, on October 3rd, 1916. It was examined in the flesh by Mr. H. W. Ford-Lindsay.

DUSKY WARBLER (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*).—A bird of this species was shot at the old Brickfields at West St. Leonards, Sussex, on October 18th, 1916. It was examined in the flesh by Mr. Ruskin Butterfield. Mr. Bristow, who set it up, considered it a female by dissection, but Dr. Hartert, who examined it after being set up, thought it a male from its length of tail. This is the second British specimen, the first having been obtained at Auskerry (Orkney) on October 3rd, 1913.

ORPHEAN WARBLER (*Sylvia h. hortensis*).—A male shot at the old Brickfields, West St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex, on September 21st, 1916, was examined in the flesh by myself on September 22nd. This is, I believe, the fifth recorded English specimen.

AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER (*Charadrius d. dominicus*).—A female was shot by T. C. Relfe at Rye, Sussex, on September 22nd, 1916, and was examined in the flesh by myself on September 25th. The wing measures 81 mm.

J. B. NICHOLS.

## DISPLAY OF THE STONECHAT.

ON June 7th, 1917, I for the first time noted a pair of Stonechats (*Saxicola t. hibernans*) in the King's Park, Edinburgh, and that under pleasing circumstances. I heard close by, an excited warbling and there was a male Stonechat displaying before a female. What was most noticeable was the extent of white he displayed. He crouched low before her with his primaries stiffly lowered, brushing the grass. The carpal joint was buried under the white collar puffing out the white feathers and making the white neck appear the size and shape of a shilling, and at the same time making the white of the neck continuous with the white of the wing-coverts. The tail was expanded fully and the white of the coverts was so spread over it as to make the proximal half of the tail appear white.

WILLIAM SERLE.

## TWO CUCKOOS' EGGS IN NEST OF MEADOW-PIPIT.

ON June 9th, 1917, I found, on Buildon Moor, adjoining Shipley Glen, the nest of a Meadow-Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*) containing four eggs, one of which was a Cuckoo's

(*Cuculus canorus*). I did not visit the nest again until dusk on the evening of the 16th, when I found the nest contained one Cuckoo's egg, two eggs of the Meadow-Pipit and a newly-hatched young one which I never examined, and presumed was a young Pipit. On the early morning of the 17th the nest still had the same contents, the egg of the Cuckoo being unhatched. Having to go away from home on this date, I asked Mr. Fred Jowett, to whom I had shown the nest, if he would look at it in the evening. On the 18th, Mr. Jowett told me he had visited the nest and found all the eggs—one Cuckoo's and two Meadow-Pipit's—lying outside the nest, and that on his replacing the eggs in the nest they were thrown out again, so that it was evident that the newly-hatched young one, instead of being a Meadow-Pipit as we had assumed, was really a Cuckoo. Although it was now dusk, I determined to go and ascertain for myself, and on reaching the nest I immediately saw that the young bird, which had grown immensely in two days, was a Cuckoo. So it is evident that a second Cuckoo's egg had been laid between my finding the nest on the 9th and my visit to it on the 16th, and this egg must have been laid when the other Cuckoo's egg was in an advanced stage of incubation. I feel fairly certain both eggs were laid by the same Cuckoo, since the unhatched egg was very similar to the one in the nest on the 9th, which was of a type less broadly ovate than that usually found in this district.

E. P. BUTTERFIELD.

#### COMMON SCOTER IN WARWICKSHIRE.

RECORDS of the Common Scoter (*Oidemia n. nigra*) in Warwickshire, are, I believe, sufficiently uncommon to make the following occurrence worthy of noting:—On April 28th, 1917, I saw five, two males and three females, resting on the water in Sutton Park. Their visit was brief, as they had disappeared when I returned two hours later, and they were not there on the previous evening.

B. A. CARTER.

[The Scoter not infrequently occurs on inland waters in April when it is on passage, but there seem to be few records for Warwickshire. Mr. R. F. Tomes (*Vict. Hist. Warwick.*) states that he has met with it three times and that it has occurred at Sutton, and he gives the county status of the bird as "very rare."—EDS.]

#### "TWIN" NESTS OF LAPWING.

MR. WILLIAM BATES, of Macclesfield, writes me to say that whilst on Bosley Minns early this spring he found two nests of Lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*), both perfectly built, the

edges of which were in contact and each of which contained two eggs. Before touching them he pointed them out to a friend who can also vouch for the accuracy of his statement.

Mr. Bates informed me that he has hunted for plovers' nests for nearly fifty years, but has never seen anything of the sort before. T. SMITH.

#### SNIPER PERCHING ON A BARN.

On June 8th, 1917, I watched a Snipe (*Gallinago g. gallinago*) standing, apparently quite at ease, on the top of a high old barn in Shropshire. I was only thirty yards from the building when chancing to look up I was startled to see the Snipe clearly outlined against the sky. Being in a hurry I could not wait to see how long it remained on its lofty perch, but it did not look in any hurry to move.

I believe it is not so very uncommon for Snipe to alight on posts, etc., but do not know whether there are any records of them perching on buildings. FRANCES PITT.

[For correspondence on Snipe and other waders perching on trees, bushes, posts, rails, etc. (a frequent occurrence), see Vol. III., pp. 59 and 89. Perching on buildings has very rarely been noticed we believe.—Eds.]

#### ARCTIC TERN IN SHROPSHIRE.

ON May 16th, 1917, an adult Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisæa*) was brought to me, which had been found dead on a hill pasture at Ticklerton, Church Stretton, the previous day. This species only occasionally visits Shropshire at the times of spring and autumn passage. H. E. FORREST.

EFFECTS OF THE SEVERE WINTER ON BIRDS.—We have received a number of interesting communications on this subject, but hope that many more readers will send us notes, especially regarding the diminution of "resident" birds. Some sort of comparison with the numbers in 1916 should be given to indicate as nearly as possible the proportion of decrease. It should also be mentioned in which species no decrease has been noticed as conditions appear to vary in different districts. The subject is of considerable importance, and the more information we receive the more reliable will be the detailed report which we propose to publish.—Eds.

POROUSNESS OF EGG-SHELLS.—In connection with the letter on this subject in Vol. X., p. 296, Mr. T. Smith writes that he had a recent experience with a Jay's egg, the contents of which oozed through the shell in many places before any hole had been made with the drill. This was the only egg

of the clutch which showed itself porous to any marked extent. It may be remarked that the shells of all birds' eggs are more or less porous, and during the process of incubation about one-seventh of the total weight of the shell and contents (or between 14-15%) is lost through evaporation. When the internal membrane is ruptured from any cause, the process is of course much more readily apparent. See N. H. Foster, *Irish Naturalist*, XI., p. 237; H. S. Gladstone, *Ibis*, 1904, p. 376, etc.—F. C. R. JOURDAIN.

INCUBATION-PERIOD OF SPARROW-HAWK.—Mr. A. Brook states (*Field*, 14, IV. '17, p. 559) that from his observation the incubation-period of *Accipiter n. nisus* is about twenty-eight days. In one case, however, thirty-one days elapsed from the laying of the last egg before the first young one hatched. This is a considerably shorter period than that recorded by other observers. Mr. S. E. Brock estimates it as 30-32 days. Messrs. E. W. H. Blagg, J. H. Owen and the Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain at 35 days, while in a nest watched by Prof. J. H. Salter the period lasted 37-38 days.

PALE AND DARK-BREASTED BRENT GEESE.—Considerable discussion, initiated by Miss E. V. Baxter and Miss L. J. Rintoul, has taken place in *The Scottish Naturalist* recently concerning these two forms of the Brent Goose. In quoting our *Hand-List* the authors mentioned have omitted to note that in our first list of "corrections and additions" (*Brit. B.* IX., p. 7) we stated that the two forms, which we had in the *Hand-List* considered as distinct sub-species, were apparently merely individual varieties, since they are now known to nest together in the Old World. We take this opportunity of stating more positively that No. 283 *Branta bernicla bernicla* and No. 284 *Branta bernicla glaucogastra* of our *Hand-List* are dimorphisms of one species and should both be called *Branta bernicla bernicla*.

RED-NECKED GREBES IN MORAY AREA.—Miss A. C. Jackson records (*Scot. Nat.*, 1917, p. 69) having satisfactorily identified two *Podiceps g. griseigena* in a northern firth on November 30th, 1916, and Mr. C. Oldham states (*l.c.*, p. 117) that he saw several birds of this species in Cromarty Firth on October 9th, 1912. Miss Jackson states that the species has not, hitherto, been recorded for the Moray area.

GREAT SKUA IN SUFFOLK.—Mr. W. H. Tuck states (*Trans. Norf. Norwich Nat. Soc.*, Vol. X., Part 2, p. 178) that an example of *Stercorarius s. skua* occurred near Ixworth, forty miles inland, in January, 1915.